

A FRIEND WORTH HAVING

A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Morning May 13th, 1860

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

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“He is altogether lovely.” Solomon's Song 5:16

OUR sermon this morning, will consist chiefly in noticing the answer which the church gave to the little ones; “He is altogether lovely.” I shall notice the description which the church gave of the Lord Jesus Christ under seven distinct ideas; premising that the person here spoken of is a person in regal dress; and several parts that are mentioned that appear to those, perhaps, inconsiderate upon the matter to refer to parts of his person, refer not to parts of his person, but to parts of his royal dress; so that the person who is here presented to us as a king in his regal attire is in a word the Lord Jesus Christ; and I think we shall find as we go on no difficulty whatever in realizing its spiritual meaning. And then again another thing, or one of the chief things indeed that make it important to us is this; that this is not a mere abstract description; it is not descriptive merely of what Christ is in himself; it is descriptive of that, but it is at the same time descriptive of what he is to the church. The church here speaks of him in that revelation which the Holy Ghost had made of him. And therefore, I say these are the two main ideas; first what he is in himself, and then his relations to his people; for it is his relation to us, and the interest we have in the things here set before us, that makes it so important to us. The description begins at the 10th verse; and in going through this sevenfold description this morning, in order to give some little idea of the truth of our text, that “he is altogether lovely,” we shall in the first place find *holiness, health, and preeminence*; in the next place we shall find *regal dignity and substitutional devotion*; third, *purity and corresponding propriety*; fourth, *immortality and corresponding testimony*; fifth, *riches, holiness, and riches*; sixth, *strength and purity*; seventh, *the glory of his general aspect*. These are the things that are embodied in our text; “He is altogether lovely.”

Now first we have *holiness, and health, and preeminence*. “My beloved is white and ruddy; the chief among ten thousand.” I take the white here, for it is a common orientalism, to denote holiness. Here you find holiness, and health, and pre-eminence together, put together; as sin, and sickness, and degradation go together. You will at once recognize here a complete contrast between the Lord Jesus Christ and ourselves. We in in this very book are spoken of as black; “I am black;” which I think we all agree is expressive of our sinner-ship, of our state by nature; that we are blackened by sin. Jesus Christ stands in entire contrast to this; he is white. Then again he is ruddy; there is health;

