

THE LIVING WORD

A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Morning August 28th, 1859

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT EXETER HALL

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Volume 1 Numbers 38 and 39

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1

FIRST, here is a good word; and secondly, that good word is well placed, for it is with God; it could not be better placed. Our great drawback is that we are not by nature with God, but that we are afar off from God; that we are without Christ, and without hope, and without God in the world. And when brought from that state, and made near by the blood of Christ, we then find that we are brought into the best position in which it is possible for men to be brought because being brought into that position, the Lord becomes our life, becomes our light, becomes the length of our days, and our portion forever. Then John takes another step and brings us to the very climax of all; “In the beginning was the Word;” that is good; “and the Word was with God;” better still; “and the Word was God;” that is best of all. Here is a wondrous Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, upon whom God the Father has laid the government of all worlds; and he shall bring about that which the Lord has designed; “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.” Here then, you have in the very order of our text, an entire contrast to the things of time. The things of time lessen and lessen; they become more and more gloomy; they lose by degrees, relatively speaking, their value. Human life in reality is not to us now, what it was twenty years ago; it goes on lessening, and lessening, and lessening, until by and bye it comes to nothing, and our poor bodies must mingle with the dust. Not so godliness. We begin simply with the Word of truth; that word of truth brings us into oneness with the blessed God and by and bye we come up to all that dignity which is indicated in the language of our text; you observe it goes on more and more and will do until the Redeemer shall present all his people perfect, blameless, and spotless before the eyes of his glory with exceeding joy. Here then is the apostle's idea amplified, when he says, “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” Let the prospects of time and the world be as gloomy as they may, if brought into this life and into this light, then we have prospects that cannot be blasted; we have “a hope which is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.”

I shall first describe *what this word did in the beginning*; I shall then, secondly, point out *the advantages, or some of the advantages of its position*; and then lastly, *the necessity of the Lord Jesus Christ, being what it is here declared, that he is God*.

First: I notice then first, *what this Word did in the beginning*. There are various beginnings spoken of in the Bible; first, the beginning of the creation; then the beginning of the gospel; and then the beginning of the post diluvian world; and then the beginning of the Jewish nation by Abraham; and then the beginning of the gospel dispensation. But it is only one of these beginnings that I shall notice; and to which John may perhaps here refer; I mean the beginning of the gospel, as manifested immediately upon the fall; for we read that the Lord walked in the garden of Eden in the “cool of the day” and that *cool of the day* certainly bears reference to the Lord Jesus Christ; that instead of the Lord coming in the intensity of his wrath, and cutting Adam and Eve off there and then, he came *in the cool of the day*; he came in and by his dear Son; “and Adam heard the voice of the Lord,” that is the Word of the Lord, “walking in the garden.” Now, the question is, what did the Word do? I will describe to you what it did; and then leave you to judge whether we are partakers of that grace evidently ministered to Adam when the Lord thus appeared to him. First, what it is to be brought to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first question which the Lord put to Adam was a question that belongs to everyone, and the import of which is sure to reach the conscience and the soul of every sinner that ever shall be saved; it is a question of vast and everlasting import; a question that I trust many of us have felt the weight of. May it be our lot this morning in reviewing that question to see and know that we ourselves have felt the weight of that great question which the Lord put to Adam. It was simply this; “*Adam, where are you?*” Could a question, under the circumstances of any kind be more important than that; “*Where are you?*” What will it take to answer that question? More grace and more gifts than I either do or ever shall in this world possess. “The first answer is that he was under sin.” He was now under sin; sin had the dominion over him; sin had taken possession of his soul, had taken possession of his heart; and had made that heart, that was created pure and holy, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Secondly, he was under the curse of God’s eternal law; he was under eternal condemnation; he was under almighty wrath, he was under the everlasting indignation of the Most High God. “Where are you?” May the Lord, if I am this morning speaking to any who are strangers to these weighty matters, may the Lord cause you to feel the force of the great question, “Where are you?” For you are certainly either under sin, or else you are one with Jesus, and by him freed from sin; you certainly are either under the wrath of God, or you are born of God, and brought out into the love of God; either under condemnation, or else one with God’s salvation. This then was the first question which the Lord put to Adam. “Where are you?” And the Lord convinced him of where he was. Just so it is now. The word, of the Lord, convinces, or the Lord, convinces those that he intends to save, of where they are and what they are; he convinces them of where they are, that they are under sin and under the law; convinces them of what that are, that they are altogether as an unclean thing; and that just as the leper was literally, so the soul is spiritually. They are brought thus to feel what they are and where they are; and when we are thus brought to feel what we are, and where we are, life itself becomes a burden, death becomes the king of terrors, eternity appears awful, our existence appears a curse. Happy, thrice happy the man that knows something of this. Vital godliness, then, is a personal thing; and when brought under this conviction of what and where we are, we need then no prayer-books, no ceremonies; no, it is become now a reality; and you cannot stop that man from praying; he feels that he is a sinner, and he sighs for mercy; he feels that he is lost, and he sighs for salvation; he feels that he is condemned, and he sighs for

