

# **THE GREATEST GLORY**

**A SERMON**

**Preached on Sunday Morning, June 12th, 1864**

**By Mister JAMES WELLS**

**AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, Borough Road**

**Volume 6 Number 286**

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, had shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6

WE are, by the apostle Paul, reminded that this light is above the brightness of the sun; and if we take that one thing not only in its literal, but in its full and proper meaning, it will then simply set before us this one truth, that the life and blessedness of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that that surpasses this world in value and blessedness, and that it surpasses all time things; that all things we might desire are not to be compared unto it. So that the moon, when set, as it were, in comparison with Christ, is confounded; that the sun when set, as it were, in juxtaposition with the gospel is ashamed; when the Lord thus reigns in Mount Zion, after the order of eternal life; and in Jerusalem, after the order of the glorious city which he has founded, and before his ancients gloriously. And all his people are ancients; they are all taught to trace their origin up to eternity; and though born in time spiritually, they were chosen before time, loved before time, blessed before time, known before time, provided for before time, and everything pertaining to their pilgrimage through time was settled on them before time, even the very hairs of their head numbered. All that the Lord permits, and all that he does, we are obliged to have these two doctrines; all that which he suffers to take place, and that which he actually brings about, it all accords with his own appointments; for that which he suffers he has as much decreed to permit it as he had deeded to do what he himself does. And where it our lot to enter a little more into this truth, not to make us fatalists, I do not deny that I am a predestinarian, but I am not a fatalist; I do not hold that everything takes place of necessity, but that everything takes place in subservience to the counsel and to the will of the great God; and there is a great deal of wisdom in that exhortation, “Stand still, and see the salvation of God. Be still, and know that I am God.” I am sure there is not within the sound of my voice this morning one Christian that has not looked back and

seen how many perturbations of mind, how many castings down, how many distresses, how many fears, and how many agonies, I may say, he has undergone in the past, all quite needless, all for want of a little more faith in the Lord, a little more patience to wait, and a little more confidence in his blessed name; and then, by and bye; he brings it to pass, and “he brings forth your righteousness,” that is, your righteousness of faith; not your righteousness after the flesh for there your righteousness is all filthy rags, but your righteousness of faith; and bringing forth that righteousness as the light, away goes all darkness, “your judgment as the noonday.” And it is this experience of his faithfulness, of that light that is indeed a light that surpasses everything else, it is this experience that endears the Lord, and teaches us to trust in him. It is this light that enables us to look through the long vista or I may say, the short vista of time, into the open glories of eternity; and when we are for a few moments so favored, we seem too long to be there. However, this morning the latter part of our text will occupy our time, having, as some of you recollect, noticed the former part of the verse last Lord's Day morning. We have, then, this morning to notice simply *the glory of God*. “To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Of course, “the face of Jesus Christ” here is a form of speech to denote the person of Jesus Christ. But passing by that, the question is, what is the glory of God? We must be careful in this. The glory of God spoken of in our text does not mean his glorious perfections merely, though they are included; nor does it mean his glory as a Creator; nor does it mean his glory as a Legislator or Lawgiver; nor does it mean his glory as a God of providence; but the glory meant in our text is the glory of the gospel. We must be careful in this; for there is a kind of universality in the gospel itself. It sometimes speaks of itself as if as though it was everything; and indeed, it is everything to us. Hence it is said, “All things are of God.” I saw lately a duty-faith divine trying to handle that, that all things were of God, and he made out that sin was of God also and in a very curious sort of way, and various other things. I thought, Now, all this arises from you're not seeing the kind of “all things” that are there meant. The “all things” here mean the “all things” that form the kingdom of Christ, that form the salvation of the soul, that make up our reconciliation to God, and that constitute the eternal blessedness we are to have; that's the “all things” here. As it says in another place, “Behold, I make all things new and he that overcomes shall inherit all things;” that is, all these new things. The people of God are new creatures, and brought into a new life, and into a new heaven, a new earth, and all things making up our eternal welfare are of God. Thus, then the words “all things” are used in an apparently universal way but mean simply the whole range and compass of the gospel.

