

THE RIGHT WAY

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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**“So will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, says the Lord.”
Jeremiah 31:28**

WHEN we take into consideration the absolute eternity of the Most High, the absolute infinity of all his perfections, and that he is infinitely happy in, and by, and from, and with himself, and that not anything can be taken from him nor anything added to him; when we take this into consideration, and then remember that one Divine Person in this eternity, in this infinity, though thus infinite, has taken our nature into oneness with himself, so as to form an essential part of his person, and to become God and man in one person, who shall undertake to describe the closeness of this union of divinity with finitude? Why, surely, the union of the soul and body man cannot be more sympathetic, or more identical, or closer, than the unity of divinity with humanity. And yet it is in this great matter of God having so set his heart upon man as to take our nature, here, lies the great secret of all the mercy interest which the Lord takes in man; he having thus in the greatness of his love come and taken our nature, he having thus in the riches of his grace chosen a people in this wonderful Person; the people were given to him, and he is responsible for them. And the Lord has fixed, he has settled purposes concerning these people, and which purposes accord entirely with the love wherewith he has loved them, and with the grace by which he has chosen them, and with the mediation by which they are saved. And hence the great purpose of this love is thus expressed by the apostle, and that very beautifully; “In whom,” in Christ Jesus, “we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will.” If, therefore, the Lord watch over us to build, if the Lord watch over us to plant us in the senses here, intended, I am sure it must be after this order of things; it must be by his dear Son; it must be after the order of that covenant which is declared in this wonderful chapter; for this chapter is altogether evidently a new covenant chapter. But while we thus speak, the great point is that of taking forth the precious from the vile. It is a matter, much to be lamented in our day, in the so called Christian world, that men calling themselves Christians are putting off their own, souls with a mere natural religion, without that downward experience that proves the existence of life in the soul, and that proves that the Holy Spirit has begun a work of grace in the soul; without that vitality which severs the real Christian from all others.

Why, my hearer, if there be any one thing you can think of that demands our prayerful concern, and that is worryour of all the agony of which we are capable, as it is said, “Strive,” or “agonize to enter in at the straight gate;” I say, if there is one thing more than another that is worryour of all the sighs, and earnestness, and agonies, of which we can be the subjects, surely it is that of making our calling and election sure. For, if our calling be a mere conscience calling, then, while we pass it off for a gracious calling, it is nothing all the time but a mere conscience calling, and will leave us at the last where it found us. There is (and I hope before long to give a whole sermon upon that one important matter) a distinction between a mere conscience religion and a heart religion. Saul of Tarsus, before he was called by grace, had a conscience religion, and what he did he did conscientiously; and he had a moral conviction of his state as a sinner before he was called by grace. But then that was all conscience work, it was not heart work; he had no spiritual conviction. When a spiritual conviction came, then it brought to light the concupiscence of his heart; then he learnt that he himself, independent of his doings, that he himself, in his very heart, and mind, and nature, and state, was carnal, sold under sin; but that the law of God was spiritual. He recognized the entire antagonism existing between the qualities of his nature and the qualities of God’s eternal law. Now comes spiritual conviction, now the heart is ploughed up, now the heart becomes a burden, now the sin of the heart becomes a plague and a grief, now there is way made for the coming in of that mercy which the Lord had for him. It is a path, then, somewhat like this that we shall have this morning to travel; and, in so doing we may notice first *the adversity*. This is implied by the adverb of manner, the comparison, “So will I watch over them, to build, and to plant.” We have, then, first *the adversity*; secondly, *the establishment* and thirdly, *the prosperity*. We have the establishment in that being built up; and we have the prosperity implied in that being planted.

