

# A GOOD POSITION

## A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1860

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

Volume 2 Number 91

“And stood before the angel.” Zechariah 3:3

AFTER noticing the defending angel and the interceding angel, we have this morning just to say a little more upon the position in which this angel appears, that *it is by him that God dwells with man, and man dwells with God*; and then secondly, *the way in which Joshua stood before the angel*; and then thirdly, *the mercies which Joshua in that position realized*.

First. This is what Joshua understood; he knew this; he knew that it was by the Lord Jesus Christ that reconciliation was brought about, that God would dwell with man; he knew that Jesus Christ would ascend on high, and would receive gifts for men, even for the rebellious; that the Lord might dwell among them. Taking only this view of our subject, or this view of the angel, how exceedingly precious he is. Ah, my hearer, can you point out a moment since you have known the Lord in which the sword of justice might not have stepped in and cut you down as a sinner but for the interposition on your behalf of this angel, of this mediator, of this priesthood, this perfect atonement? No, I am sure the longer you live the more you will prize not only the atonement of Christ, but you will prize it especially in the perfection of it; it is an everlasting remedy for every disease and malady that ever can arise. David knew this, when he saw that the pardon of all sin and the healing of all diseases, that these two stood inseparably connected together by the wonderful work of Christ; so that he could bless the Lord, that had forgiven all his iniquities, and healed all his diseases. Joshua thus stood, then, before the angel. So, my hearer, if we are taught of God we shall be brought to stand before Jesus Christ, to look to Jesus Christ, to seek mercy by Jesus Christ, to expect mercy by Jesus Christ. There may be some here this morning, for there are people, I believe in the world now who have the grace of God in their hearts; and their agonies from day to day are very great because of the state they feel themselves to be in as sinners; and yet somehow or another, while this is their state, they cannot as yet understand clearly what Christ has done; but if they could, I do not say that this would release them; no; it is nothing but the Holy Spirit bringing home the word with power, and causing them to realize that which we shall presently have to notice, can release them; but it is a wonderful stay. There is no one knows what an anchorage ground the atonement, the perfect atonement of Jesus Christ is, but those who have done business in great waters, and have been tossed as it were to heaven, then down again to the depths, and have staggered to and fro like a drunken man, and been driven to their wit's end, and constrained to cry to the Lord, and he has commanded and there has been a great calm. You do not know what an anchorage ground this atonement of Jesus Christ is to such a one. The apostle says

