

HEAVEN'S SIGNET

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, September 25th, 1864

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, Borough Road

Volume 6 Number 301

In that day says the Lord of hosts, will I take you, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel says the Lord, and will make you as a signet: for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts." Haggai 2:23

WE must view the Zerubbabel here intended as one greater than the literal Zerubbabel, for if we do not take it in that light, we shall certainly miss the substance and the proper meaning of our text. It is just the same as in some other scriptures where the word *David* is mentioned, but David not at all meant, but a greater than David. And though there be here an allusion to Zerubbabel as to his servitude, yet it is evident that it has a spiritual and an ultimate meaning, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is the person that is really and truly meant here by the word Zerubbabel. And you observe that this Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel. Shealtiel, according to the learned, signifies asking of God; that is to say, Shealtiel was a praying man. And so, the ancestors of Christ were praying men. Shealtiel was the ancestor of Zerubbabel, and stands the representative of the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ, his spiritual ancestors, they were all praying men; they all asked God from time to time for the revelation of his mercy, and for the fulfilment of his gracious promises pertaining to the appearing of Jesus Christ in the world, and the glory that should follow. I at once, therefore, come to notice the four things presented in our text. The first is *the service of our great Zerubbabel*; he is here called a servant, "O Zerubbabel, my servant." Second, *the acceptableness of our great Zerubbabel*, "I will take you." Third, *the honor put upon our great Zerubbabel*, "I will make you as a signet." Fourth, and lastly, *the reason hereof*, "I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts."

I notice then, first, *the service of our great Zerubbabel*, uniting, as we go along, our services as connected with the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are five things in relation to the service of Zerubbabel that make him a very beautiful representation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first is that of the smallness of the beginning. He began the building in a very small way, and there were many, as you are aware, that mourned over the littleness of the appearance of things, while others rejoiced. So, the Lord Jesus Christ, he began in a very small way. Look at him, for instance, in Bethlehem. Who would have thought, upon seeing that infant there, no man that did not know the Lord could have thought, what there was in that infant? What a small beginning that seemed to be!

and it didn't appear that it would take much to destroy the life of this infant. And yet all the demands of law and justice depended upon that infant; the entire deliverance from eternal wrath to come of millions depended upon this infant; and the eternal blessedness and glory of the same people depended entirely upon this babe of Bethlehem; and the sweet, the satisfactory, the uncloying sweet fellowship of God and man to all eternity depended upon this infant. "Who has despised the day of small things?" We may almost imagine that persons standing by, and hearing what Simeon said, persons who did not understand the spiritual meaning, must have thought the man mad indeed; must have thought him one of the most extravagant of men, to hold that infant as the eternal salvation of his soul, and to venture, in the name of that infant, into the regions of death, and even into eternity. "Let now your servant depart in peace, my eyes have seen your salvation." But then you see, friends, while it was a small beginning, it was a right beginning, it was of the right kind, it was right, it would never have to be undone again. And how did it begin? It began with holiness; that is the principle with which it began. "That holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God." The day of small things. And of course many despised it; Herod would in a moment balance in his own mind the powers which he had at command with the supposed helplessness of this babe, and therefore employed all the powers that he had at command to reach the life of this babe; but, bless the Lord, he could not do it. Now I say, while it was a small beginning, it began with a right principle; it began with holiness. There was no sin in the root; he was free from sin, and, therefore, every way pleasing to a holy God. Now let us apply this principle to ourselves. Here is a sinner just beginning to discover his state as a sinner; he has as yet no understanding of mediation, he has as yet no understanding of the way in which he is ultimately to be saved; he begins to be concerned. Now we wonder if that person who thus begins to be concerned, with whom it is the day of small things, we wonder if his beginning is from the right principle, if it be from the same principle as that with which Christ began, that of holiness; then that man will do well. What do I mean by that? I mean this, the apostle Peter says, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed;" that would be the wrong principle. If you reform your life, so far so good, and adopt a humanly devised religion, and adopt as your principle something devised by man, then you are born again professedly, but it is of corruptible seed; your religion is the religion of the flesh, and it is a corruptible seed; it is like yourself, and both you and your religion will be sent to hell together, if you die as you are. When the soul is thus born of the incorruptible seed of the word of truth that lives and abides forever, that soul will feel about, and will wander about, sigh about, and seek about, and will never rest until it finds that that corresponds with that by which it is born. It is born of an incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever, and that man will be uneasy, and uneasy, and uneasy, and discontented till he finds out the perfection that is in Christ. Ah, he says, that will do so far, but I want something more than that. Then he goes on and finds out the certainty of the truth of the gospel; then he wants something more than that; he then goes on and finds out an everlasting covenant. It matters not how weak your prayers and how dark your mind at present, if it be the day of right things. "Who has despised the day of small things?" It must be a day of right things, and if so, then your experience will demonstrate to you more and more the wickedness of your heart, the depravity of your nature, the wretched condition you are in as a sinner; you will go on by degrees to learn more and more what a poor, loathsome creature you are, and that nothing but the perfection that is in Christ can exempt you from damnation; and by-and-bye you will see that nothing but that great truth of an immutable covenant can do for you. When you are brought thus far, and these truths appear, I cannot describe to you, because it would be wrong to attempt it, I cannot describe to you with what delight you will receive the testimony of Christ's perfection; with what delight you will receive the certainty of the promise, the testimony

