

RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, December 18th, 1864

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, Borough Road

Volume 6 Number 316

“Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:21

THESE words were addressed to persons who were evidently concerned about their eternal state and brought to that concern by the address to them recorded in the preceding part of this chapter. And the apostle Peter, discerning that concern in their minds, and discerning that they had become an earnestly inquiring people concerning eternal things, he directs them what to do; he says, “Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” Repentance here means change, come over from what you have been into what this gospel reveals come over into the faith of Jesus Christ, and thus your position will be changed. “And be converted;” the word “convert” here is a kindred word to “conform;” be conformed unto this Jesus Christ. And therefore, they did, by the grace of God, willingly pass over from their former hopes to the hope of the gospel, the original meaning of repentance being that of change; and they did thus become conformed to the Lord Jesus Christ. And just as sure as a soul is so enlightened as to see that Jesus Christ is the way, by what he has done, and the truth, and the life, and the soul repents, changes, enabled to change its hopes and position; and come over to the hope of the gospel, and be conformed to Jesus Christ, I have no other hope but Jesus Christ, then that which is declared in the next words with such persons is sure to follow, “that your sins may be blotted out.” And the man who thus believes, and sees into the suitability of Jesus Christ, his sins are not yet blotted out, not in his own soul and conscience, but they will be. His sins at present hang over him like a cloud; and he can see that Jesus Christ is, as I have said, the way, the truth, and the life, but such a one cannot yet see that he is interested in that Jesus Christ. But when the Lord fulfils the word, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed you;” then it is that peace flows into the soul, then it is there are the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. And the apostle Peter says, “And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you.” Now, we are not here to understand that the apostle Peter meant that God would send Jesus Christ to them personally: the sending of Jesus Christ there must be understood the same as revealing Jesus Christ; and so the meaning is that God by his Spirit shall reveal Jesus Christ unto you, and you will find in him all the life, and all the holiness, and all the righteousness,

and all the grace, and all that shall supply your need; he shall reveal him unto you. "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Now this subject of restitution of all things will be our subject this morning. I shall not follow out precisely, as I generally do, the clauses of the text, but notice simply this morning this subject of restitution of all things; after I have just observed that this is one of those scriptures that have been made use of to uphold all sorts of systems. Hence some tell us that this earth is to be restored to its pristine state, and that old Jerusalem, in bondage with her children, is to become a new Jerusalem, and is to be the metropolis of the world, and I don't know what all; and that that will be a part of the restitution of all things; and that also lost men are, after some ages of suffering, to be restored; also fallen angels are to be restored, and a great many things of this kind. Those are the doctrines which are founded upon the scripture I have read in your hearing this morning. But, however, as these doctrines have never yet, not any one of them, been proved to me, I therefore cannot believe them unless I were convinced of the truth of them, and so I had better not meddle with what I do not understand, and especially with what I do not believe, nor employ our precious moments we are together in matters of mere speculation. I hope and trust we are in too much earnest with our souls, with our welfare, and for the welfare of others, so to throw our time away as to employ ourselves in vain speculation. Let us therefore, keep, this morning to those all-important things about which we cannot be mistaken. You are aware that the words "all things" here, and in many other scriptures, simply mean all the things of the gospel, everything pertaining, to the gospel. "Blessed with all spiritual blessings;" "Behold, I make all things new" "He that overcomes shall inherit all things;" that is all these new things. So, then, I would give you to understand that I mean this morning to keep strictly to the gospel, and that it is in the gospel sense of the word I shall try to work out what is here presented, namely, the heavens receiving Jesus Christ until the restitution, the restoring, or the making good of all things? I would just observe that the meaning of the restitution is indicated in the latter part, of our text, "which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Therefore, the restitution being a kindred word to that of restoration, and to that of reparation, the making good of all the promises, and establishing everything, is evidently the meaning here. Nor can I enter upon the subject without just reminding you that the Lord's prophets are called holy prophets; not because they assumed a holiness of their own, not because they entered into what are called holy orders, not because they by human education acquired a certain position in the eyes of men, and so called themselves holy; no this is not the ground. They were called holy prophets first, because they were sanctified by the Holy Ghost; they were born of the Spirit of God, and had in their souls an incorruptible seed, even the word of God, that lives and abides forever. Also, these same men were consecrated to God by the atonement of Jesus Christ, by that atonement that was not yet actually made. Also these men had peace with God by that righteousness that was not yet wrought out. Also, these men were, by the Holy Spirit's revealing the new covenant to them, they were by that truth severed from all systems of error, and thus they were consecrated to God. And they went forth therefore, in the holiness of the Holy Spirit, in the holiness of Christ and of his truth, and thus stood consecrated to God; and thus, they were holy, the Lord himself having made them so. Their message was holiness, their object was holy, their end was holy, their work was holy; and therefore for every reason they may well be called holy prophets, and especially as they were a part of the people, it is a name belonging to all the people of God; a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, to show forth the praises of Him that has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Now upon this matter, then, of restitution there are three things we may notice. First, *the ground upon which the Savior ascended to heaven*; in other words, the restitution Christ made while he was on earth; that is, the first thing that we are to attend to. Second, *what is meant by the heavens must receive him until the times of restitution of all things.*” Thirdly and lastly, *what this ultimate restitution of all things is.*