that it is an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast. I think what I am now saying is fairly implied in our text; because the angel is represented in preceding parts of this book of Zechariah as standing in the several positions by which the Lord reveals himself every way adapted to the necessities of a sinner. But not only so, but when the Lord shall thus dwell with Zion, "many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, that is, a great many people, so I take it out of a great many nations, as John says, out of all nations and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, shall be joined to the Lord. Is it not a most dreadful thing to think of that while all men like to have a hope in God, yet the only way in which they can be one with the Lord savingly is the way which above all they so object to? But when the Lord becomes the teacher, then it is he slays that enmity, by bringing you down, and so leaving you that you cannot do the things that you would. Oh, how little do some of the people of God. even now understand some of the Lord's dealings with them. We hear a great deal in the religious world about praying, and about believing, and about coming to Christ, and about this, and about that, and about the other, as though there was after all something the creature could do. But if the Lord intend you to be joined to him, to be one with him, he will first disjoin you from everything else: he will stop the mouth of prayer, you shall not be able to pray; he will so deal with you that the more you try to be what you think a Christian ought to be, the farther you shall seem to be off, and everything shall seem to go against you; and as Job says, "If I wash me, and make me ever so clean, then you plunge me again into the ditch, so that my own clothes shall abhor me." Ah, this will bring us to renounce all confidence in the flesh, will bring us to loathe ourselves in our own sight, and make us willing to be one with the Lord, in the only way in which we can be saved. Upon this oneness I dwelt rather largely last Lord's-day morning and will therefore not enlarge upon it now; but cannot forbear two or three remarks here on being joined to the Lord, because of the way in which the Lord does join a sinner to himself. Just look for one moment at the ties by which the Lord unites us to himself, the Lord Jesus Christ being the very center of all these ties. Hence, we are said to be joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. So that we are united, joined to the Lord by the atonement of Christ, and by the righteousness of Christ, and by the Lord's choice of us in Christ, and that before the world was, and by his decree or ordination, ordaining us to eternal life. And there is another scripture which is very expressive upon this being joined to the Lord; where the Lord says, "I will bring them into the bond of the covenant." Now the Lord's oath is sacred with him; and if we are made to understand the new covenant of God in Christ Jesus, it will enable us to read the Scriptures in a very different way from the way in which we read them when we did not understand his covenant; if we are brought to understand this new covenant of God in Christ Jesus, and brought into the bond of it, as that covenant, that testamentary will, that is infinitely sacred in the eye of the Lord, and infinitely dear to his heart; because the purposes of that covenant surpass in importance, surpass in magnitude, surpass in glory, all other purposes with which we are acquainted; for neither creation nor legislation, legal legislation, have any glory, by reason of the glory, which excelled. And when brought into the bond of this covenant, you will hold it fast. And if Satan should stand as he did here with Joshua, on your right hand to resist you, your answer will be, Well, I may not be one of the persons for whom this atonement is intended; I may not be one of the persons, perhaps, whose names are in the book of life; perhaps I am not included in this wonderful covenant; perhaps I am not included in the decree to eternal life perhaps I am not included in the promises of the Gospel; perhaps I shall be lost at last; perhaps I am one that shall perish; but if I am, I will perish here, and nowhere else, for I have no hope anywhere else; here I will stand, here I will wait, and here I will watch; and if I am lost at last, I will be lost standing before the angel; if I perish, I will perish here; I have no hope anywhere else; and the God of heaven is my witness that I have

tried; to make myself holy, and tried to make myself righteous, and tried to make myself good; I tried to be as righteous as the precepts are, and tried to be as upright as his holy law is, and as perfect; and the Lord is my witness I have failed in every point; look where I may, every refuge fails me; and if I am lost at last, I must be lost here, standing before the angel of the Lord. I will never go away from this position until God himself shall send me away. Well, let me say, then, the Lord never did send such a one away; never. It was so in the days of his flesh; see how he received those who from necessity were brought to him; he never sent one away, and he never will, if they are brought into this position. Indeed, the more I look at my text the more I like it. "He stood before the angel;" he had no standing-place anywhere but on gospel ground; and there he stood fast and knew there was no other way in which he could be joined to the Lord; no other way in which the Lord could love him, and no other way in which he could love the Lord. You cannot love the Lord all over the Bible, no. You read the 28th of Deuteronomy and see if you can love the Lord there; and then read the 17th of John and see the infinite difference between the two. All the curses described there for pretty nearly 60 verses, in the 28th of Deuteronomy, you will find if you go on you deserve them all; you may read verse after verse, you will say, Ah, I don't see why that curse should not come upon me, and that, and that. And if you do not know Jesus Christ and read that chapter it will make you miserable. Can't love God there; no; God does not love you there, does not love his people there; that is a revelation of his wrath; you may consent to the righteousness of his judgment, consent to it as a matter of righteousness, and tremblingly submit; but love him you cannot; no. The Lord has not given us the 17th of John and Solomon's song in vain; when we come to those parts of the Bible where there is no voice heard but the voice of the beloved, where there is no voice heard but the voice of Calvary; where there is no voice heard but the voice of mediatorial achievements; where there is no voice heard but the voice of triumphant grace; where there is no voice heard but the voice of salvation; where there is no voice heard but the voice of everlasting love; ah, bring us into these parts of the word of the Lord, there we love him. And often does a sensible sinner, sensible of what a poor creature he is, say, Ah, well, if the Lord deal with me according to the order of things in the Canticles, and according to the order of things in the 17th of John, and according to the order of things in all the Gospel parts of the Scriptures, ah, then I shall be saved; but as soon as I go away from them, I really feel such a want of conformity to the precepts, I am sure to be condemned; I can find no peace anywhere but in those parts of the Bible where the river of mercy rises and overflows all the banks of my sins, that not so much as the top of one of those mountains is seen, but the ark carries me above all, and will carry me through, and make me at last more than conqueror too. He stood, then, before the angel of the Lord. And it indicates, as we shall have to observe presently, confidence on the part of Joshua that he was able to stand at all. He stood before the angel. It is not said that he was sitting down or lying down; but he stood before the angel; there was strength in him. And there is nothing will so lift up a poor sinner's head, nothing will so confirm the feeble knees, nothing will so strengthen the weak hands, nothing will so calm the trembling heart, nothing will so comfort the conscience and expand the soul, as the manifestation of what the Lord Jesus Christ is to a poor sinner. Thus, then he stood before the angel as the way of access to God; he stood before the angel as the way of being joined unto the Lord in love, so as to walk with him in love, and to rejoice in him as his portion. And then thirdly, he stood before the angel as connected with the meeting place, where God and man were to meet, "For the Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land." Canaan is here referred to reflectively; but the ultimate land prospectively is here referred to. "The Lord shall inherit Judah his portion in the holy land." And this holy land means that rest that remains unto the people of God. And I have often thought what a comforting thing it is to the Christian to remember that those