of his immutability. Now, then, Zerubbabel began thus in a small way, and Jesus Christ appeared thus to begin as the day of small things; but then it was a day of right things. And so, with us, matters not how small if it be a day of right things. The Lord help us to look to this matter. There are so many false professions; there are so many called, and so few chosen, that the more we are led to search ourselves upon this matter the better. That is one thing, then, brought before us by Zerubbabel being made as a type of Christ, the day of small things. So, bless the Lord, some of us can look back at the time when it was a day of small things with us; but we could not rest until we found that that people give all sorts of evil names to, which they do from two principles: first, from ignorance; and secondly, from enmity; and therefore we should be the more silly of the two if we attached any importance to what they say against those truths which we know to be of God; which truths we know to be holy, just, and good; which truths we know bring to us the thoughts of our God, and bring us from time to time near to God.

The second feature in the service of Zerubbabel was the hindrance. The progress of the temple was hindered twenty-one years. Now that is a long time to be hindered. But we bless the Lord that these hindrances are by divine sufferance, and we may say, in one sense, by divine appointment; that the Lord decrees to permit it. He sees what the enemy wants to do, and he says, Well, it is my will to permit you to go so far, and no farther. And so, they hindered the work for twenty-one years. Now I am not going to tell you that Jesus Christ really tried to go on with the work, and could not; but I am going to point out to you that upon this matter which I think is well worthy of notice, and very encouraging to us to trust in the Lord when there seems to be nothing moving; when we seem to be, as it were, neither dead nor alive, for the wise virgins slumbered and slept as well as the foolish. Hence, now, the Savior appears when he was twelve years old, and we hear no more of him for eighteen years. Now eighteen years is a long time. He appears at twelve years old, answering the questions put to him by the learned men of that day; he went down to Nazareth, subject to his parents, and we hear no more of him until he is thirty years old; from twelve to thirty. Here, then, is eighteen years; there seems nothing moving. Whatever is become of the Babe of Bethlehem? Whatever is become of that wondrous Child that so spoke in the temple as even man never spoke? for there was not a man among all the men there that could speak as he spoke. Whatever is become of him? Year after year rolled over; and what the ideas and feelings of the people of God were, that I cannot say. But here is a mysterious part of his life. May I suggest, though it is rather an assumption than not, whether, as man was to obtain his bread by the sweat of his brow, whether the Savior was during this part of his life enduring that part of the curse, and working at his human avocation? I think, perhaps, though it is rather assuming the thing, that the Savior did take this part of the curse. Here, then, is a mysterious part of his life; here is nothing apparently moving. Where is the Surety of the everlasting covenant? Where is the Savior of sinners? Nothing moving. See what an analogy there is here between the Savior and ourselves. You go on sometimes week after week, get nothing, blaming the poor minister; he does not preach as he used to do, always the same thing over again. You do not blame yourself, and he cannot blame you. And I only say this, that while there is apparently nothing moving, it is a great thing to be kept during these times of do-nothing, if I may so speak, during these times when everything seems so neutralized, it is a great thing to tarry by the stuff. And unbelief will sometimes whisper and say, I think I will go and hear something a *little* different; yes, a *little* different; and presently some feasible error just gets hold upon you're feeling a little. Well, say you, I do not know, our minister has spoken a good deal against it, but I think it appears very feasible. And presently it gets hold of you a little farther and a little farther, till by-and-bye the devil gets you into his