I notice then, first, *the restitution that the Savior made in the days of his humiliation*, And I enter upon the subject with great pleasure and great delight, because it is that upon which my soul daily dwells; it is, my daily bread, my daily thought, my daily care, my daily delight, will be my glory presently when I shall put off this my earthly tabernacle, and be clothed with that house which, is from above. First, then, the restitution that the Savior made in the days of his humiliation. There is a fivefold, restitution that I notice. I do not, mean that I am going to compass, in what I shall say all the restitution he made in the days of his humiliation, but I take up a fivefold view of it. He himself carries our attention to it in the 69th Psalm, which psalm, as you are aware, enlarged very much upon the sufferings of that dear Savior who bare our sins in his own body on the tree. And his beautiful words are these, which I am sure as Christians we can set our seals to with all our souls and with all our hearts, “I restored that which I took not away.” This will guide us, then into one item of the restitution which he has made. And remember that the restitution which he has made was not for himself, but that it was for us. “I restored that which I took not away.” First, then, it is a self-evident truth that the Lord Jesus Christ did not take away the honors of God’s law. God’s right, as the moral governor of rational beings, was to be loved with all their hearts, with all their strength, with all their minds; that’s the very essence of the moral law. And when men shall multiply, then this same love to God according to the laws demand branches out into love to man; “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang,” as the dear Savior says, “all the law and the prophets.” Now this was man’s original position, so that, there must have been a perfection of natural love between Adam and Eve; and had not the fall taken places there must have been perfection of natural love between their descendants and that perfection of natural love would have continued. But sin, and Satan took away this love to God; sin and Satan took away this love to man; so that wicked Cain slew his brother and thus soon, showed that love was gone, that the rights of God were gone, that the honors of the law were gone, that obedience to God was gone; that everything that made man happy, that everything that made man’s existence a blessing was gone; and dreadful and deadly hate had taken the placed of that love, in which the blessed God delighted. Now, then; let us see, the dear Savior. He was made of a woman, made under the law, according to a prediction; for so was the prediction, that it was the seed of the woman that was to bruise the serpent’s head, to redeem them that were under the law. It is, therefore, a self-evident truth that he lived a life of perfect love to God, and perfect love to man; he died a death of perfect love to God and of perfect love to man. “Greater love has no man than this, that he lays down his life for his friends.” Ah, then, the honors of the law are restored; Jehovah’s legislative character shines in its eternal majesty; the majesty of the law is maintained; Satan can never triumph and say, “The law lost its power, the law has been trampled down, the law has failed and the law is no more worthy to be called law; for it is abrogated and annulled and set aside. The Christian knows it is not so, but that the law of God is eternally established by the Lord Jesus Christ and justice asks no more, the law asks no more, and the Christian, when he realizes the blessedness that he has in what Christ has done, the Christian asks no more; for there the Christian is satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord. “I restored that which I took not away,” And ah, how gladly our souls, by precious faith, lay hold of what he has done, and