that came short of the promised land literally did not come short of it on the ground of what may be called infirmity, nor on the ground of fallen nature, nor on the ground of anything of the flesh considered; but simply on the ground of unbelief; that is, not the unbelief of infirmity, wherein you are unable to believe you belong to the Lord; but they came short of the land on the ground of disbelieving in God at all; they set the Lord aside, and made themselves captains to go back again into Egypt. So that every little trouble that arose, they immediately apostatized; and then they were reformed again, and then they apostatized again; their heart was perpetually given to backsliding. But then, while this was the case with this national people, there were some among them, as we see, that understood this great circumstance of coming out of Egypt; they knew the Lord; and they knew very well that he was able to supply all their needs, and able to support them; so that they did not come short; but everyone that continued to believe, he held out, and possessed the promised rest. And so, it is now; there remains a rest to the people of God. Now a rest means, in the first place, a release; and that release is in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. And rest also means possession; and so there remains a possession of an inheritance incorruptible, and that by the Lord Jesus Christ. "He shall inherit Judah, his portion in the holy land;" that is, in that gospel rest which the Lord Jesus Christ has established. But then, again, here we are met with something difficult; were it not for the power of God, would hinder the Gospel of Christ. This rest that I am speaking of is not the rest that flesh, and blood would seek; no, we want earthly rest, we want worldly rest, we want mortal rest; we want rest that accords with the requirements of flesh and blood; that is just where, we are. But on the other hand, in contrast to this, the soul seeks after that rest which is spiritual, that rest which is in Christ Jesus; and these two natures are contrary one to the other; we cannot do the things that we would. The Christian hardly ever knows what real satisfaction is; for if he enjoy the Lord a little, then his old nature craves after its own objects; and if he is pretty comfortable circumstantially, and naturally, then leanness comes into the soul; and the Lord has so ordered it that we shall find no rest until we find it in entire possession of that holy land in which he will possess Judah. Thus, Joshua knew, then, in standing before the angel of the Lord, that he was in the way of access to God, the way in which he was joined to the Lord, the way in which he would enter into rest, and the way in which God should be all in all. And hence the command, "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord, for he is raised up out of his holy habitation," "Be silent, O all flesh," means that the people of God, or all the saints, shall be put in every way to silence as regards the flesh; not a crook in circumstances but by and bye you shall be silent upon. We have a great many things to say about them now; hardly anything takes place that is contrary to our feelings and convenience, but we think this is wrong, and that wrong, and the other wrong. And it is one of the most mysterious things, but so it is, it matters not how crooked things are, the Lord will make them straight; it matters not how deep the valley is, he will exalt it; it matters not how high the mountain is, he will bring it down; it matters not how rough things are, he will make them smooth; it matters not how dark they may be, he will turn that darkness into light. "These things will I do unto them, says the Lord, and not forsake them;" and we shall not have by and bye a word to say against any of his dealings with us.