Now as to our subject this morning, I must this morning work by time, that's all I can say, and I shall begin and go on till my time is gone, the Lord enabling me; but as to getting to the end of the subject, or through the whole range of the subject, I might as well attempt to empty the ocean with a teaspoon as to attempt to do such a thing as that. And I do not lament this; but I glory in the fact that the glory of God in its range and compass surpasses everything and will to eternity surpass the range of angels or of glorified men. However, we must notice some items of this glory of God. First, then it means the triumph, the victory, of the Lord Jesus Christ; that's the glory that is that in which the Lord delights, and by which he is glorified. Hence the apostle will lead us along very nicely in this part He says, “Thanks be unto God, that always causes us to triumph in Christ.” Now

this is the one part of the glory, then, the victory: that we have in Christ. Here is sin against you, the Savior comes in, and down it goes. Here is guilt making you afraid, the Savior comes in, away it goes. Here is death making you afraid, the Savior comes in, swallowed it up, gone. Here is Satan making you afraid, the Savior comes in, treads him down under your feet. Here is tribulation making you afraid, the Savior steps in and causes the consolation of his presence to overcome the tribulation, and makes you exceeding joyful in the very midst of tribulation. You have many enemies to encounter, many that would do you if they could; but Jesus steps in in the stability of his friendship and then you triumph in Christ. When you can take that stand firmly, and feel and reckon upon what you have in Christ at any rate, reckon upon what there is in Christ, if you cannot reckon upon what you have in Christ; because your mind may be tired, and you may doubt and fear as to whether you have any real faith in or love to Christ; well, then, if you cannot reckon upon what you have in Christ, first reckon upon what there is in Christ, that in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And the apostle follows up that declaration with, "You are complete in him, who is the head;" so you see this completeness is where there is no power can alter it. "You are complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power." So that, while sin robbed us of the completeness we had in the first Adam, sin and Satan robbed us and spoiled us there; but, says John, referring to our standing in Christ, "He abides" the man that is thus in Christ! "he abides, and the wicked one touches him not." That scripture many years ago puzzled me amazingly; because I knew the devil did touch me in a great variety of ways; and he has been at it almost ever since; and I think he is worse than ever, for he knows he has but a little time. But when I come to understand the difference between Satan touching us as we are in ourselves and as we are in the world, touching us as we are in Christ is quite a different thing. This, then, is one item of the glory of God. "Thanks, be unto God that causes us to triumph in Christ." I do like the gospel myself so opened up, when I read the word of God to my mind, as to shut out other things, and to enable me to feel that God is a God of all the mercy I can need, and of all the mercy that I could need if I had ten million times more sins than I have; even then he is a God of all the mercy I can need, of all the ransom I can need, of all the grace that I can need, of all that I can need for time, all that I can need for eternity; and I am sure the Lord delights in this.

The second item of God's glory is eternal life sovereignly given. The apostle bore a good testimony. "Make manifest by us," he says, "the savor of his knowledge in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish; to the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life." Now let us see if we can understand this. "We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish." How so? By one thing. They were unto God a sweet savor of Christ by one thing; and by that one thing they were a savor of death unto death unto the one, and of life unto life to the other. And how were they a sweet savor of Christ unto God? By abiding firmly by the truth; that is the way in which they were a sweet savor unto God. The gospel was committed to them. As the apostle beautifully observes, "He counted me faithful;" not that Saul of Tarsus had any more faithfulness in the flesh than the rest of us; but the Lord undertook to make him a faithful man; and so, counting me, and making me what he counted me, "he had put me in trust with the gospel." And so, they were a sweet savor unto God by abiding firmly by the truth; and how they were a savor of death unto death to the one, life unto life to the other, I will notice presently. Let us take an Old Testament scripture to explain this. Now, if you do yourselves the favor, any time, to go to the 3rd chapter of

