

THIRD DISCOURSE UPON EZEKIEL'S VISION

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning January 3rd, 1864

by Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 6 Number 263

“They went everyone straight forward.” Ezekiel 10:22

THERE cannot be any doubt but that there is considerable ambiguity about those parts of the word of the Lord concerning which the people of God themselves so much differ as to the meaning thereof. Still, as the Lord has thought it worth his while to record such things, I think it is much more worth our while to read, mark, learn, study, and pray over such Scriptures, that we may understand them, that we may enjoy the advantages of them, and that we may have grace to walk out the principles and purposes thereof, and that our spiritual coast may be thus enlarged, and that the Bible may become, by our increased acquaintance with it, increasingly interesting; for of all the treasures we can possess, short of heaven itself, real spirituality of mind is the greatest. Oh! what a treasure is a living, spiritual thirst for a covenant God; what a treasure is a real, living hunger after the provisions of mercy; what a treasure is love in the heart toward that blessed truth, that blessed Jesus Christ, that blessed gospel, and that blessed God, by which we are saved from so great a death, and that he does still save us, and will save us. And therefore, under these considerations, I felt that although we have had two sermons, though not upon this text, yet upon the subject of Ezekiel's vision, I did not feel disposed to take my leave of it for the present, without saying a few more things upon that that does, after all, concern us all.

We have, in the former two discourses, noticed the wheels and the spirit of the living creature. Last Lord's day morning we intended, though we had neither time nor room to do so, to notice the three doctrines, namely, first, *decision for God*; secondly, that it was *a spirit of revelation*; and, third, *a spirit of ultimate glorification*. This last part we had no time to dwell upon; I therefore purpose making a few remarks this morning upon that department, which will come in as we go along. I will therefore, in the first place, notice *the course of these living creatures*; “They went every one straight forward.” Secondly, *their ultimate settlement down in the city of God*. Third, and lastly, *the encouragement that such have to press forward*.

First, then, I notice *the course of these living creatures*: “They went everyone straight forward.” I am sure we shall not be able to understand this first mark of distinction, which distinguishes the true Christian from all other men, unless we take into consideration one particular person out of

these; for it is here said that *everyone* went straight forward. We must mark one particular person out of them all, one who was chosen out of the people, one upon whom the Lord laid help; we must notice the Forerunner, and then I think we shall get at the meaning of going straight forward. Let us, then, in order to point out the straightforward course of the Christian, just look at the Christians Forerunner, Christ Jesus the Lord. How true it is of him that he went straight forward; that is, he came into the world for a certain end, and that certain end was to be attained by certain means, and from those means the Savior never did deviate. And I need not remind you that everything is, as we are in our state by nature, out of square by nature, out of square with God, everything is crooked. In order, therefore, for us to go straight forward the way must be made straight for us, and things must be made straight for us. Let us see how the dear Savior has done this. Now he was made we read, under the law, under the law of God, and he went straight forward, in obedience to the law of God. He loved God with all his heart, and his people as himself, and from this perfection of love to God and love to the people, he could never be drawn or driven aside. You could never find him when he was not in a perfection of love to God, in a perfection of love to his disciples. Truly, truly trying was his wonderful life, yet he could neither be drawn nor driven aside; he went straight on in this perfection of love, in this walking in entire accordance with the law of God, and, at the same time, with the gospel of God. And let us remember that this wondrous life that he lived was not for himself; he needed no such obedience for himself; he was personally perfect, without any obedience to make him so. But we needed an obedience to make us perfect, and so the life of Jesus Christ is imputed unto every one that believes. Every one that is brought to see that his own original life in Adam is ruined, that his nature is depraved, that he is carnal, sold under sin, every one that is brought to see that all his righteousness's are as filthy rags, he looks about, and he says: Wherewith shall I come before the high God? And the answer is, "Be it known unto you, men and brethren", that which you like to know, "that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins;" and by him all that believe are justified, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Faith in his righteousness, therefore, makes things square between us and God; receiving that righteousness, the law asks no more, justice asks no more, holiness asks no more. Your heart, as you feel to your sorrow, is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; yet, while you have nothing in you, no good dwelling in your flesh, you have in your soul a knowledge of this your sad condition, a knowledge of the dear Savior's righteousness, and you love him in that, you receive him in that, and here it is, in this wedding garment you will be welcome to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Here, then, Jesus went straight forward; nothing could draw or drive him aside. He knew, well knew, the weighty charge, to use the words of another, that he had taken in hand; he never for one moment, lost sight of his own position. It is sometimes very difficult for the Christian to realize and recognize his own real position as a Christian; but the Savior never forgot himself, never lost sight of his position. He always knew that he was the Son of God, that he was the Holy One of God, that he was the Just One, that he was the Substitutional One, the Obedient One, the Appointed One, that he was the Lamb of God, that untold millions of never-dying souls rested their eternal escape from the wrath to come, and their possession of eternal life, upon his wondrous life and his all-atoning death. He was, therefore, as it was written of him, "The zeal of your house has eaten me up." So, when he came to the atoning department. I will not here enlarge upon the circumstances with which it is very evident that Satan had some hope of drawing or driving him aside. When they came with swords and with staves against him; when they unrighteously judged him overnight; when they hurried him off early next morning to Caiaphas, the high priest, and from there to Herod, who set him at naught with his men of war, and back again, and heaped every insult they possible could upon him, in

