

A PUBLIC GOSPEL

A SERMON

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“For the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.” Ezekiel 1:21

To say all that could be said upon any subject, would be sure to make the same tedious. I shall therefore give only this one sermon this morning upon this subject, from which we had, as you are aware a sermon last Lord's day morning. I will therefore, at once proceed to make a few remarks by way of concluding the subject which we then introduced; and in so doing I will take up the subject where; we left off, namely, *the form in which these wheels appeared*; secondly, *their oneness*; thirdly, *their straightforward course*; fourthly, *the presence of the Lord in them*, and fifthly, *the happy destiny of living creatures spoken of in our text*.

These wheels, you are aware, we have taken to represent the gospel. It was an ancient custom to speak of eternity as a circle. There is nothing, of course, that can really and truly represent any one of the perfections of God; and if there were, we have not capacity to comprehend those perfections; and so men have, even by the, Holy Spirit's leading, made use, from time to time, of such figures and forms of speech as would help them to form some little idea of the things that are to mortal eyes invisible. Therefore, a wheel, having no beginning and no end as it were, being a, circle, the ancients thought very suited to help them to form an idea of eternity, “from everlasting to everlasting.”

Before I enter upon the subject I would just remark that here are four wheels, and that they are put together transversely, so that there is a wheel in the middle, of wheel; each, wheel transverses the other, so that anyone with the slightest mechanical perception would at once see that four wheels put together transversely would form a globe, and that is what we have here. We have therefore the gospel here represented as the circles of eternity, and yet so united as to form a globe, for reasons which I think will come pretty clearly before us, this morning. Indeed, the globular form of this representation of the glorious gospel of God is the first thing we have to deal with; not forgetting that these wheels are full of eyes. And see how this accords with the Holy Scriptures. The scriptures are sometimes, as it were personified, and represented as seeing. Hence said the apostle, “The Scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith.” What a beautiful representation of the gospel these four wheels are in their being full of eyes, simply

because they look east, west, north, and south! The ancients did not know that our earth was a globe, but the Lord knew it was, and that he would make it known to men in due time, because even that revelation stands connected with that kind of transit from one part of the world to the other that affects the progress and spread of the gospel. The providence and the grace of God go together. There is not a Christian here this morning within the sound of my voice that cannot bear testimony to that truth. The Lord in the movements of his providence brought you to where you were to be convinced of your state, or laid you under some affliction, or subjected you to some loss, or took some step towards you by which you were brought to know your state as a sinner, and led to seek the Lord. Now, then, this representation of a globe is to show us that the gospel looks all ways; that it is not something that is to be shut up in a corner; it is not something that the Pope has in the Vatican, and deals out a little at a time as he pleases; it is not something that this party, that party, or the other party, can shut up in their vestries and their cabinets, and so deal it out just as they are pleased, so that we must belong to this party, or to that party, or to the other party, if we would have the gospel. That is very much the fashion of the day. The question in our day is very much of that character. Do you take the *Standard*? Are you a reader of the *Standard*? If not, to hell you must go. Are you a reader of the *Herald*? If you are not, you are a very uncharitable man. Are you a reader of the so-and-so? If not, why, your state is very doubtful. Well, of course all this is the spawn of Popery; all these parties, as far as they contend for parties, are led by the spirit of Popery; and before we attack Popery in our land, let us first put down Popery among ourselves; let us do away with the antipathies, the willful misrepresentations, and the everlasting aim to degrade each other, and so trying to hinder the gospel; let us do away with Popery among ourselves first; then, when we have made our own doorway clean, we may go to Home, and sweep the Pope's doorway; but all the time our own is as it is, I think we had better be quiet, if we know not better how to behave ourselves. Now the Savior foresaw all this, and he said to his disciples, One will say, Jesus Christ is here; another will say, Jesus Christ is there; another will say, Jesus Christ is there; but he says, believe it not; "for as the lightning comes out of one part of heaven, and shines unto the other, so shall the coming of the Son of man be." Here, then, is the mystic representation of the gospel; intended for all the world, it looks all ways. And I must again remind you that the new covenant (for this is the new covenant gospel) knows nothing whatever of nations. The old covenant did know something of nations; it took up the Jewish nation, and stood against other nations, but the new covenant knows nothing whatever of earthly nationalities. It looks all ways: "Go you into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Here, then, is the general liberality of the gospel. "Whosoever," that is the testimony of the gospel, that "whosoever" it does not matter where they are, "whosoever believes on him" independently of all parties, of all names, of all human help, human sanction, or anything belonging to the creature, "whosoever believes on him has everlasting life." And if I may, without again confounding the editor of a certain Standard, and driving him half mad, borrow an astrological illusion upon this matter, I may just observe, while speaking of this globe looking to all the cardinal points, that some of the ancients, following the system to which I have referred, compared the east to infancy, the south to manhood, the north to old age, and the west to death. So, the gospel takes up the infant; it takes up the man; it takes up the old man; it takes up the dying man; it looks all ways, and we bless the Lord for this. I myself am a firm believer, and hope someday to lay before you my reasons for that belief, I am a firm believer in infant salvation¹. We bless the Lord that we know some are saved, and I have my reasons, which I Will not now state, why I believe all are saved. We have some beautiful instances in the word of God of the gospel taking infants up even before they are born:

¹ See sermon number 627 for 1870 titled "Infant Salvation" [Infant Salvation](#)

take Jeremiah and John the Baptist. So, then, an infant is never too young for the Holy Spirit to regenerate. An infant cannot be too young or too small for the Lord to see it. These wheels have eyes, that is, they are in reality the eyes of the Lord, and it means that by the gospel the Lord sees all the objects of that gospel. So, then, it takes up the infant. Are any Christian people afraid of their children reading the Bible too soon, paying attention to the Bible too soon? Do you think your children are very young, and are you, on that account, afraid to read in their hearing God's word? Are you afraid to pray with them because they are young? No. The great privilege and blessing, I may say, for so it is, of the press is so awfully and so dreadfully abused that every parent does his very utmost to keep from his children those infamous books that would corrupt their infant minds, and that would destroy every vestige of noble and of good feeling. One can hardly imagine any punishment bad enough for vile and wicked wretches that can sit in their studies and manufacture poison, and take advantage of the great privilege and blessing which the press is, to debase the minds of people. But the blessed book of God looks to the child. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not (as a general rule) depart from it." They do sometimes depart from it, and everything turns out quite contrary to what your hopes and strivings have been, but not forever. As sure as you have lodged your prayers and supplications at the throne of grace, though your children should go on like demons, there are your prayers, and the time will come when those prayers shall be answered. God will turn the tide, will cast Satan out, and you will stand amazed at his goodness in answering your prayers in such a mysterious way. Never, perhaps, was there more wisdom embodied in fewer words by an uninspired man than in the words of Cowper. We have occasion to say it almost every day:

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform,"

He does things very differently from what we might imagine. Then we come to manhood. The ancients to whom I have referred compared the south to manhood. And what is there like the Bible then? Walk in the ways of your heart, O young man, and do as you please; go on and enjoy the world all you can, and think nothing of your soul; only just remember that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. And if that scripture should look to you, young man, and stop you, and make you begin to think, and begin to pray, and begin to say. Here I am, arrived at manhood, but how long will this youth last? I can't be young long. When I was a lad, I recollect So-and-so; he was a young man then; he is an old man now: I shall soon be old; what shall I do then? Here I am without Christ and without God. Now, then, the gospel looks to the young man. (I look back. I was but a young man; I was but twenty-two when the Lord was pleased to find me out and to stop me, to turn my wandering feet to tread that heavenly road in which I have been many, many times weary, but *of* which I shall never be weary; and therefore I bless God that he thus became the God of my youth. Then, again, the north they took as a figure of old age. So, if we meet with an old sinner, and I have met with many in my time, and I was very pleased, I will just name it; I was preaching in a chapel some time ago, and a woman came into the vestry, and she said, "Do you recollect preaching in such and such a place?" "Yes." "Well," she said, "my grandfather heard you. He lived eighty-one years without Christ, without God, without hope, and without religion; but you came with that declaration, 'You must be born again;' and it made the poor old gentleman's frame tremble, it made his soul tremble, and he went home from that sermon a broken-down sinner, and there he lay, and there he waited. And what seemed to be equally surprising, you came there again just that time twelve months; and while you had wounded him the first time, you came with