But I come now to the experience of Joshua in standing before the angel of the Lord. I think the first thing is that of understanding. Joshua knew where he was; he understood his position. You that know not what soul trouble is, you know not your position as a sinner before God; you that know not what you are in your fallen natures, you that have never been put to the test of God's pure and holy word, go as thereby to be convinced in the contrast that you are altogether as an unclean thing, you know not where you are, you know not what your position is. You of course

try to persuade yourself that things will be well at the last; but you have no reason whatever to believe that; for “except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God;” and “without holiness no man can see the Lord;” and there is no holiness in any man until he is born of God, born of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever; and without this vital holiness uniting the soul to Christ, and Christ becoming the sanctification, he cannot see the Lord. They know not where they are. But Joshua being convinced, as we observed in our last sermon on these words, of his state, he understood his state, understood what he needed; he therefore understood where he was. And just so now, a poor sinner can understand what he is as a sinner and can understand where he is as to his hope of being saved; he may not yet understand where he is as to his real interest in these things, but he can understand where he is as to his standing. I have felt all along, notwithstanding all the darkness I have had, I felt fully assured of this; I knew no man under heaven can teach me in this respect; that is to say, I know very well it is all of grace, from first to last; I know very well that it is not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy that we must be saved; and I know very well that the order of salvation runs thus, that he has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, given to us in Christ before the world was. Joshua knew therefore, he was standing on Gospel ground; he understood the truth; he knew this angel; he apprehended this great messenger, this divine messenger, this divine person; he saw the position where he stood, and, understood where he was. Ah, it is a great thing for a man to understand where he is; for you know it is written of Satan that he deceives the whole world; and the deception shall be such, that if it were possible, he should deceive the very elect. But a sinner being brought to the Christ of God cannot be wrong. “Ah,” says one, “if I am brought to stand before Christ, I am sure to be right.” I don’t know, friends; you must mind that it is God’s Christ. For your own soul’s sake, if I might deal in a word of exhortation to them that are seeking, for heaven’s sake, as you prize the salvation of your soul, see that you stand before God’s Christ. A duty-faith Christ is not God’s Christ. I solemnly declare this morning, that that Christ that pretends that he would save men, and men won’t let him, is not God’s Christ; for he saves all that are given to him, he never lost one. So, if you are putting your hope in that Christ that is represented by that doctrine, it is not God’s Christ; it is the devil’s Christ. I am plain upon it. And if you are putting your hope in a Wesleyan Christ, a Christ that died for the whole human race, but can get but very few of them to heaven, most of them for whom he died are in hell, that is not God’s Christ; that is man’s Christ. Any false doctrine connected with the Savior makes a false Christ; and these are called antichrists. That preposition *anti* has a compound meaning, and two opposite meanings, too: it is remarkable; it means *for*, and it means *against*. So that while these men profess to be for Christ, they are at the same time against the true Christ of God. Mind, this, angel is called the angel of the covenant, and that covenant is an everlasting covenant; that covenant is a covenant ordered in all things and sure. We have innumerable false Christs in the day in which we live. You say, perhaps, “I put my hope in Christ, and do not trouble myself about doctrine.” My hearer let me say to you, with all the solemnity of a dying man, that to say that you put your hope in Christ, and pay no regard to doctrine, is just like saying that you place your hope in Christ without any regard to what kind of a Christ it is. How do I know what kind of a Christ he is but by that which the Bible represents, and if the Bible represent him as the High-priest, and that he has perfected forever them that are sanctified; if the Bible represent him as entering the holy of holies with his own blood, and with the names of the election of grace inscribed upon his breast-plate, there to plead their cause; and if the Bible represent him as giving eternal life to as many as are given to him; if the Bible represent him as appearing at the last great day triumphant, with every soul that was given to him before the