order to turn him aside, in order to make him repent of the path in which he was walking, in order to make him give up the great cause he had taken in hand; but no, under it all, and through it all; and heaven will eternally resound with the wondrous testimony, that amidst it all he was as a lamb led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers opened not his mouth. Not one word could Satan extort to get hold of; not one omission or commission could the enemy produce to get hold of; no. He went straight on; he knew that he was born for that solemn hour; he knew the position in which he stood; he could not be confused or confounded, or refuted, or stopped; he went straight forward, until he reached the end of the wilderness of sin, the end of the wilderness of the curse, the end of the wilderness of Satan's power, the end of the wilderness of tribulation, the end of the wilderness of solitude; and when he reached the end he said, "It is finished," bowed his head, gave up the ghost. Thus, by his life and his death, everything is made eternally straight with God, and never can be made crooked again. Adam's righteousness could be, and was, turned into unrighteousness; Adam's perfection could be, and was, turned into darkness, corruption, and sin. But can you change the Mediator's perfection; can you blemish his perfection; can you tarnish his perfection; can you in any way move or affect his perfection? There it is, and here this name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and is safe. Wrapped in a Savior's righteousness, victory by his wondrous death, the soul leaps into the liberty of the gospel, realizes the smiling presence of God, as in Ezekiel's vision; here is the rainbow round the throne, declarative of covenant peace; and the dear Savior here appears in white array, to denote his priestly character and intercession; and the Eternal Spirit here appears in all the departments, to show his almighty and eternal interest in these things; and God appears in his majestic reign governing the whole, keeping the enemy at a distance, and having a straight way for his people; they, every one, go straight forward. The apostle might well say, "Unto you that believe he is *precious*." Ah, poor sinner, it is only to feel what a poor, dilapidated, ruined, corrupt, sin-defiled, sin-ruined, sin-cursed, sin-damned mortal you are; if you feel this, and see how suited the dear Savior is to you, that he is the effectual, the glorious, the sure, the eternal remedy, you will indeed say that he is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely. But again, now then, in order to go straight forward you must first be brought into the straight way. You cannot walk in a straight way unless you are brought into the straight way. And so, it says in the 31st of Jeremiah, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them;" weeping after mercy, after God, after Christ, saying, Oh that I knew where I might find him; oh that I may be found among that happy number; oh that my soul may be found at last at his right hand! The Lord have mercy upon me! "I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble;" and that straight way is faith in Christ Jesus, where everything is made straight with God; where we, who are bowed down by sin and Satan, deformed, and rendered ugly and loathsome in Heaven's eyes, are by the dear Savior made straight, reconciled to God, and brought to love him. And all the circumstances, also, through which the people of God shall go, they also shall come straight by what the Savior has done; he will make crooked things straight. You have crooked things in your experiences; these will come straight by-and-by; you have crooked things in your circumstances, come straight by-and-by; crooked things in the family, come straight by-and-by; crooked things in the church, come straight by-and-by; crooked things in the world, come straight by-and-by; all shall come straight; for the Lord shall make crooked things straight. The greatest wrong shall come right; the highest mountain, for want of a foundation, namely, sin, sin is the foundation, Christ has destroyed sin; the highest mountainous impediment shall sink to a plain, the lowest valley be filled, the roughest places be smooth, and everything come straight at last. When you are brought thus into this straight way, then you may run and not be weary, then you may walk and not be faint;

then your feet will be like hind's feet, and you will walk upon your high places. Bless God for this holy way, this high way, this straight way, this living way, this saving way, this sure way, that leads into possession of the promised rest.

Well now to go straight forward, then, is not to deviate from God's truth on any account whatever. You cannot assign one just reason why you should deviate from his truth. Go straight on from day to day by faith in what Jesus has done, by faith in God's good pleasure in choosing you in Christ before the world was, by faith in the certainty of the promise of God.