freedom; he feels that he is a far off from God, a poor, guilty, miserable creature; and he sighs for the mercy and the grace of God. "In the beginning," then, "was the Word;" bringing sinners to the knowledge of the truth; and that same way, whatever the external circumstances may be, however they may differ in form, that same way essentially the Lord in all ages brings all his people to know their state as sinners, to prepare them for that self-same gospel which he has for them.

The next thing I notice is in contrast to this: *the curse upon the serpent*. There was a five-fold curse pronounced upon the enemy; and that five-fold curse reversed will give the five-fold blessing which belongs to all those who are brought to know their need of the blessing. It is an exceedingly encouraging idea that the Scriptures everywhere show that the man who feels his need of the Lord's mercy, that is the man who will obtain mercy. It is not his sins that can be any hindrance whatever; no; his sins may hinder him and do hinder him; but they cannot hinder the Lord; they could not hinder the Lord from choosing him; they could not hinder Christ from dying for him; they could not hinder the Holy Ghost from quickening him. And thus, our sins in these matters hinder us, but they cannot hinder him. But I will just notice the five-fold curse which the Lord pronounced upon the enemy and then take the reverse; and it will indicate a five-fold blessing upon that man that feels his need of it. And I cannot help indulging in a moment's digression here; what a deplorable thing it is that while men are speaking against the truths of the gospel, they are speaking against that by which alone they can be saved. The great defalcation, the great deficiency of the present professing world, as well as the profane world, is that men know not how deeply they are sunken, they know not how deeply they are dyed with sin; they know not their really woeful condition as sinners before God; and the consequence is that when the great truths of the gospel are brought in, they appear to such persons quite superfluous; and therefore such truths get in their way; and they say of these truths as they said of the Savior, "away with them, away with them." Let us nevertheless boldly, but at the same time affectionately and sincerely, trace out for a few moments the five-fold contrast there indicated. Satan was to be cursed above all cattle and all beasts of the field. Now just as he was cursed above all, so the believer in Jesus Christ is blessed above all. There is not a man upon the surface of the globe that is blessed as that man is that is brought to know his need of Christ, and to receive Christ Jesus in what Christ Jesus has done. The Savior is put in his work into the place of that man. You come out of your sinner-ship place altogether; and he does not partly take your sinner-ship place, mind that, but he takes it wholly, so as to finish your transgression; you have no hand in finishing it; so as to make an end of your sin; you have no hand in making an end of it; so as to make reconciliation for your iniquity; he has made an end of sin, an end of the law; he took your place; so that you have to step out of your old place by faith in Christ, and to stand in him, in his holiness, in his righteousness, in his perfection, in his conquest. Who then can be blessed like that man? You have a Father with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of a turning; you have a Savior that is the same yesterday today and forever; you have a teacher, the Eternal Spirit of God, that opens up the deep things of God, and brings you into the breadth, and depth and length, and height of the love of God, that passes knowledge. Thus, there is no man upon the surface of the globe blessed as that man is that is brought to know his need of Christ, brought to know what he is and where he is, and to receive the truth as it is Jesus. Again, it is said of Satan "upon your belly shall you go." If you turn, friends, to the 44th Psalm, you will find an explanation of that part of the curse upon the enemy; where we read that the people of God were in bondage; and they expressed that bondage by saying, "Our soul is bowed down to the dust; and our belly cleaves unto the earth." You will therefore see that it was. an ancient, an oriental idiom or mode of speech to denote slavery. So here, "Upon your belly shall you go," means that