foundation of the world, with, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" all Christs that do not answer to this biblical representation are false Christs; and you might as well hope in the devil as hope in a false Christ; to hope in a false Christ is to be deluded by Satan. They may take the name of the true Christ, as the Savior has said, "Many shall come in my name; by their fruits you shall know them;" and if they bring forward false doctrines, hostile to his perfection, eternity, achievements, and the freedom of his people, such a Christ is a false Christ. Don't make a mistake, then, upon this matter, and think that you are standing before the Christ of God while you are standing before the Christ of the devil. "Ah," say some, "this is very severe, very censorious." You will know at the judgment-day who is right and who is wrong. If you are a lost man, you will say, Alas, alas! what that man said is true. The Christ that I hoped in, according to my acknowledgment, was a false Christ; and I am lost, and the man is right" And if you are a saved man, you will before you go to heaven feel your, need of a Christ that is the Mediator of a covenant every iota of which is graven with eternal certainty, and must eternally stand. Do you not know the Galatians? Did they reject the name of Christ? No. Did they reject the name of the supreme God? No. Did they reject the apostles *in toto*? No. But they engrafted Jewish ceremonies upon the Gospel; and the apostle calls that perverted Gospel another Gospel and pronounces a curse upon an angel from heaven who should thus bring another Gospel; for another Gospel is another Jesus; another Gospel is another Spirit; another Gospel is another scene altogether. Joshua then, I say, understood this. Just look at it again; this is a weighty matter; let us see what Joshua was in his own experience as regards his state. He appeared in filthy garments, indicative of the light in which he held himself, that all his righteousness's were as filthy rags. Then, again, the angel declared him to be a brand plucked from the fire. He was destitute of one thread of righteousness, and as worthless and helpless as a brand in the fire. The 15th of Ezekiel will show you what is meant by the brand plucked out of the fire. Now, my hearer, is it thus with you? Have we thus been brought in before God, so as to know that we have not a thread of righteousness of our own, and that we are as worthless in these matters and as helpless as a brand, as described in the 15th of Ezekiel; "the fire devours both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?" If so, then we are brought to stand before the Lord in the right spirit; we are brought to stand before the true Christ, not a false Christ; one that is in practice that which he is in name. Call him a Savior, and yet not save those for whom he died! Why, then he is not a Savior at all. Call him a Priest, to take into the holy of holies the people, yet not take them there! Call him a Redeemer, and yet not redeem! What is redemption? Redemption always has two branches in it; one is the price the other is the possession. If you redeem, or if you pay the price for the redemption of anything and yet leave it, you can't say you have redeemed it; you have paid the price, but you have not taken it. The Lord Jesus Christ pay the price, and that price his own infinitely precious self; for he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, his own precious life; and loved the people so as to do this; and yet not receive them! Such a Christ is not God's Christ; it is not the Christ of the Gospel. I feel rather deeply on this point; because it is almost universally the case in our day, there is a hard-working spirit about try to smooth things down; never mind doctrine, never mind doctrine; don't trouble yourself about doctrine. That always appears to me just saying, "Never mind what sort of a Christ it is; never mind whether it is God's Christ or the devil's Christ, so that we can be all friendly together, and bring about such conversions as we should like; never mind." I hardly ever receive a letter from a comparative stranger, but I generally get a hit or two upon that. "You are rather severe upon some things, and go rather too far in some things, and I wish you were not quite so hard upon others upon some things." Of course, they do. But then I attribute this in such persons to their want of knowing better; they have not yet been

salted enough, they have not yet been tried enough; they have not yet been, as good old John Warburton used to say, devil-dragged enough; they have not yet been in Job's ditch deep enough; they have not yet been made really sensible of what they are, so as to make way for the coming in of God's Christ. Thus, then, Joshua, from his downward experience, knew his need and from his position he understood the kind of covenant, the kind of Christ, the kind of message, the kind of messenger, by which alone he could be saved.