trammels, and you begin to stagger, after all whether there is not something for the creature to do. How true the words of the apostle are, that “their word will eat as does a canker”! The apostle might well, in another place, say, “It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.” Here, then, were eighteen years in which it seemed as though nothing was doing. But we all know something was doing; we know that all that time he was living a life of perfect devotion to God; we know that all that time he was living a life of perfect devotion to his people; we know not an idle moment could belong to any one stage of his wondrous pilgrimage while in this world. And so, at those times with us, when there seems nothing moving there is a great deal moving; we learn a very great deal. We learn, I hardly know how to begin, for I might dwell upon this point for half an hour. First, we learn our own helplessness; and secondly, we learn, and a very good thing that is to learn, the insipidity of the world. Oh, when the soul is in this state, the harp hung upon the willow, and you in captivity in Babylon, thinking of Jerusalem afar off, to what pleasure in the world will you turn? Where will you go? It is all insipid; it is all contemptible, in that day shall a man cast even his silver and his gold unto the moles and unto the bats, and say, Get you hence; I have made you my hope, and now that my soul is in trouble and in darkness you are of no avail. We learn, then, the emptiness and insipidity of everything apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, then, here is the day of small things, and here is the day of apparent nothing, and yet, in these times of apparent nothing, much is going on; we learn much that humbles us, and much that makes us prize the mercy of the Lord. When we are suffered to be under the hidings of his face, “If you see my beloved, tell him I am sick of love;” I feel ill for want of his presence; there is nothing can satisfy me, and he knows it, but his presence. Happy the man that can use this language; that can come before God on his bended knees, and say, O God, you know that I have none in heaven but you, and there is none upon the earth I desire beside you; and, O God, you searcher of all hearts, you know that my highest ambition, my most sincere desire and prayer, is to have a double portion of your Spirit, that I may have life and liveliness, holiness, righteousness, liberty, and peace, and live to you, and walk with you, and talk with you, for:

“’Tis heaven to rest in your embrace,
And nowhere else but there.”

If these downward experiences have this effect, then indeed they are blessed. Then, after the Savior had labored in private life, he comes forth into public, was baptized, and now comes the commencement of his work. First, here is the day of small things; second, here is apparent hindrance. So, with you; first, the day of small things, then very much hindrance. It is our mercy our God cannot be hindered. Presently the Savior begins his work; baptized, God the Father appears, “This is my beloved Son the Holy Spirit appears, and settles upon him in bodily shape, like a dove, no doubt to denote the peaceful work of the Spirit, and the peace the Savior should accomplish. And when Zerubbabel began to rebuild the temple, on they went. So the Lord Jesus Christ turned the water into wine, healed the leper, opened the eyes of the blind, raised the dead, fed the multitude, silenced the boisterous winds and waves, and answered every question that was put to him with wisdom profound. He could not be drawn aside, could not be driven aside, could not be moved; and never once, amidst all the trouble his disciples gave him, and amid all the craft and all the subtilty of men and of fallen angels, the Savior never once lost his presence of mind, went on successfully. It is delightful to read his wondrous life and see how everything he touched gave way before him. Who would not boast of such a Jesus Christ as this? And just so with you, Christian; after you have endured your captivity, you will rise by-and-bye with power, and you