the oil and the wine the next time, and healed him, and he was made as happy by the second sermon as he was miserable by the first, and a few weeks after that he died, and died as happy as a man could die.”² Thus, then, the gospel looks to the north, decrepit old age. If I am speaking to a man or woman ever so old, recollect if you are out of hell there is hope. All the time the lamp holds out to burn, if grace set in, the vilest sinner shall return. And then if we come to death, see the thief on the cross as a sample of this. I know not how many I have visited in their last illness that knew nothing of Christ, or God, or the gospel; and before my visits ended the change was wonderful; the scene was changed, their souls alive, mercy rolled in, pardon sealed, peace flowed in, and they died happy. Call this the west, then. So, my hearer, there is no age of life, there is no condition, and there is no state, however bad, but the gospel can manage it. Oh, it has, in order to demonstrate this, taken up sometimes some of the worst of characters, and turned them into some of the brightest of saints. Thus, then, the gospel is a public and a universal gospel; that is, it is to be preached to all men; it is not to be in a corner, shut up with this party, that, or the other. And I must confess that my antipathies to mere party do increase, because I know that all that party-spirit does a great deal of harm, and originates, generally, in carnality and littleness of mind. If we have not magnanimity enough to allow those we believe to be our real brethren to differ from us in some of their opinions, why, we shall never go on like Christians, all the time we are determined to stumble at straws, and to nibble at every little speck that we see. In this solemn day, when Popery is so abounding, all the children of truth should stand, as it were, in an impenetrable phalanx, and lose sight of the little differences of opinion that are found, among us, while we hold fast the great essentials of the everlasting gospel. Oh, what a much better aspect we should then present, and how much less would the infidel rejoice over us, and how much less would Satan laugh at us, and how much more encouraged should we be to go on with the work of the Lord our God! I cannot forbear saying, for it is an awful truth, that I have met with worse usage, I have met with more wicked misrepresentations, and with far greater persecution from those that profess the same things that I myself do than I have met with from the world, or, from the low doctrine men; for many of the low doctrine men are blessed with manly mind; that is what very few of the *hypers* possess. Now the gospel, then, is that which looks every way, sees every case, is suited for every age and can manage every case, let it be as bad as it may. And if any of you should be so placed as to have no one to own you, never mind; the gospel will own you, if you will own that; Jesus Christ will own you, if you are not ashamed to own that; the Holy Spirit will own you, if you own him; and if God be with you, you will not be wanting any good company; you will not be wanting in peace, you will, not be wanting in happiness. For what is there after all like entering into our closets, and praying to our Father that sees in secret? and he that sees in secret shall reward us openly.

Now it is said of this living globe that it turned not as it went. It would be useless for it to turn, because it was the same on all sides. If you look at one part, “He that believes shall be saved.” If you look at another part, “It is by faith, that it might be by grace, that the promise might be sure to all the seed.” And you may look all round, which way you like, and you will find no deviation from this. One said “Well, can’t you so turn it round as to let a little bit of free-will in? No, no. A little bit of duty-faith in? No, no. Therefore, it turned not; went straight on. Hence one of old said, “What must I do to be saved?” “Believe on, the Lord Jesus Christ.” Oh, the mighty difference between the law of works and the law of faith! Is not the apostle charmed with the difference when he said, speaking of the old covenant, which was nothing else but the law of God in a covenant

² The above took place many years ago at Crockenhill, in Kent, but I do not now recollect the name of the aged man.

form, that covenant, with its penalties, as you are aware, on the ground of failure, and all its advantages were not only able to be lost, but they were lost, the apostle said, speaking of the law and he is certainly not quoting from the ten commandments there, he is quoting from the old covenant to show you that the old covenant is nothing else but the law in another form, "Moses describes the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which does those things shall live by them." But then that is only a social, moral, natural life; there is nothing supernatural in it. But then he said, "The word of faith speaks in this way; that if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus" what does he do? Takes all your sins away, and brings in a righteousness for you, and brings you into the bond of an immutable covenant, "if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." Cannot say more than that, because to be saved includes everything that you can think of. Thus, then, "he that believes shall be saved." The gospel never deviated from the law of faith, and it never will; no, not from the first promise down to the end of time. "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." What is that but the foundation of faith? What is that but the introduction of the victorious seed? What is that but the victory the Savior should achieve? What is that but putting Satan down? What is that but bringing our souls to heaven?