In the next place, there is in Joshua in this position unbounded confidence. He stood there understanding, he knew where he was, there was unbounded confidence. "Lord, you are able to make me clean." If I can but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole." "I say unto one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it; say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." Lord, I have unbounded confidence in your atonement as to its ability, unbounded confidence in your power, unbounded confidence in your love, unbounded confidence in your mercy. Lord, your mercy is like an ocean, that can swallow up with infinite ease my sins, were they a million times more than, they are; your atonement is deeper than hell, high as heaven, broader than the sea, and longer than the earth; that atonement ranges to an infinity to which my sins can never range; and that atonement as it were, searched every corner of the universe for every one of my sins; were they as far apart as the east is from the west, that atonement would find them out, and swallow all up. Unbounded confidence in the infinite ability of the Lord Jesus Christ: can't have too much. That kept Joshua up. You cannot find anything that is so great against you as Jesus Christ is for you. Then as Joshua stood there understandingly knew where he was; stood there with unbounded confidence; he also stood there with hope. For I distinguish between confidence and hope. He may have unbounded confidence in the ability of the Lord's mercy, and yet at the same time not have much hope that mercy was for him. Can't you see the distinction? Some of you, perhaps, are brought just so far as that; I know, Lord, you can save me if you will; I know that you have power enough in Christ to save to the very uttermost, if you will. Well, then, if you understand where you are, and have unbounded confidence in Christ's ability to save, then hope springs up; you have a hope, and that hope will keep you, as it kept Joshua.

Third. And now let us see what the result was. Did the Lord leave Joshua to stand here in solitude, in dire despair? No! the Lord stepped in and rebuked Satan; and you know he caused Joshua to realize just what he wanted to realize; something to have in possession, and something for ultimate prospect. "Take away the filthy garments from him." Now these filthy garments represent him as a sinner; and representing him as a sinner and then those filthy garments being taken away, brings before him this great truth, that Jesus Christ shall be made in the likeness of sinful flesh; all the sorrows and griefs of sin; he took our unrighteousness away, he took our degradation away; in his humiliation he took our degradation, and by his atonement has borne it away. And then, secondly, he realized the transfer of sin. "I have caused your iniquity to pass from you." Here was pardoning mercy realized in his soul. Now this is by the angel of the everlasting covenant; here is pardon realized; his iniquity passed from him to this angel, passed from him to Christ; Christ has put them away. Just so now. Blessed are all they that wait; for no one ever did wait in vain in the position I have described, not for the true Christ, and never will. Some of us have realized this same truth of pardoning mercy times out of number, pretty well; the Lord has sealed the matter home to my mind; did this morning; truth came, and all the endearments of eternity rose around my soul; I felt for a moment as if I was in Elijah's whirlwind, rising up to heaven, connected with the chariot of

salvation. Ah, what sweet times they are; they don't always last long; yet to realize this blessed truth, that he has laid our sins on Jesus, that we are not responsible for one, they are all put away, and God is a God of peace, and we are at peace with God. Then, again, not only pardon, but also justification. "And I will clothe you with change of raiment." Here comes justification; this is what he realized. And the raiment, of course, with which he became clothed, is, to make short of it, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; a truth revealed as clear in the Old Testament as in the New. Then the next is, he is crowned with loving-kindness. "Set a fair mitre upon his head; though I am aware this is a kind of priestly crown. But go into the 6th chapter of this same book, and you will find this same Joshua crowned with a regal crown: there you read of a crown of gold upon his head; all carrying the idea of coronation. The mitre showed that he was crowned with sacred perfection, with the perfection of holiness; he had attained the perfection of holiness, and that perfection of holiness is in Christ. He had attained this he was crowned with it. And then the other denoted that he was crowned with royalty, crowned with victory and dominion; so that whatever is indicated in the various parts of the word of God by the crown, or whatever is said in various parts of the word of God upon this mitre, is indicated in Joshua being crowned; crowned with life, because they shall reign in eternal life; crowned with loving-kindness, because by that loving-kindness they conquer and shall reign; crowned with glory. And there is a crown that we have to hold fast, that we are in some danger of partly losing. I should be very sorry to lose that crown; I never have lost it yet; and I should be very sorry to lose it- Some good men have lost it for a time; I could point out instances in the Bible; very bad to lose it. And what crown is that sir? Did not know that you high doctrine people admitted we could lose anything. Well, that's a proof you don't know us. You live in your own notions about us, but you don't know anything of us. You had better go a little more where the Gospel is preached, and you will know a little more about it. There is the crown of Gospel freedom; see that no man take that crown. There is a danger of losing it; the Galatians lost it for a time; and if you begin to receive a false Christ, you will lose it your freedom is gone.