“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
How often does he hide a smiling face.”

The Lord help you to lose sight of the things in a measure that are seen by mortal eyes, and to see God's truth, and remember, not only is there not anything too hard for the Lord, but there is not anything that he will not remove; not only that there is no impediment that he cannot overcome, but there is no impediment that he will not overcome. He will be with you. And oh, if you are thus brought to see this order of things, and brought into the same, then you will go straight forward.

But in this going forward there must be a recognition of something. The first thing that you must recognize is the essential importance of God's truth. Remember, if you part with any part of God's truth you part with God, you part with Christ, you part with his Spirit, you part with his grace.

It is not my province to judge men, to say, That man will be lost, and that man will be saved, that is not my business, any farther than principle is concerned. I say, a man that is not brought by faith into this straight way, into reconciliation to God, that man, dying without such reconciliation, must be lost. That I insist upon. I say that the man who is thus brought by faith into this reconciliation is a saved man; the man who is not is not a saved man. But then there are so many degrees of approach toward vital godliness, and some come so near, and yet do not seem to possess it, that I am obliged to leave it. Now I advise you, therefore, to be careful what you say about persons. Deal with principles and the less you deal with persons, the better, any farther than persons are characterized by principle. I am led, and you that are taught of God are not led in these matters by intellectual opinion, or by logical reasoning. You have been brought to feel, and do now daily feel, and it is clear to you as your existence, that your salvation, from first to last, is entirely of the good pleasure of God. It was the good pleasure of God that Christ died for you; it was the good pleasure of God that he made you concerned about your state; that he chastened you, humbled you, brought you out of the crooked way into the straightway; and you are governed now, as your own experience tells you, according to his good pleasure. If I were governed by any other principle, where should I be? I have this last fortnight, the greater part of the time I have been away from you, I think I have been favored to drink in more of the spirit of God, and of the gospel of God, and of the grace of God, and of the presence of God, for some part of the time, then I have for a long time. When he rolls in one meaning after another of his holy word, and surrounds you with the sparkling glories of eternity, the opening heavens around you shine, you feel transformed and translated; you feel then so raised up that the things of time are nothing in comparison of the wonderous realities of eternity. Ah! Why me Lord? I am so satisfied as I am of my own existence that he has thus dealt with me simply because in his mercy he was pleased to do so. Oh! not unto me, not unto me, but unto his name be all the glory. And, Christian, is it not so with you? When Jesus is precious to you, when you have a rich time, a refreshing time, a revealing time, when the glories of eternity open up to you, and you feel carried away, is there anything in you that you can

fall back upon, and say, The Lord so blessed me because I am so-and-so, and so-and-so? You know you could not; no, you could not, your testimony would be, It is of the Lord's mercy I am not consumed. And I am sure the Savior did not reappear to Peter and to the rest of his disciples on the ground of anything good that they had done, for they had all forsaken him and fled, and one with an oath denied him; and yet he returned to them, breathed peace into their souls, the Holy Ghost into their minds, and made them happy, and commissioned them with that great commission indicated in this vision, and they went forth to the ends of the earth with this gospel, living chariot. How willingly will every redeemed soul cast its crown at the Savior's feet! How willingly will they set the crown upon his sacred head! Thus, then, brought into the straight way, let us leave the characters that we cannot decide upon either way, and do not let us decide and say they are not children of God, because God may see the grace of God where we cannot. On the other hand, do not let us receive them as children of God unless we can receive them to the glory of God; and I can receive no man to the glory of God unless I receive him by the truth of God and by the testimony of the Spirit. I must have some testimony from that man that he knows something of soul-trouble, gospel hope, gospel endearments, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Seek, therefore, not to appear something before men, but receive each other to the glory of God; and when we can do that, the reception is holy, it has Heaven's approbation, and if it has Heaven's approbation, then,

"Careless, myself a dying man,
Of dying men's esteem;
Happy, O God, if thou approve,
Though all beside condemn."