Now, then, I think I ought to repeat here that these living creatures that are brought into the circles of eternity, that are brought into the gospel, were originally carried away from God by the whirlwind of sin, they were under the thick cloud of their sins, as you read in the beginning of this chapter; and they were children of wrath, the fire of God's wrath surrounding them, ready to fall upon them, and whirl them into hell. But the gospel reached them, brought them out of this whirlwind, out of this cloud, out of this fire, and now they are brought into a new world, now they are brought into the everlasting truths of the everlasting gospel of the everlasting God; now they rejoice that his mercy, is from everlasting to everlasting. Thus, then the gospel goes straight forward; it never did deviate from its orbit, and never can. Astronomers tell us that most of the planets are made by the influence and action of other planets sometimes to deviate and diverge a little from their orbits. But it is not so with the gospel; it has gone straight on, it has never deviated from its orbit, it has never moved from its path, and we shall see presently to what a glorious end it carries all that are one with it.

Just a word upon *the oneness of these wheels*. In the 10th chapter, at the 13th verse, you read (and that verse is more significant than I am able to open up to you), "As for the wheels" there is the plural, and you know how to get to understand this in relation to the truths of the gospel, "as for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel!" I am one of the last to find fault with our translators, because they were faithful men, but that translation does not give the full meaning of the original; and our translators were aware of this, and they knew their business was not to give explanations, but only translations; for had they given explanations, we should have had their comments instead of a simple translation. They were responsible only for translating with as much faithfulness and exactness as they could. They have therefore given us a marginal reading. "As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel, O revolution!" Now there are two things there; first, the oneness of these wheels, and secondly the revolution which they should bring about. And what a revolution does it bring about in the soul! You that know the Lord, what a different man you are now from what you were when you were spiritually blind, when you were spiritually dead, when you were an enemy to God, when your language was "Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of your ways"! Oh, what a revolution has been wrought in you since that!

How great the change! We may well be called new creatures. And then it means, also, the oneness of the gospel. You cannot separate one gospel truth from another, you cannot sever the love of God from election, and you cannot sever election from predestination; and you cannot sever, not scripturally so, nor really so, predestination from regeneration, and you cannot sever regeneration from justification, and you cannot sever justification from glorification. And thus, these glorious truths all stand together, and you cannot separate the living creatures from these wheels. Hence the apostle rejoices that there is no separation from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. See then the revolution the gospel has brought about. And what will the resurrection from the dead be but the last glorious revolution that we shall undergo when mortality will be finally dethroned, when corruption will be stripped of its power, when the earthly image shall no more appear, and when not a symptom of weakness shall ever hinder our happy bodies or our happy souls to all eternity. Look, then, the globe around, where can you find anything like the gospel, where the blessed God is manifested in an everlasting covenant, infinitely surpassing everything else? You also observe the oneness of these creatures with the wheels. When the creatures stood still the wheels stood, and when they went forward the wheels went forward, and when they were lifted up the wheels were lifted up. When they stood still the wheels, stood still. Yes; when you, Christian, stand still, God in his love stands by you, God in his choice stands by you, God in his salvation stands by you, God in his promise stands by you. Ah, said the Christian; I can neither believe, nor pray, nor read the Bible; I am set fast and cannot go on; surely the Lord will go on and leave me behind. No, he will not. You will not be able to say as the Egyptian did whom David's servants found in the fields "My master left me because three days ago I fell sick." Well, he said, I should like a better master than that. Then go with us, and let the God of Israel be your Master. Well, I will go with you if you will swear that you will not kill me. Well, we will not kill you, if you love our God. Oh yes, I should like to serve him; and if you will not deliver me into the hands of my master. And so, he went with David. The Lord will not leave his people in their troubles. When one of his children is hurt, he is hurt; in all their affliction he is afflicted. Love is everlasting still mercy is everlasting still; salvation is everlasting still. Bless the Lord, then, he will not forsake you. And when they went, the wheels went by them. So, when I can get on a little the love of God and the truth of God go with me. And when they were lifted up, go as high as they might, the wheels went with them.