First, *the adversity*. The Lord says, “As I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict.” You see there is a great accumulation here of phrases; and you may depend upon it that they are as much inspired as are the clauses constituting our text. So that we must pay attention to them as we go along, First, then, here is the plucking up. “As I have watched, over them to pluck up.” Now I understand this to mean, to be plucked up from the first Adam. All of us by nature need this. But let me try and describe what it is. Now every man is sure to have, until the Lord becomes the teacher, some hope from himself in the mercy of God. He thinks, well, if I have not been what I ought to be, I mean to be better before long. In a word, in some shape or form or another, until a man is taught of God, he is sure to have some kind of hope arising from the creature. I am not so bad as my neighbors are; if I am, I mean to be better. It is all sure to arise in some shape or form or another from self. But when God comes in, and convinces that man that all his doings, good and bad, are sinful; and that all his thoughts, and his very prayers are sinful, and that this man’s holiness is nothing but unholiness, that his righteousness is nothing but unrighteousness, that his wisdom is nothing but foolishness, that his strength is nothing but weakness, that his comeliness is nothing but deformity, that his beauty is nothing but blackness, that he is altogether a thing of nothing. Now, when he is brought to see and feel this what does such an one then become in his own estimation? He becomes, as Job says, mere stubble. “Will you pursue the dry stubble? will you pursue the leaf broken by the wind?” These are the representations that those that are taught their state by nature have given of themselves. Now, my hearer, are we thus plucked up, and thus brought to feel that if ever we have any saving hope in God it must be by the gift of God, it must be by the grace of God, according to that order which the apostle sets before us when he says of the Lord, that “he has given us everlasting

consolation and a good hope;" through what? Through something that we have been, or are, or expect to be, or wish to be, or intend to be, or try to be? No, my hearer; "he has given us everlasting consolation" blessed testimony; and that is by everlasting salvation; and therefore, "a good hope through grace;" he has given us a good hope through grace. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich." You know that there is a remnant according to the election of grace, and that you are saved by grace. He has given us a good hope through grace. Now this is one step towards being built up a right; this is one step towards being a living stone in mercy's eternal building; this is one step towards that state of things expressed by the psalmist when he says, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." Now, are you this thing of nothing in your own experience? As for free will, it is a figment; it is a delusion. I will grant free agency in everything natural and moral; but when we come to supernal things, when we come, to eternal things, then there can be no free agency there, there can be no creature choice there; there can be no creature meddling there. The whole must be of God, from first to last. But not only thus plucked up from the first Adam, so as to have no hope from ourselves, that if we get a hope it must be from the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus; if we get a hope, it must be by such a knowledge of the perfection of it, as to give us somewhat to understand that scripture, that "where sin has abounded;" and sin abounds by the sentence of the law; when the law comes in, then sin revives, and the sinner dies to all hope from himself; "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Now sin abounds by the law in the conscience where the law comes; and into that same conscience where the law comes to plough up the ground, to plough up the heart, there the seed of mercy comes; and there, where sin has so abounded as to sink the sinner into self-despair and self-loathing, there Christ comes; and wherever Christ comes, there grace does much more abound; so that sin must bow, must be swallowed up, and come to nothing, where grace takes possession. But here is not only plucking up, but also breaking down; that is, breaking down self-confidence. You must be brought to self-despair. I do most solemnly believe that we live in a day in which vast numbers make a profession of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that do not know what it is to be so broken down for their natural hope to be taken from them, and to feel themselves without hope; and to be so broken down as not to be able to get up again, to be broken down under sin. Sin keeps me down; consciousness of sin keeps me down. I cannot rise to call God my Father; I cannot rise to call Christ, my Savior; the law, and conscience, and conviction, keep me down. I can be raised up only when the Lord shall come and raise me up. Ah my hearer, let us not deceive ourselves; for as the Lord lives, if we are not thus broken down, and kept down until the Lord shall come and raise us up, there is something wanting at the root of our religion. "He lifted up the beggar from the dunghill;" but why should he lift him up, if the beggar can lift himself up? "he raises up the poor out of the dust;" but, then, why should he raise up the poor out of the dust, if the poor can raise himself up? And that "he has raised us up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" but, why should he raise us up, if we can raise ourselves up? Now, my hearer, I must leave you to judge what you know of being thus plucked up, and broken down, and kept down like Saul of Tarsus, he was kept down until the Lord came and raised him up; and so it was with the psalmist, and that made him say, "You are my glory, and the lifter up of my head." But people lift themselves up in our day; a few qualms of conscience, and down they go into a little bit of fleshly humility, and then they get up in to a full assurance; mustn't doubt, oh, no, say their ministers; don't doubt, don't fear. That is one of Satan's devices to drive away all godly jealousy, for there is an infinite difference between the doubts of godly jealousy and the doubts of infidelity. These ministers don't seem to know the difference; and I believe we live in a day when there are thousands of ministers