just in proportion as we are brought to lay hold of and to realize what he has done, just in proportion is the righteousness of the same law fulfilled, not by us, but in us; for if love be the fulfilling of the law, I am sure that a spiritual acquaintance with the truth here I am now stating, that Jesus Christ restored that which he took not away, will endear God the Father in sending such a ransom, will endear the Savior in having wrought such an eternal work, will endear the Holy Spirit in having revealed it to us, and it will endear the saints of God, for you cannot meet with a man or with a woman who knows his or her condition as a sinner, and has fled for refuge to this sure hiding-place, to this sure rock, to this sure blood of the covenant, without feeling a little unity of spirit to them; and the more earnest they are, and the more clearly they are led into the truth, the more there is this unity of spirit. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together!" Here is a unity in this unity, an imperishable unity, a divine unity, an everlasting unity, in which this God is our God for ever and ever and will be our guide even unto death. That is one part, then, of the restitution that the Savior made in the days of his humiliation. Secondly, he did not take away the image of God, but he has restored the image of God. Man was created in righteousness and in true holiness; indeed, in these three things we may sum it up, in righteousness, in knowledge, and in true holiness. But man, by nature is unrighteous, unholy, and alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him. But Jesus Christ restores this image, and he brings us into his own righteousness, and his own holiness, and he becomes our sanctification, and gives us a true knowledge of God. It is by him we learn the very thoughts of God; we learn by him the purposes of God, we learn the counsels of God, and can tell today, through and by Jesus Christ, what God will do with us in a dying hour; we can tell today what God will do with us at the end of mundane time; we can tell today what God will do with us forever and forever. The Holy Scriptures reveal this, and they reveal it by Jesus Christ. Here again, then, Jesus has made restitution; he has restored to man a better image of God than that which we lost. Thirdly, Jesus Christ did not take away man from God; that is another self-evident truth. It was sin that took us away from God; and sin has such elements in it that it is said of us, that from our very birth we go astray, telling lies. Oh, unhappy, unhappy creatures we are apart from the grace of God! everything is our delight but Jesus Christ, everything is our delight but the truths of the gospel; everything is our delight but those things in which the blessed God delights. Well, then, may it be said of those for whom the Savior died, that they have gone astray like lost sheep, they have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Thus "he died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." He did not take us away from God; it was sin that took us away from God; Christ brings us back to God. "The redeemed shall return and come with singing unto Zion; everlasting joy shall be unto them." In this part of my subject I shall fail, and ought almost to apologize for the failure; for when I look at the greatness of that scripture I have just quoted, I will just quote it again, merely to remind you of the greatness of it, and of the impossibility of a poor creature like me saying anything upon a scripture so great, that can be perhaps profitable to you; namely, that "he died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to" whom? Why, if any magnificent world had been named, or anything else, all must have fallen short of what is there said. "To bring us to God" to bring us to God to God our exceeding joy; to bring us to God, in whom are all our springs; to bring us to God, to dwell in God. This self-existent, eternal, infinite God, in all the infinity of His perfection, to be our portion; and that he so brings us to God that there is no more separation from the love of God, that is in Christ Jesus. Ah, then, he took us not away, but he brings us in; finds out the poor wandering creatures,

"Saw me wandering from the fold of God;

He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed his precious blood.”