So then, as I have not very much farther to go, and having in this respect, at any rate, made no crooks yet, I have come straight hitherto. What the covenant was to me when God first brought me into it, that it is now, save that it is more to me than ever. What Jesus Christ was to me when I first saw his perfection, that he is now, with the exception that he is more dear to me than ever. What the Holy Spirit was to me when I first enjoyed his comforting's and teachings, that he is now, save that he is more dear to me than ever. What a covenant God, or a God in covenant, was to me then, he is now, save that he is dearer to my heart, and I wish to be devoted more and more unto him. We must recognize, then, the importance of truth, and the importance of spirituality of mind. There are some people who think, if they hold fast the doctrines, that will do; and the world at the same time has their affections, and their hearts, and nearly all their anxieties; and they cannot hear the minister. Alas! alas! no. The full soul loathes the honeycomb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet. And then, for the slightest cause, they will wickedly leave a place where they have made great profession, where they have professed to realize from time to time the solemn presence of God; and yet they wickedly leave it and make it their business to go from house to house to get others to take the same wicked steps that they themselves have taken. I must leave such to the judgment of Him that judges righteously. My conscience is clear that I am sincere, and if I die today, I shall die with a good conscience that I have dealt faithfully with the souls of men; and I hope to do so to the last, even if I have only half a dozen at the last to speak to. I would rather that should be the case than I would deceive or deal unfaithfully with any man.

But I step to next part of our subject. Now these living creatures where were they going to? They were going to the city of God. Go to the 43rd chapter, and we there see them settled down in the city of God. They entered into the house of the Lord by the east gate, by the east. Now that looks rather ambiguous; let us have the proper meaning. There is no meaning worth having apart from Christ. And that might, with equal propriety, be rendered, and that would give the meaning, They entered or settled down in the city *by the sunrising*. And what is the sunrising? The resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Because I live, you shall live also." "He dies no more, death has no more dominion over him." And by his life, he having conquered death, and he, having ascended to heaven, there

presents me; and by his resurrection, including in that, of course, his ascension, and intercession, and presence in heaven, hereby we enter heaven. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." But just look at it: you are to settle down eternally by the resurrection of Jesus Christ; that is, on the ground simply of what he has done; so that your right to the city and his are one and the same. You are not your own life, he is your life; and you are to live the kind of life that he is to you, and to have the kind of welcome that he himself has there. Therefore, the end we have in view is to enter heaven by Jesus Christ. "They that were ready went in with him;" they were ready. There are two things essential to make you ready; the one is the knowledge of the truth, of what he has done, and the order of his covenant; and the other is such a love as shall enable you willingly to leave everything else. These are the two essentials. Point me to a man on a dying bed that does not know the truth, I think then of that solemn scripture, "To take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel." Point me to a man on a dying bed that does not love the truth; I think then of that solemn scripture, "That they all might be damned that received not the love of the truth." Point me to the man on his dying bed that does know the truth, then I think of that scripture, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free;" he is a free man. Point me to a man on his dying bed that knows and that loves the truth; then I think of that scripture, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor entered the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him." Thus, they settle down in the heavenly city by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And now notice, let us trace out his atonement in this matter, and see how nicely it meets us. How was he brought from the dead? By the blood of the everlasting covenant. How did he enter heaven? By his own blood. How does he stay there? By virtue of his own blood, for it is his own atoning blood that dedicates heaven to the people, and while that retains its power he will retain his place, and they, his people, be with him forever. The second feature of their settlement down in the city is that of the recognition of the word of God. It is said of them that the noise of their wings was as the voice of Almighty God when he speaks. That is a form of speech to denote that the people of God recognize God's word. Here are they that keep not the commandments of men, but the commandments of God; here are they that keep not the testimony of men, but the testimony of Jesus Christ. And therefore, the voice recognized there means that they recognize the superiority of God's word; that puts everything else to silence. "Be silent, O, all flesh;" the sin of the flesh, the unbelief of the flesh, the troubles of the flesh, Satan, everything; all put to silence by the word of the living God. So they enter by the resurrection of Christ, and by that eternal, universal calm which the word of God makes, Christ having laid their enemies prostrate at his feet. Silence: "not a dog shall move his tongue against the children of Israel." Third, it is said, the earth shined with his glory, the glory of the Lord's presence, the earth there of course the new earth. The sun is a magnificent object, but it is a glow-worm in comparison of the presence of God.

There is here and there a scripture, like a little window, very little indeed, lets in just a ray of that supernal light. The apostle says it was mid-day when the Lord met him. Not in the morning, before the sun was hardly up; nor in the evening, when the sun was not at his zenith: but it was at mid-day, as the apostle declares in his sermon before Agrippa; and yet, through the noonday brilliancy of an Oriental sun, there was a light that shone above the brightness of the sun. What must the immortality of the soul be, I will not say to bear that light, but to enjoy that light? Solomon says, "It is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun." If that be taken spiritually, it will be realized in eternal perfection.