that are nothing else but deceivers; they themselves are deceived, and they deceive others. If I doubt the word of God, doubt the truth of that word, that is an infidel doubt; but if I call in question whether the work is real in my heart, that is a godly jealousy doubt; if I am afraid to say God is my Father, because I have not yet realized his pardoning mercy, and am not yet brought into the spirit of adoption; if I dare not call Jesus Christ mine, because I have not yet been favored with the love of God shed abroad in my heart to realize the presence of God; if I am afraid to call him mine; why, these are the doubts of godly jealousy. The man that is a stranger to such doubts, the man that has an assurance without ever being laid under such doubts, is nothing but a presumptuous professor. You are presuming that God is your Father, but you have never been plucked up nor broken down, nor kept down; you have not been raised up by his power, you have raised yourself up, and you have yourself taken possession and I will tell you what your destiny will be, it will be that described in the 17th of Jeremiah, where it says, "He that gets riches, and not by right;" and I am sure, if you profess to hold Christ, if you are sure that God is your Father, and that all the blessings of his everlasting love are your portion, without any right to come to this conclusion, what is the result? why, you have gotten riches presumptuously, and not by right. "As the partridge sits on eggs and hatches them not, so he that gets riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool." So, when you come to die, and come to ask where is the real experience? you will look about, and find you have none. So, in ancient times, they said, "the Lord said, and the Lord said," and yet the Lord had not spoken. Here, then, I will not insist, I never did, and never shall, so much upon the *quantity* of experience; but I do contend for this one thing, that all the people of God must have the *same* experience in *kind*; though in degree it may not be the same, yet in kind it must be. You recollect the apostle Paul, when writing to the Philippians, what a remarkable expression he uses bearing upon this subject; he says, "You are all partakers of my grace." That is an expression that has often laid upon my mind. I have walked in the streets many times meditating upon that, "You are all". He allows no exception; "You are all partakers of my grace;" you are all saved as much by grace as I am; and that, as grace found me sovereignly, so did it you; as it held me fast when it did find me, so it does you; and as it humbled me, so it does you; and as it lifted me up, so it does you; and as it saves me, so it does you; and as I am one of the remnant according to the election of grace, so are you; and as the election has obtained it, and the rest were blinded, so have you. That is a remarkable expression; just showing that while they were not all partakers of his grace to the same degree, they were all partakers of the *same kind* of grace. Like Lydia, where it is said (a scripture that many people, in order to carry on their deceptions, refer to; but they give an obscuration; instead of an interpretation of it) that "the Lord opened Lydia's heart, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." Ah! They say the Lord merely opened Lydia's heart. Well, it implies that her heart before was closed, and that the Lord alone could turn her unbelieving heart into a believing one; that the Lord alone could turn her heart from a foolish one into a wise one, her prayerless heart into a praying heart, her heart of enmity into a heart of love, her heart of antipathy into a heart of reconciliation; and "she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul." And you know Paul was a thorough high doctrine man, and she attended to the things which he spoke; and yet you say, Ah! I don't like those high doctrines; but, like Lydia, my heart is open. I don't believe you are like Lydia, then, for she attended to the things spoken by Paul. She would not have done as a Wesleyan minister did some time ago in the country, when he preached in a Calvinistic pulpit, such as it was, and he absolutely tore the 8th and 9th of Romans out of the Bible, and put the leaves into his pocket, and walked off with them; and when the next minister came, his text happened to be in one of those chapters, and the chapters were gone, and they found that the Wesleyan minister had torn the leaves