whereas we are mortal; we are dying; our countenances show that we are mortal; our infirmities, and diseases, and feelings more or less remind us of our mortality; that there is in us all a disease of mortality that must bring us to the tomb. But the Lord Jesus Christ has no mortality in him; he has no disease in him; he is healthy. Then again, he is the chief among ten thousand. He is the Chief Shepherd, and the Chief Priest; and indeed, stands the Chief and the Head of all his people. Here is the exaltation; whereas we ourselves are not only black, and not only dying, or destitute of health; for if Church of England's teaching be wrong in a great many things, it is perfectly right in that part of its confession where it says, "There is no health in us." And so, by sin as we are black, and as we are diseased, so we are degraded, we are by sin brought down into oneness with Satan, into oneness with hell, into oneness with everything that is offensive to the most high God, and degrading to the creature. Now let a poor sinner be convinced, then, that he can no more alter his state by anything that he can do than the Ethiopian can change his skin; that he can no more heal that wound that sin has made than he can create a world; that he can no more raise himself up from the dust and from the dunghill of sin into which he is sunken, than, as I have said before, he can create a world; then let the Lord Jesus Christ be revealed; let him appear in his purity; and let it be seen that his precious blood can make us white, that his precious blood can make us white as snow, yes, whiter than snow, that his precious blood can take all this blackness away, and present us in all the purity of his own lovely character, in all the purity of his own perfection; even this one conviction and this apprehension of Jesus will begin to endear him unto us. And then secondly, here is health; "ruddy." I take the ruddiness to be expressive of health. So here is a sin-sick soul; ah, let Jesus become the health of his countenance; let the dear Redeemer come in and say, I will heal you of your wounds; I will bring you health and cure; I will give you perfect soundness; I will be your health; and you shall never be sick again, never be ill again, never be wounded again, not in the way we are in the first Adam; for in Christ Jesus we cannot be wounded. Hence the comfort; "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" We may be cast down for want of possessing good health. You know there are some people who have a very peculiar mode of speech on this matter of health; they say they do not enjoy good health. I should think they would enjoy it if they had it; it is a pity they have it, I should think, if they do not enjoy it; but that is not their meaning; their meaning is they do not get good health. Well now, I do enjoy good health, when I can get it. It is true literally, but it is also true spiritually; and that is the way in which I am now speaking of it. When my soul is healthy, when my affections mount to the throne of God; when I can stand fast, and rejoice in the Lord, and be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, then I can say, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." I am sure, then, that in these two characters the Savior is altogether lovely; namely, his being our sanctification, indicated by the white; and his being our health, indicated by his being ruddy. And then third, he is also the chief among ten-thousand. He stands at the head; he is head over all things to the church. What a complete contrast this is to what we are! And the Lord is pleased to teach us many things upon this matter in his dealings with us, both in our soul's experience and in circumstances. First in our soul's experience. Is it not nine-tenths of our time very different from what it should be if we could have the fulfilment of those pure desires which the Lord gives us after him? But instead of this we feel the truth of the apostle's words that "I have a law in my members bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." This holds the soul fast, brings it down; and there we are subject to it, We groan under it; we cannot get at anything spiritual in our prayers; at least our feelings and ideas in prayer when we are in that state are something like this; now, Lord, here is a thorn; Lord, take that thorn away. No, the Lord says; my grace is sufficient for you. Ah, that is not

what I want, Lord; I want the flesh to be put right; I want to be comfortable in myself; I want the thorn taken away, and then I shall not need grace to enable me to bear it. Now that is just the feeling we have when we are in that dark, carnal state of mind. But when the Lord is pleased to raise us up to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, then our better mind shall I say, our better, will, our better nature, our better principles are in operation; and then if we have the choice which we would prefer, the getting rid of the thorn, so as to be easy and comfortable, or have grace whereby to bear it; and so have less of earth, and more of heaven, less of the creature, and more of the Creator, less of the things of time, and more of the things of eternity; less of the things that are passing away, and more of those things that remain; less of those things that after all are but shadows, and more of those things that are real, and vital, and eternal; then we should choose the good part, Hence, the two opposite states of mind that Martha and Mary were in; they were both good women, both real Christians, both real lovers of Jesus; but just at that time the one preferred the temporal, and the other the spiritual; and "Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken from her." Shall we not then this morning, grace enabling us, hail the dear Redeemer, and bless his holy name, that we have nowhere else to look for sanctification; that we can be made white only by his precious blood; that we can have health nowhere but by him who took all our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses; and that we can be raised up, and have dignity and honor, and become kings and priests unto God, become sons of God, and enraptured as was John when he said, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." that this we have only in and by Christ Jesus; "for he has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." Here then the blessed Redeemer in these three characters I am sure must be altogether lovely. I do think we may put the language of our text at the end of every one of these verses which I will read, namely, that he is altogether lovely.

We go then in the next place to the 11th verse, where we get *regal glory; and substitutional devotion*, for such I take to be the meaning. We have first, regal glory, "His head is as the most fine gold." I do not understand this for one moment to mean his head literally; though I admire the poetry of Dr. Watts upon this description of the church, still, while I admire the poetry, and perfectly accord with some of his ideas, and shall conclude our service this morning with two or three verses of that hymn, still, that is not the meaning here, when he says,

"His head the finest gold excels,
There wisdom in perfection dwells."