This, then, I will call the third part of the restitution that he made; first, in making good the honors of the law; second, in making good the image of God; third, in bringing immortal souls unto the blessed God. And one of old said, and I hope every one of you, and yet I cannot suppose that every one of you can say so now, but I could pray it may be so; if it is not so now, God grant it may be before you die, that you may be favored to say with the Psalmist, “It is good for me to draw near to God.” Ah, no one knows the blessedness of nearness to God but the man that realizes it. When you are in experimental nearness to God, you have no bondage then, you have no troubles then, care not for all your enemies then; you can laugh at your sins then, you can laugh at everything then. “He that sits in the heavens shall laugh.” And it is said of old of the daughter of Zion, and she was near to God, and though she was weak in herself, she saw that God was her strength, when the Assyrian power threatened her, great as that power was, she shook her head at that power, and laughed it to scorn. And so, it is good to draw near to God; yes, so good that one said, “In your presence is fulness of joy, and at your right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Fourth, Jesus Christ did not take away the service of God, but he restored that service. Adam and Eve were to serve God; they were put into the garden not to do nothing. Some suppose that there was no work to do before the fall; yes, there was, pleasurable work; and part of Adam and Eve’s pleasure was to be dressing the garden and looking to it. But then there would be no thorns, there would be no sorrow, no sign of death, for he put the man into the garden to keep it and to dress it, and so he was to enjoy the Lord’s presence, and just walk about; for it was a sort of pleasure-garden, and he might employ himself just as he liked, sit down when he liked, and lie down when he liked, and eat as much fruit as he liked, and do as he liked, and it was a very easy and a very happy service. As Dr. Johnson very well says of them, that “fruition left them; nothing to ask, and innocence left them nothing to fear.” But alas! alas! Satan envied them, and brought sin in, and then they ceased to serve God. This happy and tranquil service of God was taken away, and so man became a servant to sin, a servant to Satan, a servant to hell, and led captive by the devil at his will. Now, then, Jesus Christ restores the service of God; he brings us into the service of God, and says, “Come unto me, all you that labor,” and try to make yourselves holy, and cannot do it; that try to make yourselves righteous, and you are not able to do it; and trying to please God, and you are not able to do it. Leave off your work, renounce self altogether, and “come unto me, and take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and you shall find rest unto your souls: for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” And so the service which Jesus Christ has restored, when I say restored, I mean of course he has made good the service of God; he has substituted a higher paradisiacal service; he has substituted a better, infinitely better service than that we lost by the fall: for Adam and Eve could never serve God as we do; they never saw so much of God in creation as we do in salvation; they never learned so much of his mercy and grace, nor had such strong reasons to serve God, as we have; we have the strongest reasons to serve God. Why, he has served us; God has served us, giving us his Son; Jesus Christ served us; the Holy Spirit serves us; and the Lord, by his providence and by his grace, serves us, comes forth and visits us. We have the strongest reasons to serve the Lord our God, and to come before his presence with singing. Now, you, Jesus did not take away the service of God, but he restored the service of God. And I have been in the service of God now pretty well forty years, thirty-nine years, at least, and I am sure if I had to live a thousand years, and the Lord asked me which I should choose, all the riches, and honors, and luxuries of this life, without his service, or have his service with the lot of Lazarus, painful as it might be to be full of