Exodus, you will find that Moses was there sent to the children of Israel after a certain order of things. He said, What name shall I go in? And the Lord's answer was, "I am that I am;" which, of course, is a declaration both of his eternity and of his immutability. So that Moses thus was to go in the name of him who is eternal, and who is immutable. Now that is one thing that Moses must abide by; he must abide by the eternity and immutability of the blessed God. Now let us look at both these things in Christ: we are to abide by the eternity and immutability of our God as it is in Christ. See the eternity, what is the eternity of our God in Christ? Why, an eternity of love. "I have loved you with an everlasting love." What is the eternity of God in Christ? Why, an eternity of mercy. "His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting." What is the eternity of God in Christ? Why, the eternity of a covenant, an everlasting covenant, of which Jesus is the mediator. What is the eternity of our God in Christ? It is eternal salvation. "Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever." And in all these God is immutable. Now, then, we are to abide by this; but this is not all; this is only one aspect of the gospel. Another aspect is that of new covenant relationship. Not only was Moses to go in the name of Jehovah's eternity and immutability, but also in the name of new covenant relationship; and the Lord speaks of it decidedly, solemnly, and delightfully: "Thus shall you say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, had sent me unto you; this is my name forever, and this is my memorial", or that by which I will be remembered, "unto all generations." Now, then, Moses was a sweet savor of Christ unto God by simply thus abiding by the eternity and immutability of the blessed God and abiding by that new covenant relationship indicated by his being the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; hereby Moses was a sweet savor unto God. If, then, we are accepted in Christ, we are accepted there into God's eternity, we are accepted there into God's immutability; and the Christian as he stands there is as unchangeable as the great God himself; the Christian, as he stands there, is as eternal in his duration and blessedness as the blessed God himself. See the blessedness of the standing. Why, you cannot change as you are there; your life the same, your holiness the same, your righteousness the same, your Savior the same; one with Jesus; like him; and when the body is raised from the dead at the last great day it can no more again die than the Savior's body can again die; it can no more again fail than the Savior's body can fail. Here, then, is another item of the gospel, namely, this everlasting life by Jesus Christ, and that Moses was a sweet savor of Christ; for Moses knew Jesus Christ as well as Paul the apostle did. Why, say you, don't say that? Quite as well; I could easily prove it, but I mustn't stop to do that now. It is very clear then, by simply and faithfully abiding by the truth, that they were a sweet savor of Christ unto God. The Pharisee that went to the temple did not savor of Christ unto God, therefore was not a sweet savor to God. The poor publican called for mediation, mercy; and the publican's faith in God's mercy by Christ Jesus made him a sweet savor unto God. So that all the boasted good of the one without faith in Christ could not make him a sweet savor to God; and all the sins of the other, he having faith in Christ, could not make him an ill savor to God; he was a sweet savor unto God; so is every poor sinner thus brought into the true faith of the true gospel. Now comes the difficult point. "To the one we are savor of death unto death, unto the other we are a savor of life unto life." Let us see how Moses was this and see if that will not explain to us this scripture. How was Moses a savor of life unto life to the one? By saving them, and abiding by the Lord's own order of things, succeeding in bringing the Israelites out from the tyranny of Pharaoh, he brought them out of Egypt through