Satan never should be free; and Satan never was free, he never can be free; he and his house are reserved in chains of everlasting darkness. Now here again bring in the reverse: the Christian is free; if you are a Christian then you are no longer a slave, you are free; free as described by the apostle when he says, "Who shall lay anything to the charge God's elect? It is God that justifies; is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again;" so that not a fault can be laid to their charge; they are risen into eternal freedom. Oh, what a precious gift is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! Give me his wondrous righteousness; I rise by that into the light of God's countenance; I rise by that above sin, above death, above the world, above the curse, as says the word of God, "They shall rise with wings as angels; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." This is the path to eternal life, this knowledge of where and what we are of the Savior in his exalting us to a throne of glory, surpassing every other position; and this freedom which he has wrought out. Then it is said of the serpent, "Dust you shall eat all the days of your life." I leave out the letter of that Scripture, and trouble not myself with its literal meaning; its mystic and spiritual meaning is clear enough. Dust is to be Satan's sustentation; and dust will mean that which is earthly, that is so self-evident a truth that I need not dwell upon it. You will understand that while it is said of Satan, he is to eat dust, it does not mean Satan personally only, but all that are one with him; and it means that they shall have no sustenance but that which is earthly. Look at that man's state who is one with Satan; he is blinded by the God of this world as to what the gospel is; that man has nothing for his sustenance but dust; that is, earthly things; and if that man have a religion, why, his very religion as such is as filthy rags; his religion is as something fleshly, and like the flesh it is but dust at the best; he knows not his need of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now here again take the reverse; the man that knows his need of Christ, and is led to receive him, what has he for his sustenance? Look at the opposite declarations; in the one case that which is earthly, and that only shall be the sustenance of all the enemies of God; but if brought into oneness with Christ, then see the difference; they in oneness with him shall have the bread of eternal life, the bread that comes down from heaven; so that if a man eat of that bread, he shall never die; and if he drink of that water, it shall be in him a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life. They shall be brought into that sustenance, so as to fulfill that great scripture, and what a wonderful scripture it is, that "As their day is, so shall their strength be." And by this order of things which I am now pointing out, the longer they live the further they go from Satan, until ere long they shall be at an infinite distance from him, and he at an infinite distance from them; never to come together again, never to be deceived by him again, never to be ensnared by him again; for he is defeated, defeated, and defeated forever! Oh, then, what songs of praises must resound to that Redeemer who has shown us where we are, and is bringing us on from one degree of light to another, till we arrive at the perfect day! Again, the fourth part of this curse, "I will put enmity between you and the woman." There can be no question about this, this is a matter as clear as A. B. C. The woman, of course, mystically means the church. If you just turn to the 12th of Revelation, you will there meet with the woman alluded to in this early part of the word of God. There is the woman "clothed with the sun;" that is the church of Christ, clothed with the light of heaven, clothed with Christ; he is her light and her immortality, "And the moon under her feet;" not the literal moon under her feet, but the moon there means the gospel, and that she walks in this moonlight: it denotes that she has a night in which to walk, and the moon under her feet will mean the moon-light, that is, the gospel light. "And twelve stars upon her head;" that is, she shall be crowned with the fulfilment of all the predictions of prophets and apostles; twelve here is a definite number for an indefinite. And the woman, the church, then, clothed with the sun, walking in the moonlight of the gospel, and looking forward to the time when she shall be crowned with the fulfilment of all the predictions of holy

prophets and apostles, the enemy hated this woman, and this woman hated the devil. What did this enemy try to do? He stood before the woman to destroy the child that she was laboring to bring forth. What child was that? Why, the holy child Jesus. Not a literal woman, not a literal labor, not a literal bringing forth, but a spiritual bringing forth in the public ministry of the word. For centuries, as most of you, perhaps all of you, know, the church of God labored to bring forth Christ into the public ministry of the word. Satan stood before the woman, first by Paganism, then by Popery, to destroy the public ministry of the word, to prevent the church from bringing forth Christ publicly. But what else has the church to bring forth? If the church shall prosper, it must be by bringing forth Christ Jesus the Lord. But the time came, (and perhaps it may there refer to the time of the great Luther,) when this Child was brought forth, in spite of Satan standing before the woman to destroy it; the glorious gospel of the blessed God was preached and has been preached with safety ever since and will to the end of time! Why, the day of Popish dominion is gone by; there are too many Bibles abroad now, and at home too, for Popery ever again to reign; rage it may, but reign it never can; it has seen its day; and its monks and priests are nothing but a few frogs now hopping about the land, the relics of olden times; like the ruins of some old prison, just to remind us there was a huge mansion existing once; but it is going on to ruin, and must go on to ruin for the Redeemer must prevail; his truth shall stand his enemies shall fall his own shall be saved! "She brought forth a man child;" Christ Jesus; "and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne not literally so, for it does not allude to his literal ascension, but that the Lord so interposed, and took such care of the gospel, that it has been preached ever since. And I will not stop here to digress, or else it is very plain that even some of the despots abroad are beginning to look very wistfully at the Bible. The Emperor of Austria, in his own heart, would be glad to see the Bible in his dominions, but he does not at present dare to sanction it. The other Emperor, nearer home, the Emperor of the French he, in his own heart, would be glad to see the Bible the religion of his people. Why, these despots begin to look round, and they say, We cannot think how it is that these English are unconquerable. The great secret of it all is the Bible. It was a good act of our Queen, when an African prince wanted to know the secret of her vast power, she sent him a Bible, and told him that was the secret of the whole; and so, it is. When the holy child Jesus, therefore, is brought forth in the ministry of the word, there is life in it, for he is the life; there is light in it, for he is the light; there is salvation in it, for he is the salvation; there is liberty in it, for he is the liberty; there is God in it, for "in him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. How contemptible are all the mummeries of human invention when set by the side of the God-man Mediator, Christ Jesus, who has swallowed up death in victory, and brought life and immortality to light. There is therefore entire enmity between Satan and the woman; agree they never can and never shall.