out. He thought he should do the people a great service by so doing. So that was not attending to the things spoken by Paul; that was rather tending to destroy the things spoken by Paul. And why did that man act in that way? Because he had never been plucked up, nor, broken down; he had never, therefore, been brought into the spirit of the Gospel, so as to feel in his own soul that if he ever were raised up it must be by the power of God, independent of good or bad in the creature. Now, then, the Lord plucks up and breaks down, and throws down too. There is something very powerful in that, throws down. Well, why does he throw down? What! does he throw people down? Why, of course he does. You have piqued yourself, perhaps, upon some goodness or another, and you are dreaming that you are a little better than you were. Presently some cross providence comes; just where you meant to be happy, the Lord meant you to be unhappy; and just where you meant to make a nice thing of it, some gain or another, the Lord meant you to make a loss; and he disappoints you here and there; and throws you down; and you murmur; you can't make it out, don't understand it; and then, in a little while you turn around and say; What a rebellious wretch I am, I wonder the Lord does not cut me off. The Lord by these cross things comes and dashes you down, throws you down, and breaks your self-conceit all to pieces; and then you are ready to say, I think I know now what David meant when he said; "I am like a broken vessel, like a poor earthen vessel broken to pieces;" so that what help is there in such a poor creature as I am? I know this is a mystery, this is a path which the vulture's eye has not seen, which the mere formal professor knows nothing of, and therefore, cannot appreciate God's truth. "And to destroy." So it is; the Lord absolutely destroys all our false confidence's, he will too; and we are learning this all our days. This is not only the first work, or rather, not only when the work of grace begins in the heart; but all our days, more or less, the Lord is plucking us up, plucking us up here and there. If he sees us somewhere that is not good for us; the Lord plucks us up, and breaks, us down and throws us down; if we put anything into the place of what he has for us, he comes in and blasts the whole, sweeps the whole away, But there is one thing I will say of the Lord, whatever he takes from us he will never take himself from us, he will never take his mercy from us, his dear Son from us; his holy promises from us, his covenant from us. But he will take other things away to make room for that which he has for us. And then he will also afflict. There is a great deal of downward experience here. People tell me that the life they live is all joy, and all delight; and so, they quote the words of the apostle, when he says, "Thanks be to God that always causes us to triumph in Christ." Was the apostle actually always rejoicing? Certainly not; he gives us a very different account from that; he tells us of the law in his members bringing him into captivity unto the law of sin, and hindering him in spiritual and eternal things; and he well knew if the Lord could be hindered as well as himself, there would be no hope. I understand the apostle to mean this; Thanks be to God, that when we do triumph, it is in Christ; he never causes us to triumph anywhere but in Christ; if ever he causes us to triumph, it is in Christ, it is always in Christ. And so, it is always in Christ; for there we have life and light, and sanctification, and justification. I often think what a mercy it is that these rebellions, these downward experiences (I know very well what this is called, I must not stand for that, I must not hesitate to tell out God's truth, and show what human nature is, and the way in which the Lord makes room for his mercy); I say, what a mercy it is that these very rebellions and downward experiences, so far from touching or tarnishing the sanctification, the justification, the approbation, the completeness we have in Christ, actually make way for the same; for who is the man that will run to the rock for shelter, but the man that feels there is shelter nowhere else? Ah! the Paschal Lamb must be daily our shelter; we need, for it is not a superfluous declaration, that "he abides a priest continually;" and we are sinners continually, and we need this High Priest continually. And then, when we get to heaven, in order to keep our praises up in their