will leave the paltry, contemptible gospels of the day millions of leagues behind. We live in a day when there is hardly anything but creature-doing preached, go where you may. If you take up a sermon, it is all about what the creature ought to do. Why, it is too late to talk about creature-doings in this matter, now God has pronounced every man unrighteous, a thing of nothing, altogether filthy, altogether unprofitable and abominable. And I ask this question, the living God said concerning the Christian church, concerning those that should be brought to know him, he said, "They shall" for so the Holy Spirit has led the Psalmist to record, "they shall abundantly utter the memory of your great goodness, and shall talk of your mighty acts; they shall speak of the majesty of your kingdom, and shall sing of your righteousness." Where is the people that do so? We have a few humble men scattered about the country that do so; and we have a few in that village, a few in that town, very few, that will go to hear something concerning the great goodness of the Lord, and the mighty acts of the Lord, and the majesty of his kingdom, and sing of his righteousness. But, believer, you that know something of the day of small things, and something of going up into the mount of prayer time after time, and saying, "There is nothing, there is nothing;" by-and-bye a very little cloud shall arise, like a man's hand, your captivity shall be turned, then, I say, you will leave those empty gospels thousands of leagues behind, and they will appear so mean in comparison of your possession. Here is the Savior setting out when he is thirty years old towards the end. What does he take with him? "This is my beloved Son." That is my Father, and so I will take my Father with me. I am not alone my Father is with me. And the Holy Spirit came upon him in bodily shape like a dove; he took the Holy Spirit with him, therefore took the truth with him. Just so, Christian, when the Lord manifests himself, what do you take with you? You take God himself with you; "The Lord of hosts is with us the God of Jacob is our refuge." You take the Holy Spirit with you; you take the gospel with you. No occasion to take the law with you, nor the old covenant, nor your sins, nor your troubles, nor your enemies, except to pray for them; you may take your friends, but not your enemies, except to pray for them. Not to take my sins? No; you have no business with them; God the Father has taken them away, how dare you take them back again? Jesus Christ has put them away, how dare you take them back again? And the Holy Ghost testifies they are gone, and you and your legal old man laboring and trying to bring your sins in and see if you cannot make them damn you somehow or another. You fool; God give you wisdom to understand his lovingkindness and his mercy, and then you will run in the way of his commandments. You do not know how sweet it is to be brought into the secret I am now describing; to see the Lord recognizing you as all fair, without a blemish, or a fault, or anything wrong. Ah! you can run into his presence then; oh, yes! The prodigal was quite welcome to come into the father's presence. You do not find that the father had a word against him, not a syllable. That is a beautiful thing, though we need great faith to believe it. Ah! I am such a wretch. So was the prodigal. But I would not have come at last if I had not been forced. Nor would the prodigal. But I am come in such a dreadful plight. So was the prodigal. But I have not the least claim whatever. Nor had the prodigal. But I am ashamed to be seen. So was the prodigal, and the father knew he did not look very well, and therefore he took care to have the best robe for him. No man could look worse than the prodigal did when he came to his father, and no man could look better than the prodigal did after the best robe was on. No man could look more like a slave than he did when they saw his brawny hand; been working among the swine; but when the ring was on, he could hardly believe his eyes. Why, dear me, who could have thought my hand would have had a ring on it? And when he got the shoes on, I will venture to say they did not pinch him anywhere; oh, no. And when the fatted calf came, I will venture to say he wanted no persuasion; depend upon it, he found he was welcome. And when they began to dance, you may depend upon it if he was

rather awkward at the first, he would soon fall into their measures, very soon. And when the music charmed the very thought of his sins away, you may depend upon it he was as merry as any of the best of them there. And if Satan could have got in, he would have said, Don't you foot it like that. You dance lightly, will you? Don't you be deceived; see what you have been. I have nothing to do with what I have been; I have to do with what my father has made me. By the grace of God, I am what I am, and that grace shall be my theme.