The third department is that which the prophet lays a wonderful deal of stress upon; three times does he repeat it, that these living creatures settled down in this city, 43rd chapter of Ezekiel, are the same that he saw years before by the river Chebar. They had come through many storms and many trials, and yet they were still the same, their holiness untarnished, their righteousness unblemished.

“No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.”

Just the same. Clouds and storms, losses, crosses, slanders, reproaches, stumbles, and troubles of all sorts; broken spirits, and broken hearts, and broken bones; and yet, though they had all these and a thousand more tribulations besetting them by the way, yet, as they were in Jesus, they appeared the same at the last. And the prophet gloried in that. Now you Wesleyans, take notice of that; the prophet does not admit that one of these living creatures became anything else but a living creature. And let us hear what the prophet says in this same verse about it. Now this is the tenth chapter, the one our text is in; the whole of the last verse reads thus: “And the likeness of their faces was the same faces;” glad of that; “same faces;” no hypocrisy, no change. Abel’s face was the same, but Cain’s countenance fell; Jacob’s face was the same, but Laban’s countenance was not the same, changed. And so, there are professors that have changed their religion many times, simply because religion has really never changed them. But their faces were the same, yes. I looked at Jesus Christ a long time ago, full approbation; just the same now. I looked at God the Father, in his love, and mercy, and sworn covenant, full approbation; just the same now. I looked at the Holy Spirit’s testimonies long ago, full approbation; just the same now. Ah, say some, that is not much; why, I can come as far as that. Well, if we can get no farther than that now, we shall get to heaven by-and-by; for it is written, “Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me.” “The same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances,” I have not seen them for a long time before; well as ever, healthy as ever, strong as ever, blooming as ever, respectable as ever, rich as ever, happy as ever, comfortable as ever, joyful as ever, satisfied as ever. Do they appear in poverty? No; not a thread has given way; none of their raiment waxed old. No sickness, not one feeble person among them; they all look well. But, say some, all very well; appearances are deceitful sometimes. So they are, friends, and therefore I will read on; “their appearances and themselves” mark that, “and themselves.” Now I like that uncommonly well; their faces the same, and their appearances, and they were what they appeared to be. That is more than you can say of everyone in this world. There was a vital and living reality. Ah, says one of them, I am as happy inside as I am outside, and as easy in my conscience, heart, and mind. Their faces the same, their appearance the same, and themselves the same. And how is this? Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Their covenant God is the same, a faithful and unchanging God.

“Though I, a feeble mortal, change,
His love is still the same.”

One word more; 43rd of Ezekiel; not only do they settle down by the sunrising by the authority of God’s word, in the light of his presence, and in eternal sameness, but also in fulness. Says the prophet, and that completes the scene, “The glory of the Lord filled the house;” what David calls a fulness of joy in God’s presence; and then, lest he should be misunderstood, he says, “and pleasures for evermore.” Jesus thus sees the travail of his soul and is satisfied; his people are satisfied with the fulness of God’s house, even of his holy temple; and they shall neither hunger, thirst, nor sigh, nor cry, nor die, nor sorrow anymore; the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall lead them, and God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces.

There is one more feature of our text, and that is this, that the people of God are in this vision spoken of apart from their faults. Can anything be more encouraging than this? Is there a Christian that does not love Solomon’s Song? And why do you like Solomon’s Song? Why, say you, because it tells me so much of what I am in Christ, and does not tell me of my faults; that is why I like it. And why do you so like the 17th of John? Oh, say you, because it describes the work of the Holy

Spirit in receiving and abiding by the truth, and does not reap up old grievances, or new ones either. That is, it. And why do you so like the 7th of the Revelation? Oh, because the people appear in white robes, and palms in their hands, and have come out of great tribulation, and are without fault before the throne, and are represented by what God has done for them and what God has constituted them, not a word about their faults. And why do you so like the 14th of Revelation? Oh, say you, because the same people that are spoken of in the 7th chapter as clothed in white robes, and palms in their hands, and without fault before the throne, are standing on Mount Sion in the 14th; not one word about their faults. And why do you like the 21st of Revelation so well? Oh, say you, because the Lamb's bride appears there without any one of her faults, not a fault attributed to her; nothing said of her but that which is good; all sorts of good things are said of her; clothed in white on the king's right hand, and the most magnificent city for her to dwell in that ever was known or ever can be known. And so, what are these things for, but to inspirit us, and to keep us from a slavish terror, and to make us serve the Lord our God cheerfully? So, then, those of you that are members, do not be afraid to come to the ordinance this afternoon. Why, here God holds you in his dear Son. The Lord help you to see him there, and to meet him there, and to know that he has cast all your faults away and received you in what his dear Son has achieved.