perfection, we shall need this High Priest; for to all eternity by the perfection of his offering, though there will be no infirmity in heaven, yet, at the same time, our praises, in their strength and perfection, will be kept up by the perfection of his priesthood. Now, he says, "I have watched over them." Let us, then, stop at this part for a moment. How is it with us? Can we look back, and say that we have been either gradually or instantaneously, either, for it matters not as to the form, that is not essential, have we been plucked up, so as to have no hope from ourselves? Have we been broken down and kept down, and could not get up until the word of the Lord came and gave us hope in the Lord Jesus Christ? And have we been thrown down again and again in our false confidences, and are they all destroyed? And have we been afflicted and grieved again and again under the hidings of the Lord's face? In a word, have sin and self been made a burden to us, so as to make us loathe ourselves in our own sight? If so, I am sure we are already squared for the building, suited for the building. "So, will I watch over them, to build, and to plant." You will see, even if I occupy too much time upon this part of our subject, I cannot pass away from it without saying, look at the solemn comparison, "As I have watched over them to throw down;" so that the Lord here seems really to indicate that this plucking up, that this breaking down, and throwing down, and destroying, and afflicting, is as essential to their real welfare as the building up and the planting seems so to me; that there can be no real religion without this downward experience. Hence, the Savior's mission. He characterizes those to whom his mission belongs as being bruised, as being prisoners, as being broken-hearted, and as being bound as with chains and fetters. These are the persons and until a man be brought to know this is his state, he can never appreciate what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. I am not going to turn your downward, or upward experience either, into salvation; but we find, and we insist upon it, that where the work is real, there the word of the Lord has been rendered as a two-edged sword, dividing asunder soul and spirit, entering into the joints and marrow, and thus levelling us with the dust. I know a man that could preach a very good sermon to you upon this very subject, a man by whose bedside I sat yesterday for half-an-hour, who will very soon be in eternity. Now he had got as much moral religion as any man need to have, and as much natural religion and had been a good servant, kept a situation, twenty years, and respected by his master. We like all that; if is all excellent in its place; the fault is that men make religion of it. He was brought on to his dying bed, and one of our Sunday morning sermons reached him, "You have delivered my soul from the lowest hell;" and in that sermon that downward experience essential to the right knowledge of the way to salvation was described, cut the man up root and branch, and made him tremble to the very center of his soul. He was a stranger to this downward experience, this soul trouble, and to that kind of salvation that is there set forth, and a stranger to God's order of things, cut up root and branch. The end of the sermon gave him a little hope; and then he read some more of our sermons, and they have given him a great deal of hope and brought his soul into sweet fellowship with eternal things. I saw his soul was full of eternal things. I never enjoyed more liberty at the throne of grace than in praying with him. Oh, the mighty difference between the morally convinced sinner and the spiritually convinced sinner between the man whose religion is mere conscience work and the man whose religion is heart work; the man that has seen and felt his woeful condition, and there lies until the tide of mercy rolls in, and enables him to cast the anchor of hope upon free-grace ground. I cannot describe the mighty difference between the two; and none but the man that has been into these downward experiences can understand the difference between the two; "for the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." It is one thing to talk; you may learn the doctrine of experience; and at the same time you have got only the doctrine of it; you may have it in your head, but not in your heart. But, my hearer, that

will not avail. Satan cares not how he may deceive you, if he can get you to be clear in the doctrine of experience, fill your head with experience, while you are a stranger to it in your own soul. You are as much deceived as the Pharisee is, if you get sound doctrines into your head, and have not received these truths from a sight and sense of your need of them, so as to receive them by the Spirit of God. You may be as sound in your creed as the apostle Paul and yet be a damned man. A mere sound creed will not do. Religion is something more than a notion; something must be known and felt. The sinner must be humbled and broken down, and be kept in that state until God shall raise him up, that man has no right to call God his until he can do so by the authority, the power of the Most High. I am more delighted with one vital conversion, than with ten thousand mere natural, mere fleshly: mere carnal conversions.