We all feel that that is true, and glory in it too; but that is not the meaning here. The head being as "most fine gold" here we mean a crown upon his head; that is, Christ as he appears in royal dress; he appears with a crown; his regal character. And you must understand that this verse refers especially to him, as I think we shall have proof presently, in his humiliation; and then the other verses will refer to him after his resurrection. And there is something striking in his appearance after his resurrection, and the description in the other two verses, after we get past this 11th verse. We have then in the first place his crown, go to the 2nd chapter of the Hebrews; and there you get an explanation of the first part of this verse; his head being as most fine gold. He was crowned with pure honor. Many men are crowned with false glory; many bad men, that are successful in military and other exploits; but still we do not reckon their crown to be pure; that is, we cannot reckon their honor and glory to be pure; they acquire it, and retain it, and get high honor; but we do not reckon it to be pure. Now the Lord Jesus obtained what he did by holiness, by righteousness,

by love. So, in the 2nd of the Hebrews, where the apostle says, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor." Look at him in his miracles; did he not perform them all openly; did he not perform them holily; had they not all a tendency to holiness and righteousness; and was he not crowned with success in every miracle that he did perform? Was he not crowned with glory and honor three times by the Father while he was on earth; once at Jordan, once on the mount of transfiguration, and then at Jerusalem? So that we see him crowned with success; we see him crowned with heaven's approbation; we thus see the blessed Redeemer crowned even in his humiliation, first, with success, and then with heaven's approbation; and then third and lastly, and certainly not least, we see him crowned with perfection when he said; "It is finished that completed his crown; and that crown of perfection he will wear to all eternity. While men took Christ's righteous judgment from him, that is, they took from him the judgment that they ought to have awarded to him, and judged him wrongly, God the Father will not do him wrong. David, looking forward to this very matter, says, "And, you have set a crown of pure gold upon his head." And, my hearers, what have I here? I will tell you what I have here. I have here not only the dear Redeemer crowned with success and crowned with heaven's approbation, and crowned with the perfection of his own work. But I have here something else; for we must look at him relatively. I have you crowned here with success, with heaven's approbation; with eternal perfection; so that by him you must succeed, and by him you shall have heaven's approbation; approved in Christ, accepted in Christ; and as he is clad with eternal perfection, that perfection was not for himself, but for you; the Messiah wrought this mighty work not for himself, but for you. The Pope may have his triple crown as long as he likes; or rather not as long as he likes, but as long as he can; but we shall have the triple crown, the crown of success, the crown of heaven's approbation, the crown of perfection; we shall be crowned with eternal perfection by what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. In this part then we may well call the Savior altogether lovely. But we have also in this 11th verse *substitutional devotion*. "His locks are bushy, and black as a raven." Now this appears at first sight ambiguous; and perhaps I may be thought a little fanciful in what I am going to say as to its meaning. What I am going to say is true; but whether it be precisely here intended, I would wish to be very careful in this part. Now what are we to understand by the words, "His locks are bushy, and black as a raven"? What are we to understand by the locks? You recollect that the locks of hair were the symbol in the Nazarite of being devoted to God; and you know that Jesus Christ is called a Nazarene, expressive of devotion to God. And was there a Nazarene or a man ever devoted to God as Christ was? I question very much, forgive me if I be wrong, I question much whether out of all the Nazarenes in the Old Testament age there was one that so kept his vow as to come off entirely successful at the last, without drawback, without having to go over it again; I question if there was one. Samson lost his locks; but the dear Redeemer, not one stumble not one drawback. And the laws of the Nazarenes were very rigid and very strict; and the laws under which Christ was were like himself, perfect and shall I say very rigid, not one jot, nor one tittle could fail; and yet, everlasting honor to his dear and blessed name, his devotion to God was without exception, night and day; not one stray thought, not one erroneous word, not one wrong look, not one inconsistent act; perfection, reigned in everything; he was devoted to God in a way I cannot describe, and which perhaps to all eternity we shall never fully comprehend; that love to God and that love to us which was his element, and in which he was devoted to God. He loved God intensely, indescribably, universally; he submitted to all God's dealings with him perfectly, even to the most trying, as well as to those that were not so trying; and he loved the people with the same intense love, the same inextinguishable, constant, ardent love; for his love to God and his love to the people was nothing else but the same love