Then the fourth part of the service of Zerubbabel would be to finish the work. So, Jesus Christ went on until he said, "It is finished." And there we fix our hope as an anchor of the soul. The fifth thing would be the temple to be filled with the Lord's glory. The temple, of course, mystically means the church of God, and that church of God shall, as the result of what Christ has done, be filled with the glory of God. We shall by-and-bye be filled with holiness, no sin in us; and with righteousness, and with life, and with joy, and with peace, and with liberty, and with light; God himself dwelling in all the fulness of everlasting love in this mystic temple, the church of the blessed God. Thus, then, Jesus Christ knew what the day of small things meant; he knew what hindrance meant; he knew what success meant; he knew what completion meant; he knew what divine approbation meant; and we also must know something of the day of small things, something of hindrance, something of success, something of completeness, and something of the fulness of joy.

I notice, secondly, *the acceptableness of our great Zerubbabel*. "I will take you;" I will accept you. Now man has had two opportunities of doing well temporally; and as he lost them both the Lord would not trust him anymore. Adam had an opportunity of doing well. Here is paradise for you; you are lord over all now; you will do well, Adam, I should think; every opportunity. But Adam lost the opportunity, and awful was the event. Then the Lord places the Jew's, on the ground of a temporal covenant, distinct from all others, and said to them in effect, as he did to Cain, "If you do well, shall you not be accepted?" that is, providentially. Well, they did pretty fair for some time, as we see, up to the day of Solomon; but by-and-bye they lost it all. So, the Lord would not trust them anymore; the Lord gave it up altogether; and now the Lord says, "Behold, I bring forth my servant the Branch." I will bring forth my Son now and see what he will do. And if that should break down, then great indeed would be the misery of man. But Jesus Christ did not break down. He therefore, because he not only did not sin, but worked out active righteousness; he therefore, not only because he did not sin, but because he put away the sins of those that sinned; because of the substitutional, glorious work of Christ, he is therefore accepted. "I will take you, O Zerubbabel;" I will take you as the substitute, as the representative of the people. The Lord help us in this matter to be followers of God. I need not remind you of that scripture I so often, from some sort of necessity in my mind, refer to, that, "As many as received him." None of us can doubt, and it is a sweet thought, too; we often doubt of our own acceptance with God, but we cannot doubt of Christ's acceptance, we cannot doubt of his being pleasing to God; we cannot doubt of the eternity of his priesthood, and his kingdom, and all the character he bears; we cannot doubt this. Well, then, if we receive him in that spirit and order in which God received him, and remember, God did not receive a Jesus Christ that died for some that are in hell and therefore, if you receive such a Jesus Christ as that, you receive a Jesus Christ that will never take you to heaven. God did not receive a Jesus Christ that died for the elect, and cruelly offers to the others what he never meant them to have, and then damns them for not accepting what he never meant they should have. Such is the doctrine of duty-faith. God did not receive to heaven such a Jesus

Christ as that; but he received to heaven that Jesus Christ that, laid down his life for the sheep, that Jesus Christ whose sheep shall never perish, that Jesus Christ whose sheep shall never be plucked out of his hand. Is that the Jesus Christ you receive? There are many false Christs; if you receive any other but this Christ that God has received, God will not receive you, dying in that state.

But if you receive the same Jesus Christ that God has received; in other words, if I can make it more plain, if it be your happy lot to receive the Lord Jesus Christ in the spirit of the new covenant, which is the family spirit, the gospel spirit, God's spirit, a free-grace spirit, a salvation spirit; if it be your happy lot to receive Jesus Christ like this, then your acceptance is sure. Thus, then, the kind of Jesus Christ that God has received, and the kind of Jesus Christ that we must receive in order to get to heaven.