the Red Sea, and brought them into that association with God that all that were believers did well; they did cleave unto the Lord their God, and every one that did so was at the end of the journey alive and well. And how was he a sweet savor unto God in the others? By defeating them, by overcoming them, by conquering them. I know what the old wives fable is; I know what the duty-faith man's card house is that he flies off to; that the minister is a sweet savor in them that are lost, because he offered them salvation, and they wouldn't be saved; and so the Lord lets the minister off; he did his part, only they wouldn't do theirs; my soul increasingly abhors anything and everything that interferes with the sovereignty of the grace of the blessed God. I hate it just as I hate every false way; and the man that doesn't hate the false way, does not really love the true way. Now Moses was a sweet savor unto God in relation to the Egyptians by defeating them. Now then, "You shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." But if during that hatred exercised towards you, you begin to cry craven; you begin to cry for quarters; you begin to lower the banner; you begin to soften matters down; you begin to think, well, perhaps you have gone rather too far, will become more moderate; and so this hatred of the truth so affects your poor nerves, that you by degrees give way, over you topple into duty-faith, or something else; and thus you are not a sweet savor unto God in them that are lost, for you have not beaten them, you have not defeated them, you have not overcome them; they have overcome you, and carried you away. Whereas, if you endure this hatred to the end, stand fast, and be not moved from the hope of the gospel; neither drawn by the smiles of the crafty, nor moved by the frowns of the vicious, but stand fast through it all, then you do defeat your enemies, then you do defy them, you do overcome them, and with all their powers they have not been able to move you from the truth; you are a sweet savor of Christ unto God in them that perish, because you have beaten them, you have gained the victory; you have stood fast; the fear of man that brings a snare has ensnared you; but your feet have stood fast upon the Rock of Ages, and you come at the last and say with the Psalmist, and "though ten thousands of people set themselves against me, I will not fear," having the Lord on your side; and that's the way Moses was a sweet savor of Christ unto God in them that were destroyed because he overcame them; in them that were saved, because they were saved. Just so the apostle Paul. There were some man-made ministers. Why, they said, it will be a respectable thing to be a parson; we had better open a factory; we had better begin to chisel out some blocks, and paint them up, and work them up into order, and clothe them with all the fascinations that shall carry on our system. And so, these men went to Galatia and preached a gospel like themselves; they went there with an Arminian heart and a Calvinistic head and preached a mixed sort of gospel. But shall the apostle Paul be thus overcome? Shall he be conquered? Shall he be defeated? Shall he forsake the sovereign friendship of the living God, and begin to seek the favor of men? Shall he lower the standard in order to please men? Shall he soften matters in order to be a favorite with dying mortals, or for the sake of anything under heaven whatever? No "If an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that we have preached, let him be accursed." So, the apostle was a sweet savor of Christ unto God in them that were lost, in as much as he defeated them; he overcame them, he conquered them, was not led astray by them. I have seen a great many in our day led away by the multitude, and thereby prove that their religion was not real. And in getting your new chapel you have to have your eyes open. The devil is likely to send two or three among us to propose some softening measure or another. A very warm-hearted friend, writing under some misinformation to me yesterday, says some things that I quite sympathize with, and the one part I think that he objects