working both ways; embracing God and embracing the people in the same love. There was devotion. Is that our devotion to God? Why, friends, our very righteousness's in our devotion to God are but as filthy rags in comparison of that perfection of devotion in which the dear Redeemer lived. I know I find, favored as I am in some respects, I am that poor creature I preach sometimes without heart, pray without heart, and read the Bible without heart, and try to meditate upon eternal things without heart; a poor, insipid, dead thing. But it was never so with the Savior, he never prayed without heart, he never preached without heart, he never read without heart, he never meditated without heart; "Your law O God, is in mine heart; I delight to do your will;" he was the man that delighted to do that will day and night; he was that as it were planted by the rivers of waters, that bring forth fruit art his season, and whose leaf shall not wither; and whatsoever he does shall prosper. Here then is a service set down to our account; and we are to be devoted to God in glory in the perfection and by the perfection with which Christ was devoted to God while he was on earth, where he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. So, then I take the locks to mean his Nazariteship; and I am sure in this also he is altogether lovely. That word that has been with me three or four years seems to be taking deeper and deeper root in my soul; the more I read the Bible the more I prize it; I mean that precious little word *faith*. I am a poor cold creature I am ashamed of my best service; but I am not ashamed of his service; bless the Lord, he served God for me, and I am glad therefore to creep away as it were from my own service, and let him be my hiding place, and his devotion to God for me as a covert from the storm; yes, as rivers of water to refresh my soul; yes, as a rock, for the service that he has rendered will ever remain as a rock under which when I am weary I may repose and rest. I cannot rest in my own services; but I may rest in him; I may rest in what he has done.

"The best obedience of my hands
Dares not appear before your throne;
But faith can answer your demands
By pleading what my Lord has done."

Now it is said these locks were "black and bushy;" said to be black as a raven. Black. We just now noticed that our state, by nature is in this book described as being black; "I am black." Have we not the Redeemer here, then, in the likeness of sinful flesh? Have we not the Redeemer here with our blackness upon him? Have we not the Savior here with our sin upon him? Is it not written that he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh; that he took all our blackness, and took it eternally away? Some may think this is not the meaning; but I believe it is. Recollect, Jesus Christ is the Person here spoken of; no doubt of that; and therefore, it must refer to him in all those departments of his work and relations that will explain those matters. He took our blackness, then. It is said also his locks were bushy. I know not why our translators gave us such a translation; the original positively has no authority for it. I do not like it myself; very much prefer some of the marginal readings, but not all of them. Some of the marginal readings are, "His locks are black and curly;" that I do not like; I very much prefer the other reading, "His locks are black and adjusted;" and that will show that while he took our sinner-ship upon him, not a hair of his head (of course this is figurative language, only it conveys a nice idea to my mind), that not a hair of his head was ever out of its place. Whatever was written of him, he so perfectly met it, so perfectly answered to it, that not a hair of his head, as it were, was out of its place. That is the idea which it conveys to my mind, and I like it very much; for really the more we feel the solemn truth that it is only now and then we are in our place, and we are pretty often out of our place, the more we shall feel what a