But I hasten to the other parts. Now, such shall be built. Where shall they be built? They shall be built immovably upon an everlasting foundation, and that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now, he is an everlasting foundation, he is a sure foundation. If he does not last forever, how can he be a sure foundation? So, this man who is thus taught shall be built upon this eternal foundation, this sure foundation, that is, he shall be built upon eternal redemption in the eternal certainty of that redemption; he shall be built upon Christ's perfection in the eternal certainty of that perfection; he shall be built upon Christ's righteousness in the eternal certainty of that righteousness; "for the work of righteousness shall be peace, and quietness, and assurance forever." He shall be built upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the foundation which he has laid as the Mediator, in the eternal certainty of it; he shall be built upon God's everlasting covenant, for Christ is the surety of the covenant, in the eternal certainty of it. And when a man is thus built up, in the eternity of God's love, the eternity of God's counsel, the eternity of God's covenant, why, that man can laugh at the notion, that man can laugh to scorn the notion, of a soul being in hell for whom Christ died; that man can laugh to scorn, were it not for the awfulness of the abounding delusion, he could laugh to scorn the devil's doctrine of duty faith; I call it a devil's doctrine, for I most solemnly believe it to be such; I most solemnly believe that that doctrine, that makes it the duty of all men savingly to believe in Christ, is from hell, and intended by the devil to put the creature into the place of the Eternal Spirit, to lower the Savior, and to represent the counsels of God as being no counsels at all, and to bring the people of God into bondage, by bringing us into contact with that system that says and unsays, that contradicts itself, that is a mere suicidal gospel; that kills itself, and would kill us too, if we could listen to it. I say, the man thus broken down, and the man thus built in Christ; for if you are thus so broken down, and find out the uncertainty of everything else, you will be led to see and feel, and know, that nothing but a Gospel of eternal certainty can be any use to you. And you will see that, as the foundation is everlasting, I make no hesitation in asserting that the scriptures are as clear upon the eternal stability of the structure as they are upon the foundation. Is the foundation sure? What does that say of the superstructure? Why, that "mercy shall be built up for ever;" that "upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And shall the Lord be almost weary when the completion draws near? Shall the Lord come sighing and saying, Well, I could not have gone on much longer? Ah! no; what he does, he does with infinite ease and with eternal certainty. There shall be a universal shout among angels and saints in heaven, and throughout the church; when the top stone shall be brought home with shouting's of "Grace and grace unto it." The scriptures speak, then, with as much certainty of the superstructure as of the foundation. "The eternal God," or "God in his eternity, is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before you;" ah! so he will; but may not the enemy come back again? No, he will not; for he shall give command to destroy him.

“He shall all our sins destroy,
And every bosom swell with pure seraphic joy.”

The work is done; Christ shall reign; the superstructure shall be built up to be thrown down no more forever. Hence at the end of this chapter there is a beautiful paragraph, out of which I have dug five, or six, or seven sermons in my time, and hope to dig some more yet; “It shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more forever.” Has it been thrown down, then? Yes; first in the first Adam, and second experimentally; and then, when the sinner is thus cast down, ah! when he meets with this foundation, how gladly does he rest his hope there, how gladly he rests his soul there, how happy he is to find something firm, to rest his soul upon, something certain to reckon upon; as says the apostle; “We know” (no uncertainty about it) “that if this earthly house of our tabernacle were dissolved” what then? “we have a building;” not we shall have, but we have it now; we have it in the manifestation of it, in the completion of it, the completion of Christ’s work; in the declaration of it in God’s immutable oath, as the pledge of security. “We have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;” “kept by the power of God;” and I am sure the power of God is infinite power, almighty power. I have often thought of those words of Doctor Johnson’s, in his review of Milton. Doctor Johnson says of Milton, as a poet, that “he scorned assistance, and difficulties vanished at his touch.” Now, that may be true of Milton, as a poet; I am sure it is true of God, as a covenant God; I am sure that he scorns assistance, and that difficulties vanish at his touch. I am sure that the Gospel scorns conditions and breathes salvation free as air. “So, will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, says the Lord.” As he has broken you down thoroughly, he will build you up completely; as he has turned you into a complete sinner, he will turn you into a complete saint; as he has destroyed all your false confidences, he will give you true confidences, and build you on that foundation from which you can never be taken. The rains may descend, and will descend; the floods may rise, and will rise; the winds of adversity may blow, and will blow, and may concentrate their force upon you; but you shall fall not, for you are built upon a rock, and therefore shall survive the whole, and rejoice that God is your strength and your portion forever. But time is gone, and I must say no more.