to, step he objects to, rather, I think it was proposed from a good motive, but I am so dead set against it, namely, the proposition that we should purchase a second-hand, old, musty, rusty, duty-faith chapel. Rather than I would go with you if you are fools enough to do so, I would stick to the old Surrey Tabernacle as long as there is a bit of timber in it, rather than I would go to have anybody's old left-off garments. If I am spared, God helping me, we will have a new place; thoroughly new; therefore, I am dead set against it. I believe the motive is good in proposing such a thing; but I should think all of you, I am mistaken in you, would not take up your stand in a moment against any such thing. Let us be ourselves. "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations;" and the more the people of God are alone the better, because the less they have of man the more room there is for God; and if we are a poor desert in and of ourselves, it is in the desert the Lord likes to come. So, we shall have still to be on the watch, for if we have reasons to question the reality of the friendship of some few who do attend the Surrey Tabernacle pretty regularly, well may we be very suspicious of others that are very forward with their propositions, but hardly ever attend the place. God preserve us, and guide us, and keep us, and that I may leave you, when I do leave you in a dying hour, in the full sunshine of gospel liberty. The Lord raise up one or more among you still to carry on the glorious theme. So, then, they were a sweet savor unto God, first, in abiding by the truth firmly, and honestly, and faithfully, and vitally, and really; second, that they were a sweet savor to God of Christ in them that are saved, because they are saved; and in them that are lost, because they are defeated, because the enemy is beaten. King Saul comes home, and he says, Well, I hope I am a sweet savor to God. Why, says Samuel, you a sweet savor to God? Why, you are beaten. Oh, I am not beaten, I have beaten the Amalekites. Yes, but Agag has beaten you. He has never spared an Israelite; he has slain the Israelitish women, he has slain their infants, he has slain their husbands, he has slain their brothers, he has slain their fathers; and yet this delicate, sneaking, polite, grinning, smiling fellow, why, he has overcome you. You have brought him alive, have you? Why, he is the first man you ought to have killed among them. David would not have spared Agag, had his head off in a minute, same as he did Goliath. Now, therefore, as you have thus disobeyed the Lord, Ah, but then still I have offered a great many sacrifices. Away with your sacrifices; "behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Saul lost his kingdom, and came under the judgments of the Most High, for want of that decision which David possessed, which the prophets and apostles possessed, and which faithful men of God in every age have possessed. I could say very, very much upon this. I could remind you of good old Micaiah. They went to coax him over I am told that you are a hyper, a very narrow-minded man, that nobody agrees with you; now do for once be liberal. Here are four hundred men, very nice people, I assure you, and Jehoshaphat would have you now do the same as the rest. Ah, he says, so I will as far as the Lord shall sanction, and no further. "As the Lord lives, what shall the Lord say unto me, that will I speak." And he did, and we know the result. Now, Elijah, why, who are you, going to set yourself against four hundred respectable men? Why don't you agree with them, go over, and be comfortable? You see what a solitary mortal you are. Why, here are four hundred of them. It is true they are all men-made parsons, manufactured by men, but still very nice men; you will be friendly with them, won't you? Ah, you might as well ask God Almighty, I was going to say, to cease to be God, as to ask the prophet any such thing. That circumstance is instructive to us all. You know how the prophet proceeded, and you know what power he had with God, and you know how the devil was

confounded. Elijah thus stood out for God's truth, and he was a sweet savor of Christ in the Israelites that were saved, because their hearts were brought back again, and a sweet savor of Christ in the others, because they were defeated. Elijah, though solitary, gained the victory; and so, it must be now.

There is another respect which I must notice, in which the prophets and apostles are still a savor of death unto death to the one, and a savor of life unto life to the other; and I mention this other respect lest I should so speak as to sink any one to despair. Well, now, suppose you came into this chapel this morning unconvinced of your state, never known repentance, have never known humiliation before God, or what it is to have faith in Christ, have never known what it is to cry to God or sigh to God for mercy, to seek him; then the prophets and apostles are unto you a savor of death unto death; they declare you a lost man. But suppose something I have said or something I should say this morning should convince you of your state, and you should begin to be concerned, and begin to seek the Lord, and begin to call on our Lord Jesus Christ and begin to look after his mercy, and to desire to be one of his; that very instant the prophets and apostles, from whose testimony there is no appeal, would cease to be unto you a savor of death unto death, and would become unto you testimonially a savor of life unto life. Bless the Lord for this, it does not follow that if you are an unbeliever this morning, you are to remain so; It does not follow that if you are blind now you are to remain so; it does not follow that if you are under the curse now, you are to remain there; it does not follow that because you are a far off now, you are to remain there. What is the object, one object, in preaching the gospel? To open men's eyes, turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. And when they are turned to God, what shall they receive? Forgiveness of sins. They shall receive no reproach, no wrath, no curse, no shame no unkindness there shall be no neglect, no indifference; but the Lord with his whole heart and with his whole soul, with infinite and eternal pleasure, will forgive you all iniquities, past, present, and to come; he will heal all diseases, and bring you into the sweet savor of the gospel; and then, "he that believes has everlasting life". You now do believe; you are now being brought into this state, a partaker of everlasting life. Thus then, the glory of God is the triumph of Christ, and that eternal life that is by him; and that we are a glory to him or a sweet savor to him as we abide thus firmly by the truth.