But also, "I will put enmity between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Take notice of the difference between the two. The Savior bruises Satan's head: the Savior meets Satan straightforward, honorably, honestly, openly, on the ground of righteousness and truth. But Satan does not dare face anyone, and so he comes behind, nibbles at the heel, tries to trip you up. And hence they have their secret confessionals, and a great many secret ways of doing business; that is devil all over, you may depend upon it; if there is something in my religion that I am ashamed for anyone else to know, you may depend upon it the devil is in that, for it is just like him. So, he was to bruise the Savior's heel; he could not come forward and face him. And you will never find, all through the Bible, that the devil ever does anything in his own name, he does it in borrowed names, in borrowed robes, none of them his own. Not so with

the Lord Jesus Christ, he was straightforward in what he did; and so is real religion now. But then look at the victory; Satan must be conquered, "It shall bruise your head." And how true this is. The head of the serpent there must not be taken literally, but figuratively; we must understand it to mean his tyranny. And then the head there must be understood regally; it will mean any great ruler. We know that sin is a great ruler; and we know that delusion of any kind is a great ruler. And there may be persons to symbolize this body of error; as the Pope, for instance, is the image of or symbolizes his system. Now, bruising the head, therefore, means that Christ shall overturn all these tyrannical powers that stand in the way of the salvation of his people. So, when a poor sinner is brought, as I have said this morning, to know where he is as a sinner, and to see the Lord Jesus Christ as the ...

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... been his destruction; and yet he knew that sword must be met; he knew that sword was lifted up to minister a penalty, to minister the curse of the law, to minister justice; and that that penalty, that curse, that justice, must be ministered. The sword is lifted up and shall not be taken down till it has vindicated the justice and the holiness of the just Judge. Adam dare not attempt to meet that sword; that made him look about for one that could meet it; and he saw in the promised seed that Jesus set his face towards death, towards the curse, towards the wrath of God, towards the sword of justice; Jesus Christ did meet it; and how sweetly the apostle alludes to all the results, when he says, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant."

Second: I now notice the second part of my text; "*And the Word was with God.*" First, with God in God's counsels. Take the 10th of John, the 17th of John, the 2nd of the Hebrews; a word or two upon each of these will explain to you what is meant by the Word being with God. In John 10th, the Savior there says, "My sheep shall never perish;" never, never. Some people are offended with that doctrine; if I am speaking to any this morning that are offended with this doctrine, let me have a word with you. Suppose the Lord were to come to you now, and speak home personally to your soul the blessed assurance that you should never perish; ought you to be offended with him for that, and to say, Lord, "you are taking too much upon yourself;" do you think that you would be right; do you think, therefore, you are a wise man because you undertake to deny what the Lord undertakes to do? Never therefore, call yourself a wise man until you are brought to know that truth, and to receive it in the love of it! "My sheep shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." But is the Father one with him in this? Yes; "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." So, Jesus Christ will not part with them, and God the Father will not part with them. And so, when the Jews hated him for these eternal truths, he says, well if you hate me, you must hate God as well; if you despise me, you must despise your Maker as well; if you take up stones and cast them at me, it is like casting stones at your Maker as well; "for I and my Father in this are one." How many of you this morning can say, my heart is one with that truth; My sheep shall never perish; and none shall pluck them out of my hand?" Can you say: Ah, that is what I like; I see that the Father and Christ are one; and I am through grace brought into oneness with that testimony! But he is also one with the Father in the sovereignty of the Father, as well as in the safety of the people. "I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid

these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes. Even so Father, for so it seemed good in your sight.” An argument some people bring against election is that it shuts people out. That is false; election never shut a man out yet, and never will. It is sin that shut us out from God; and if the great God had not been pleased as an act of infinite condescension and mercy to choose some, then all must have been lost. But, say you, that is taking some, and excluding the rest. No; they were excluded before; God found us under sin, and the law, and the curse; he was not obliged to have mercy upon any. And therefore, you will be better employed in reading God’s word, and trembling at his indignation, than in caviling at his sovereignty. “I and my Father are one.” Again, in the 17th of John: “You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him,” Some people are not content with that, but Christ was. There are some people talk about bringing others; they do not know what this coming is, or else they would not so talk. As well might you talk of going to the sepulcher and raising the dead, as that you by anything you can do, can bring a sinner to Christ. We must preach the Word, and we must leave the matter with the blessed God; he directs the Word where he pleases. “No man,” says Christ, “can come unto me except the Father draw him;” he is commissioned to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given him. With that Christ is content. He is one with the Father in the safety of the people, and one with the Father in his sovereignty.

But “The Word was” not only “With God;” but “*The Word*” also “*Was God.*” This brings us first to the dignity of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me say to you all that Jesus Christ did not live for himself; he lived for sinners; and that his life of obedience to the law was the work of his whole person; that the first element essential to acceptance was that of a perfection of love. Christ being God as well as man, loved God with a love as great as God himself is he loved the law with all the love of his wonderful person; he loved the people with all his heart, and soul, and might. Then if we add to this his holiness, his integrity, his spotlessness, be it remembered that the life of this person, the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, constitutes the righteousness in which we are justified; therefore, he is called “Jehovah our Righteousness.” Let me here say, friends, that there is as much difference between your righteousness and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ as there is between your person and the person of Christ. If you could live externally for a thousand years, and that thousand years should have no blemish mingled practically with your conduct, yet all this time you carry with you a corrupt nature, a wicked heart, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; and your righteousness at the end of that time would only be a little external, flimsy cobweb sort of concern, that could no more stand to plead your cause before the majesty of God than a literal cobweb can encounter the conflagration of the universe at the last day. May the Lord lead us, then, friends, to trample all fleshly confidence under our feet, and rejoice in the everlasting righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not wonder at the greatness of those scriptures that refer to the destiny of the people by this righteousness, recollecting that in such a righteousness as this that the people are to appear in. Is it any wonder that it is written concerning them that “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun; and they that love him shall be as the sun when he goes forth in his might.”

Again, we have also this same truth in another form in his death; the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, I wish you all to understand, was not the work of mere manhood; it was the work of his whole person. The prophet Isaiah, personating the Savior says, I looked, and wondered that there was none to help.” The Lord Jesus Christ could not wonder as God; therefore, it could not be true that he wondered if he had not been man. Then he says, “My own arm brought salvation unto me; and

my righteousness it sustained me.” If he had not been God, it could not be said that his own arm brought salvation unto him. The greatest stretch of Almighty power with which we are acquainted is the salvation of a sinner. There the Savior compassed our unquenchable hell, bore our awful curse; nothing short of omnipotence could have born the sin and guilt of unnumbered millions; but an Almighty Savior took them, and bore them all. Well, perhaps there are some here this morning that hold the notion that some are in hell for whom Christ died. Ah then, you do not know Jesus Christ; you may know a Christ, but not God’s Christ, not the Christ of my text; his death was deeper than hell, and if you could go there, you could not go below that; his death would find you out, and bring you out, and take you to heaven in spite of yourself; his death is broader than the sea, longer than the earth, longer than time; so that live as long as you may, you cannot live when his death shall be null and void. O then, let me be complete in his righteousness, freed by his atonement, let this be my standing, what will be the consequence? Why, it will make your poor heart dance with joy; it will make your eye bright, and your hand nimble, and your foot nimble; it will make you happy beyond expression. But another word. The apostle upon this subject of the Godhead of Christ speaks very beautifully. He says, “Without controversy;” I looked at that this morning, and I thought, “Well, I will have no controversy today; I will aim direct at the souls of the people, and at the glory of God.” “Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.”

May it be our happy lot, friends, every one of us to know where we are as sinners; to be led into the knowledge of Christ, to receive him in his dignity, to live in the unspeakable advantages of his love, to the in amplitudes of his mercy, in the bosom of his favor; and to form a part of that number that shall encompass his throne, and crown him Lord of all for ever and ever.

The Surrey Tabernacle being closed for repairs, will (D.V.) be re-opened on Lord’s-day September 18th, when three sermons will be preached by Mr. James Wells.

[In consequence of the great length of this Sermon, the Printers have been compelled to issue it in a double number, at two-pence.]