mercy it is there is One that took our law place, and that he was always right, not a single thing was wrong. Really when I read the Scriptures sometimes, and look at the accurate way in which he answered to those scriptures, I stand amazed. If you look at any of his predictions, see how exactly they were all fulfilled; see how entirely he fulfilled, in his appearing to and dwelling with his disciples, every iota, everything that he had before said. Ah, my hearers, it is only to know him to love him. But his locks are said to be black as a raven. Where shall I look for the raven? The raven was an unclean bird, according to the ceremonial law; and all of us by nature are unclean; and God will bring his own to feel that they are unclean, that they are carnivorous, they are birds of prey, excluded from God. The raven was excluded, shut out as unclean, not to be received. But Christ took the blackness, took the uncleanness of these ravens, and they shall cease to be ravens. Well but, say you, the Lord does not change a raven into a dove. But he so changes a sinner that the one is expressive of the one state, and the other of the other. You see that in Peter's vision; and you see that in the 43rd of Isaiah, where the Lord says, "The beasts of the field shall honor me; the dragons and the owls." Here his people are called beasts of the field, and dragons, and owls; yet he says, "they shall honor me, because I give waters in the wilderness." they are brought into a wilderness state; those waters mean, of course, the waters of life; "to give drink to my people, my chosen;" there is election again, you see. "This people, that are by nature unclean, as the raven, the beasts of the field, the dragons, the owls; "this people have I formed." O blessed God, you may well say that you have formed them; for although all manner of birds and beasts have been tamed by man, yet no man can turn a beast of the field into an angel, no man can turn a dragon into a king, no man can turn an owl into an eagle, no man can turn a raven into a dove. But here, talk of transubstantiation; this is transubstantiation in reality, if you like; here I glory in the transition; "this people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." Here, then, we may well say that the Savior is altogether lovely.

We come now, thirdly, to notice again *purity*. Holiness, you see, is a wonderful key to this subject; it accounts for so many things; that as sin has done all the mischief, holiness does all the good; but it must be Jesus Christ; that must be the holiness; there is no other holiness; it must be a holiness that is stronger than sin; sin is a creature thing, and creature holiness, therefore, cannot be the remedy; we must, in order to come up with acceptance before God, be partakers of his holiness. We then come again to *purity and corresponding propriety*. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set." There are two things here meant, clearness and earnestness. The dove is here presented in its clearest visual state, when its eyes are washed, and made clear; not that Christ's eyes ever needed washing; it is the dove represented in its highest state of visual clearness and of earnestness. So, the Lord Jesus Christ when he rose from the dead; he appeared as the dove. What meekness! There stands a woman, a poor sinner, trembling and yet rejoicing, fain would have fallen at his feet, and perhaps have done as she had done before, or rather as another had done, would have washed his feet with tears, and have devoted her ample tresses to the best service to which they could be devoted, wipe the Savior's feet. But the Savior said, "Touch me not; I am not yet ascended; go unto my disciples, and tell them I ascend to my Father and your Father." there is humility, there is dove-like character, there is the peace and the quiet; "to my Father and your Father;" he is not more my Father than he is your Father; "to your God and my God." Go and carry that message. And if the dove, as we see in the case of Noah, was a kind of symbol of peace, bringing the olive leaf of peace, what was the Savior's theme after his resurrection among his disciples? Peace was his theme; "peace be unto you;" right hand and left; east, west, north, and south; every way, peace be unto you. And what was his very last act on earth