I must pass over many items I had intended to have dwelt upon. The next part of the glory of God that I notice is the vitality of godliness. Hence the apostle says, "Need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?" I see nothing against letters of commendation in their proper place; if I know a good man I can write in his favor. But the apostle gives them to understand that it was not at all needful that any letters of commendation should be sent unto them concerning the apostles, for they had reached there; and "you are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men for as much as you are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us; written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart." It really is delightful to see the consistency of the Holy Scriptures, if you take them in their proper meaning. Now just mark this; in the preceding chapter to our text, the apostle describes the work of the Holy Spirit, writing in the fleshy table of the heart. Now what does the Old Testament say about this internal writhing? The Old Testament says, "I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts;" that is, the new covenant

laws; "and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more." Now directly after the apostle has spoken of this writing in the heart, he brings in the new covenant; he says, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also had made us able ministers of the New Testament." The new testament I take there to mean, of course, the new covenant so that in their hearts was written the new covenant, a covenant ordered in all things and sure. And that minister that is not experimentally brought into the new covenant certainly is not taught of the Spirit of God; and that people that do not find their present and eternal all in that covenant, certainly are not yet perfectly acquainted with the way of the Lord. "Who also had made us able ministers of the new testament." Being convinced of it, and having realized the blessedness of it, God's immutable counsel, had afforded them such consolation that they could speak with unbounded confidence to others concerning this covenant. "Not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life." There is an important distinction there, "The letter kills." Some have thought the letter there means the law of God, which the apostle brings in; but I question whether it doesn't mean something else. Now we will suppose that the letter there does not mean the law, which he brings in, in the after parts of the chapter; we will suppose the letter means the gospel. How does the letter of the gospel kill? I will tell you. You are converted morally? Yes. And you take the name of Jesus? Yes. You are converted mentally, and you adopt a certain creed? Yes. You are converted circumstantially, not vitally; there is no real knowledge of yourself; you have undergone no real humbling; you have undergone no vital, divine change, and you profess to be a Christian. The gospel will by-and-bye bear testimony against you, and declare you are not a Christian. You will walk up to heaven's door, and knock with all the assurance possible, "Open unto us." "Depart; I know you not." You have never had the golden oil of my grace; the change was not vital. I know you not. The covering in which your soul is arrayed is not the covering of my Spirit, and therefore not the wedding garment; you have not on, by divine authority, the righteousness of my dear Son; you have been a mere letter professor, and now that letter bears testimony against you, that you are an intruder into my kingdom; you have come into my kingdom of yourself; you have been brought in by natural means, you are a natural man, and a natural professor. And so, it is that many shall thus, by a mere letter profession, letter of the word, seek to enter in, and shall not be able. This is a solemn matter. Whereas, on the other hand, if your soul is made to know its grief and its woe, and led to receive the blest redeemer with all earnestness and decision, vitally, and really, and truly, and to feel that you must abide by it, for it is your life eternal, if this be your experience, then you will be received at the last, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom. Well done, you good and faithful servant." But if you are a mere letter professor, you are but a natural man, and therefore wilt be lost at last. So, the letter kills testimonially, the law kills executively, but the gospel kills testimonially. Thus, then, here is the triumph of Christ, here is everlasting life, according to the good pleasure of God, and here is vitality, and here is the new covenant; and then there is the ministration of the Spirit, in contrast to the ministration of the law. And the gospel might well be called the ministration of the Spirit; oh, how it inspirits us in our troubles! It is called the ministration of righteousness; this is a needful thing, for we have no righteousness until it be ministered to us. And it is a ministration of superiority; it is a glory that surpasses everything else. And it is a ministration that endures forever; this gospel glory of the Lord shall endure forever. In short, the Lord delights in mercy, that's his glory; the Lord delights in sending Jesus Christ into the world, that is his glory; Jesus Christ



delighted to do the will of God, that was his glory; and Jesus Christ still delights to do the will of God; the Holy Spirit delights to carry out the will of God. May it be our delight more and more to do the will of our Father which is in heaven.