sores, and to be tossed about and looked at as a beggar, God is my witness I would rather have that path in his service than the path of the rich man without his service; because in his service there is that that can sustain, can heal, and can enable us to bear what nothing else can. Thus, then, Jesus Christ has restored the service of God, and this service will go on to eternity. Shall we ever cease to love him, ever cease to praise him for what he has done, ever cease to enjoy him? No; we have entered upon a service that will last forever; we shall leave all the painful parts behind us when we leave this world; when we arrive home in glory, then everything will go on smoothly and beautifully, and that forever. Fifthly, for these things enlarge upon me, and will do, I suppose, Jesus Christ did not take away the presence of God from man. Man, in the garden of Eden, had the presence of God as his joy and his delight. But ah! when sin came in and took away that presence, man then flies and hides himself from that very presence that had been his delight. So, the presence of God is not habitable to a sinner; you must, in order to enjoy his presence, be a saint. You can enjoy his presence only by the blood of Jesus Christ, that puts sin away. You can enjoy his presence only by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that makes you acceptable to him. You can enjoy his presence only by a new heart, by precious faith in the dear and blest Redeemer. Jesus took not away the presence of God, but he has restored the presence of God; he has brought God to man as well as man to God, and now the Lord's testimony is, "I will no more hide my face from them." So, then, the songs of the saints have been, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge." "I will never leave you nor forsake you." "I will lead the blind." And all of us are blind as to what we yet have circumstantially to go through, or what peculiar experiences we may yet have. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." David could look forward in this view to his dying hour very comfortably. "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me." Ah, if we have the presence of God by Jesus Christ, why, I say it with reverence, but I must say it, I wish to say everything that is just, and at the same time cheerful, and I must say it, that the blessed God would no more now withdraw from you than he would withdraw from his dear Son, for he grants you his presence by his dear Son. It is by Jesus Christ he comes to you, and he sees no fault in Jesus Christ; and if he see you in Jesus Christ, if he sees no fault in Jesus Christ, then he does not behold iniquity in you, nor see perverseness in you, nor can there be any enchantment or divination against you; who can lay anything to the charge of the man that is in Christ? Here, then, see what Jesus has done; met the honors of the law; has restored the image of God, has restored man to God, has restored the service of God, has restored the presence of God; he has thus far made restitution of all things. Although, lest I should be misunderstood in this matter, I may just use another phrase for the sake of clearness, that when I say Jesus Christ has restored all these things, my meaning is that he has substituted a new order of things in the place, first, of that which was lost, and secondly, in the place of what we are by nature; and therefore it may well be said that "if any man" here comes the "all things" again, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, all things become new," that is, all the things that make up your hope and eternal welfare. But I come to the second thing suggested, "Whom the heaven must receive." First, I think it means the place into which he should go. There is a certain place must receive him; what place is that? The answer, is, "This day shall you be in paradise with me." Now the word "paradise" signifies, according to the learned, a pleasure-garden; some render it a garden of delights; some tell us it is a Persian word; some derive the word from one language, some from another; but all the learned agree in substance as to the proper meaning of the word paradise, that it means a pleasure-garden, or a garden of delights. Now either definition will do;