I notice, in the third place, *the honor put upon our great Zerubbabel*. "I will make you as a signet." There are three things here intended. A signet may be looked at here as a signet into which, or upon which, a name is engraved. Now Jesus Christ bears four names. Adam bore names, but he polluted those names. The Jews bore honorable names, but they polluted those names. The Christian cannot pollute his name as he stands in Jesus Christ. Now, then, as a signet he has four names inscribed upon him. First, the name of God. The engraving upon the golden plate of the mitre of the high priest was "Holiness unto Jehovah." Christ bore God's name, and he himself kept as holy as was that name. And he inscribes the same name upon his people. "I will write upon them the name of my God." He was holiness unto the Lord; that is, holy; and by his sacrificial perfection presents them holy; and by faith in that perfection they are holiness unto the Lord. Can you understand this? It is very beautiful to my mind. I could live in this and die in this. That is one thought, then, that Jesus Christ took the holy name of God, that he continued as holy as God is holy; and that by his sacrificial perfection he does by faith engrave the same name upon his people, and that they are by what he has done holiness unto the Lord. That is one thing intended, then, by the signet, his being a signet. And as he will remain holy forever, and as the people are not holy by creature holiness, but by divine holiness; the people are not righteous by creature righteousness, but by divine righteousness, they also shall remain holy forever. Second, he bears the name of the church. Hence, the high priest, on the onyx stones on his shoulders and on the breastplate, the engraving of the names of the people was to be like the engraving of a signet. The shoulders, of course, mean his power, everything was to rest upon his power; and the breastplate representing, as you know, that judgment God gives in our favor. It is called the breastplate of judgment because, as represented by this High Priest, God gives judgment in our favor. If there be guilt, then he pardons; if there be condemnation, then he justifies; if there be thralldom, then there is deliverance; if you are conquered, for God may be overcome for a time, then he gives you the victory. Whatever your necessity may be, by the way in which Christ presents you God gives judgment in your favor. Ah, say some, that is going too far. And some of our parsons (for I feel rather ill-tempered this morning, somehow or another, I mean with error; I hate false gospels with every drop of my blood), these parsons say, "Yes, what you are saying is true, but rather dangerous to preach." Then, sir, if it be dangerous to other people to know that by the sacrificial perfection of Christ, and as he presents the people on his breastplate, God gives judgment in their favor, how is it that it is not dangerous in your case? I should like to know your genealogy, where you came from? You can be trusted, can you? Yes, sir I can. Dear me, can you indeed? Then you are not made of clay, I suppose; you are not a son of Adam, I suppose; you belong to the immaculate conception family, you can be trusted, but you don't think that it ought to be preached. What a pity it was that you

had not been born before Adam was, in order that you might have advised the Lord what to say, and not let such dangerous things go out! Poor self-gratulatory, self-important moth like you; why, you will be in the grave in a few days. God open your blind eyes and give you to see what a wretch you are; and then you will shut your mouth when your eyes are opened; saw what a sinner you are, saw the way in which God gives judgment in the sinner's favor, by the breastplate of Christ, the breastplate, of judgment. Why, your soul would almost leap out of your body with joy; why, you would indeed run through troops, and leap over walls; you could indeed tread down strength; you would indeed run up the shining way to embrace the dearest Lord. Ah, you would indeed think mortal life a toy; a mere piece of trash, in comparison of the blessedness of that acceptance you have with God, judgment given in your favor, purely and exclusively on the ground of sacrificial perfection. This will offend some of you, perhaps I better offend you than deceive you, better a great deal. Now the signet, then, first, to bear the name of the Lord, and second, to bear the name of the people. He bears the name of the Lord forever, and he will bear the name of the people forever, his breastplate eternal, his perfection eternal, his triumphs universal. But I have not done yet; done! have not begun my subject hardly. The third name he bears is that of the new Jerusalem; he bears that name. Ah, if he belonged to the old Jerusalem, and it was no better than it is now, and that was the representation of what he is, he would be a very poor Savior, I think. It is the new Jerusalem he belongs to, whose foundations are eternal, in which there is no winter, the tree bears fruit all the year round; where the river flows, in summer and in winter shall it be; where. there is no night, where there is no curse, where there is no pain; where there is no sorrow, where there is no grief, where all tears are wiped away from off all faces. This is the signet, then, Christ, that bears the inscription of the name of a covenant God, embodying the counsels of that covenant; this is the signet that bears the inscription of the names of the saints of God; this is the signet that bears the name of the new Jerusalem. And he writes this name upon his people too, the name of the new Jerusalem. With all the advantages with which I am blest as a minister, there are moments when I feel, as the apostle felt, a desire to depart and have done with all below, and be with Christ, which is far better; but if it be more needful for you I should tarry in the flesh, be it so. After all, the noblest feeling is conformity to the will and good pleasure of God.