The, next point I wish you to notice is *the presence of the Lord, in these wheels*. It is a remarkable thing that we should have the doctrine of the Trinity go pressed upon our minds by this representation of the gospel. Here is the spirit of the living creature in the wheels. Is not the Holy Ghost in the gospel? And then here is God the Father enthroned above; and here is Jesus Christ in his priestly character, the man between the wheels, clothed with linen. Here are the Three Persons. I sometimes have been tempted to think that the Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul, in the 4th of Ephesians, to gather his ideas there given from this very vision where we have the presence of the eternal Three in the everlasting gospel; and of course it shows the presence of the Lord with his people. In the 4th of Ephesians the apostle said, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body," the living creature, "and one spirit," to animate that body; "even as you are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" So in this vision God the Father is represented as governing the man clothed with linen, that is Christ, governing the Holy Spirit, as it were, sending the Spirit; governing the wheels, governing the living creatures.

Well, now, this gospel is unchangeable, the covenant is unchangeable, and these living creatures, in other words, these Christians, they also as they stand in Christ, not as they are in themselves; they need to undergo changes until the last great change at the resurrection shall come, that as they stand in Christ they are unchangeable. Ezekiel traces out the unchangeable character of these living creatures in the 10th chapter: "The likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river Chebar." Are you going to take a photograph of these living creatures? I took one some years ago. Well, but here they are again. I don't need to take another photograph. Well, but don't you think they look a little older, no sign of any grey coining? No, just the same. The likeness of their faces was just the same. So, I shall not take another photograph, they are just the same; this one will do; their faces were just the same. Well, so with some of you; your faces are just the same as they were thirty years ago, in the spiritual sense. You smiled at the gospel then, and you smile at it now; you loved it then, and you love it now; it was your delight then, and it is your delight now. Then mark "their appearances and themselves." Sometimes people's appearance is one thing and their actual self another; but Ezekiel says here, "their appearance and themselves." They looked well, and so do many things that are not well; but they were well, as well as looked well.

But lastly, I notice *the happy destiny of the living creatures spoken of in our text*. Ezekiel would not have us retire from these living creatures before we have seen their end. Go to the 43rd chapter of this same book, and just see them at home. "Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looks toward the east," or toward the sunrising. What is the gate? The gospel. Does that look toward the sunrising? Yes; it waited for Christ to come; and when Christ did come, "Lift up your heads, O you gates." It is time; you have been looking four thousand years, and he did not come; he is come now; lift up your heads; the Sun of righteousness is shining in. "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east," the way of the sunrising; came by the way of Jesus Christ; mark that, that is the way his glory came; so, it does to us, by the Sun of righteousness. "And his voice was like a noise of many waters." Translate that, explain that, and it will read in this way: notice, it is a gospel voice: "And his voice was like a noise of many blessings," rolling in like mighty waves of the sea, blessing upon blessing, blessing upon blessing. "And the earth," the new earth, where the living creatures were, "shined with his glory." And when the prophet saw the brightness of God's glory, when he saw the blessings, heard their sound, when he saw what I wish I could describe, the infallible faithfulness of the blessed God in preserving these creatures to the end, the prophet fell on his face in amazement, awe, and gratitude to that faithful and unchanging God, who had thus proved faithful to the end; loved his own, loved them to the end; that is the secret of their remaining faithful unto the end. Now when he was thus prostrate, he says, "The spirit took me up," lifted me up, "and brought me into the inner court," the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; "and behold," behold the happy end of all this, "the glory of the Lord filled the house." Take the house to mean the church, full of the glory of the Lord; take the house to mean Christ, full of the glory of the Lord; take the house to mean heaven, full of the glory of the Lord; fulness of joy, pleasures for evermore. Amen.