and so, Jesus Christ, after living in a wilderness of sorrows, thorns, and brambles, was received into a garden of delights, was received into a pleasure-garden. And if you take that scripture to heaven from the 53rd of Isaiah, see how it will apply to the Savior himself entering into this heavenly pleasure-garden, where it is said that “the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” And if the pleasure of the Lord concerning him in his humiliation prospered in his hand, and it is written that there, at God’s right hand, are pleasures for evermore, those pleasures are in the Savior’s hand, and they shall prosper in his hand. He will so manage them, not like the first Adam, the first Adam’s pleasures turned into plagues, but Jesus Christ will so manage these pleasures of heaven that they shall prosper in his hand; they shall continue to be pleasures. So that he entered into pleasures for evermore; and the poor thief should go with him, share in those same pleasures, drink of the same river, walk in the same garden, glory in the same scene; even that place which he had prepared by his mediatorial work, and into which all his people shall enter. So, then, heaven must receive him, no more sorrow, no more trouble. It would be difficult to keep us on earth, perhaps' almost tempted to starve ourselves to death, or something or another, were it not that there is a very awkward river to cross to get there, and we cannot always see across it; there is a kind of fog rests upon it generally of mortality, and we cannot see across it. But some of our brethren and sisters that have died lately, when they came near to the river, nearer than you and I have ever been, they could see across it, and seeing across it, longed to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Ah, if it be our lot, when we come to Jordan’s banks, as it were, to see across it, to see the shining city, the shining ones, the shining scene, the living green, ah, how it ravishes the soul! The soul then remains discontented with everything within the range of mortality, and longs to burst its prison, to stretch its wings, soar away, and pass into glory, where it shall love Jehovah as it ought, and shall praise him as it could wish. Second, it will mean that angels should receive him; “the heaven must receive him.” Angels did receive him. Who were the first order of beings to welcome him in this world? Not men, not besotted, infidel, hard-hearted, sinful, demonized men. No, it was angelic hosts that welcomed the Babe of Bethlehem; “Glory to God in the highest! peace on earth,” to these besotted men, that care nothing for the wonders of Bethlehem, until God in mercy shall open their blind eyes; “Glory to God in the highest! peace on earth, good will toward men,” toward those very men one of whom, as soon as he hears of it, will set all his powers to work to try to slay the Babe of Bethlehem. Angels marked the footsteps that he trod; angels witnessed his bloody sweat; angels witnessed Calvary’s groans; angels attended the sepulcher; angels testified of his resurrection; angels accompanied him till his last moment on earth; it was an angel that said, “You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner.” Angels clapped their mighty wings when he entered into everlasting glory; their songs ran through their measureless lengths of ranks, and their voices raised to welcome this King of glory. Oh, with what infinite delight did angels there receive him! It may well be hidden from our eyes; we could not have endured in our mortal state the thunder of their voices, we could not have endured the light of their presence; the very shepherds were even afraid at the light of one angel, and we well know that one angel was so magnificent in appearance that the Roman soldiers became as dead men; therefore this acclamation, this infinite welcome, was in the higher sky. Then, thirdly, it means the saints of God. If Moses and Elias were so happy on the mount of transfiguration, they appeared in glory, and I should have wondered if it had not been said so; for how they could be with the Savior when he was transfigured, and not be in glory, I know not. I am sure when the dear Savior appears to us now in his glory we can say truthfully with the poet,

“The more your glories strike my eyes.
The humbler I shall lie;
Thus, while I sink, my joy shall rise
Unmeasurably high.”

Ah, how infinitely welcome to all the saints was Jesus when he entered into everlasting glory! They had gone to heaven upon the faith of God’s promise; their mighty debt was not yet paid; their salvation was not yet actually wrought; their great adversary the devil was not yet actually conquered; death was not yet actually swallowed up in victory. What must have been their acclamations when they saw him return on high? “You have ascended on high; you have led captivity captive; you have received gifts for men; yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” And so, bless the Lord, the dear Savior is also received on earth, the kingdom of heaven here below, by the saints; but that I will not touch, though I meant that to have been one of my points. And then, last, but certainly not least, he was received into heaven by the infinite welcome of the blessed God himself. God raised him from the dead, set him at his right hand, fulfilled the promise, granted unto him power as the Son of God, power to send down the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost; “He has shed forth this, which you now see and hear.” Oh, with what infinite welcome was he received! And he knew this, and therefore in his dying hour said, “Into your hands I commit my spirit.” And Stephen also knew that his welcome to God was by Jesus Christ, and that it was by Jesus Christ he should be presented to God. “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Thus, then the heaven must receive him.

Now I come, lastly, to the restitution of all things especially intended in our text, and upon that I must say but just a word. I think that the ultimate restitution here simply means the resurrection of the people of God. The apostle argues, “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain; we know it was not vain, and we are found false witnesses; we know they were true ones; “and your faith is also vain;” some of us know faith is not vain; “and you are yet in your sins;” some of us know we are not in our sins, though our sins many of them are in us; “and they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished;” but we know they have not perished. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable;” if Christ be not risen, then there is not the restitution or making good of all things. “But,” says the apostle, “now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” And then the apostle sums up the whole thus, that Christ must rule and reign till he has put, down all rule and all authority. There are rules or rulers, sin, circumstances, and death, that usurp authority over his people, and he must reign till he has put them all down and set his people entirely free; and the last enemy to be destroyed is death. And then, when that is done, and the restitution brought about, “then shall the Son also be subject unto the Father, that God may be all in all.”

London; Printed by J. & W. RIDER, 14, Bartholomew Close, E.C.