but an act of meekness, at the same time an act of majesty, and at the same time an act of mercy? “He lifted up his hands and blessed them. And while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.” And would you believe it, that to all eternity the Lord Jesus Christ will not lay this character aside? When in the last day he shall come down our parting skies, and when this world shall be on fire, and when he shall have before him countless millions of fallen and of unfallen angels, countless millions of human beings on the left hand, and countless millions on the right, extending far and wide, in a way we have no idea of, look at his meekness then. He gathers up the few little bits of doings of his children; “I was hungry, and you gave me meat,” and so on; and they, according to the spirit they have now, “Lord, we have done nothing, we have been poor sinners all the way?” “Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me.” What, will the King of eternity, the King of glory, when he comes in his awful majesty, will he thus appear to his disciples in such meekness? Is he not altogether lovely? Here is indeed a sweet majesty, an awful love. His eyes being described as the eyes of doves, is expressive also of the clearness of his visual power. He knew his disciples. Poor Peter was still covered, as it were, with the dust of his own denial of Christ; but that could not hide him from him. And when all fled from the Savior, he did not make a mistake, and take some amiable character instead of one of his own disciples; his own were his own. As the mother says, My child is mine, whether ill or well, ugly or handsome, deformed or well proportioned, mine is mine. And so, with Jesus; his people are his people, his brethren are his brethren; and his heart never was, and never will be, lifted up above his brethren. But it is said that “his eyes are fitly set.” If we take it substantively, of course it is true; but if we take it objectively, that his eyes are set upon the right object, now can we always say that? I do not think we can. I am sure Eve could not, when she was looking at the tree of knowledge of good and evil; I am sure Pharaoh’s eyes were not fitly set when he was determined to destroy the Israelites; and I am sure Judas’s eyes were not fitly set when they were set upon the pieces of silver instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now his eyes are fitly set; they are set upon God, and upon the people of God. He looks upon God, never lost sight of God. He says in the 16th Psalm, “I have set the Lord always before me.” We cannot say that; no; but bless the Lord, he did it for us. And he always, in everything he did, and in everything he does now, sets the welfare of his people before him. We cannot always say that, can we? It is a good thing when selfishness is so out of the question that we can do anything to forward the good and the welfare of the people of God, and bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. But alas, in this also, as in other things, our eyes are often wrongly set. But it was never so with, the blessed Redeemer, his eyes were always fitly set; and in this also he is altogether lovely.

But I am afraid now your time will be gone, and my eight pages full, before I can get to the end of these verses; indeed, I must make a few remarks only upon one more verse, and then close. In the next verse we have *immortality and corresponding testimony*, “His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers; his lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.” Take him after his resurrection; “he died no more, death has no more dominion over him” his cheeks are as a bed of spices,” free from death, free from sorrow, from grief, from mortality; and bloom, and will bloom to all eternity. And so, every Christian’s cheeks shall, in the sense here intended, in his ultimate destiny, be as a bed of spices, fragrant, blooming, and fresh as sweet flowers. Our cheeks shall then be pallid no more; no more remarks about looking pale, or looking ill, or looking thin, or looking stout; no, bless the Lord, all gone, and immortality our happy lot. And then here is corresponding testimony; “his. lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh.” Now the word myrrh means bitter and yet my text says, “sweet-smelling myrrh.” And never did any one drink so

bitter a cup as that which Christ drank; never did any one undergo sufferings so bitter as the sufferings of Christ; never did any one taste the bitterness of death as Christ tasted it. But now he appears in immortality. And his lips like lilies. Ah, no more the paleness of Calvary's cross; no more paleness; there he lives the red and fresh lily, for that is the lily, I should think, that is referred to; and "dropping sweet smelling myrrh;" the testimonies of his precious, death. Here is the bitter and the sweet; paradoxical as it may seem, it is the very bitter that makes it sweet. What makes his testimonies so sweet? Because they are the testimonies of what he has suffered for us, what he has achieved for us.

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In the believer's ear!"

In conclusion, I may mention one or two scriptures after his resurrection. "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. There is a testimony, a promise, that corresponds with the immortality in which the blessed Redeemer appears. And I need not remind you of his promise of the blessed Spirit; need not remind you of other things he said after his resurrection relative to his kingdom, and relative to his coming again to receive them to himself. How sweetly then the testimonies of his mouth accord with that immortality implied in the words in which he is here represented; and here also we may well say that he is altogether lovely. While I thus speak, I know at the same time whom I have to preach to; I have poor mortals to preach to; and that mortality so gets in our way, and that mortality loves so many other things, that it does all it can to blind us to the attractive charms of the blessed Redeemer, and to create within us all the indifference it possibly can to that with which the everlasting God himself is delighted, so that we may well cry out with the Psalmist, "Lighten you mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death." Amen and Amen.

Now ready. Part 3,

SELECTIONS FROM THE SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT, EOR 1859.

Twelve Sermons by Mr. JAMES WELLS. Price six-pence. Sent free for seven stamps. J. Cox, 100, Borough Road.

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