

ROYAL NURSES

A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Morning November 11th, 1866

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the New Surrey Tabernacle, Wansey Street

Volume 8 Number 416

And kings shall be your nursing fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers: they shall bow down to you with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet; and you shall know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.” Isaiah 49:23

OUR God will have all his people know that he is a God of providence as well as a God of grace. And he has, as we see, in different ages, in different circumstances, constrained despotic kings to use their power in favor of his people. We see this in Pharaoh with Joseph; we see this in Nebuchadnezzar with Daniel and the three worthies; we see this also in Darius with Daniel; we also see this in Ahasuerus with Mordecai; we also see this in Evil-merodach, who raised up Jehoiachin out of prison, took from him his prison garments, spoke kindly unto him, clothed him with change of raiment, and gave him a royal allowance for life; and many more circumstances, as in the case of Cyrus. So that kings and queens have been made temporal helps, to the people of God. But notwithstanding this, I cannot bring my mind to believe that our text is to be understood temporally at all. I believe the words from first to last must be purely understood in the spiritual sense. And as to what some hold, that this points to that period when all the world will be Christians, kings and queens of course included, that is a position which has never yet been proved. Let them preach a sermon, or write a book to prove from God's own word that the time will come when all the population of the globe shall be Christians, then we will reconsider this matter. But we will even give them the advantage of that supposition. Now suppose that state of things existed, what force even then would our text have? You must remember that the church of God is not a national church, nor a sectional church, nor a human organization at all, but that the church of God is a congregational church. Hence the very word translated “church” signifies an assembly or congregation. The church of God, therefore, is made up of individuals. Now we do live happily, through a kind providence, under, perhaps I shall not go too far if I say the best monarch of the present day in the whole world. But, then, our honored queen cannot nourish my soul in hope, and love, and faith, and spiritual things. While I am fully aware that it is rather difficult to drag this scripture out of the old ruts, they have gone along a certain path, and the ruts are so deep that people cannot get themselves out of them. But it is always best to get out of the old ruts if we can,

and find some solid ground. You then go along easier, and faster, and better, and more, very much more, to your advantage. Therefore, venturing then to take our text in the spiritual sense of the word, I shall at once proceed to notice the subject in a threefold form. Here are first *notes of distinction*, kings and queens. Secondly, *their work*, they are to be nursing fathers and nursing mothers; they are to bow down to the church with their face toward the earth, and to lick up the dust of her feet. And then, lastly, *their happy destiny*, “You shall know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

First, then, we have here *notes of distinction*. The kings and queens here spoken of are nothing else but Christian men and Christian women. Now the Lord Jesus Christ is a king, and by virtue of oneness with him his people are also kings. When a soul is born of God, it is indeed born of a royal birth. Being born of God, it becomes associated with God; it is led to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, made one with him, and viewed as being what his atonement makes it, as being what his righteousness, his spirit, and his truth make it. Hence the apostle Peter comes to this point when he said, “You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood.” Only let us keep closely to the dear Savior in this matter, or else we shall be in the dark. You know what he has said, “He that follows me shall not abide in darkness.” So, then they are a chosen generation; chosen in Christ Jesus. The Lord gave them eternal oneness with Christ. “A royal priesthood,” because his priesthood is theirs. Whatever dignity of holiness, therefore, there was, and is, and ever will be in Christ’s priesthood, that is theirs, for he is their sanctification. And they are a holy people, washed in the Savior’s blood; and they show forth, in what they are, the praises of him that has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. They are kings, therefore, in dignity. And there is a wonderful dignity, too, in thus being born of God, born of this truly royal birth. Nothing satisfies them but the Lord himself. They are thus raised up to seek things that none others do seek. But not only are they thus kings in dignity, and have this oneness with the dear Savior, but also, they are kings in reigning power. Their reigning power is wonderful. They stand one with the Lord Jesus Christ, and in receiving his atonement they reign completely over sin, over the world, over tribulation, over death, and over error. Perhaps you will say, I do not see this. Well, then, let me point it out to you. I will ask this one question. Since you have known the Lord, has the sin of your nature been able to lower the Savior, or sever you from his truth; and have tribulations been able to sever you from his truth, and have the errors of the world been able to sever you from his truth? Now there are some of you that have been reigning in the spiritual sense for some years. Suppose sin were to come in, and tribulation to come in, and error to come in, and your vilest enemies to come in; with all they could say against you, not one of them nor all of them put together would be able to say that they had dethroned you, that they had turned you into an unbeliever, and that they had cast you back to where you were before you were called by grace, and that they had at last got the truth out of your soul, and your soul out of the truth; that you have cast away your shield, that Christ is your shield, and that God as the covenant God is your shield; that you have cast it all away, that you have done with it, and that you are dethroned, that you are in chains, and it is now utterly out of your power to believe in Jesus Christ, to hold fast his truth, or to believe in the victory that he has wrought. You know your adversaries could not do this, could not say this with truth. And therefore, whatever they may say of me, I am an Independent as well as a Baptist, and I shall assert my independence; and therefore, I say until they can say this, they can say nothing fatal. So, then, they are kings in reigning power; they hold fast his truth, and they overcome by the blood of the Lamb. They always have with them that atonement that blots out all their sins; they always have with them that atonement, that is, in their faith; they always have that with them that is a remedy

for all their wounds and diseases; they always have that atonement that keeps them holy, and righteous, and innocent, and free from sin before God. They always have this, and hereby they reign, and move them you cannot. Hence, then, in the early ages of the Christian church, and in the more modern ages of the church, when the people of God were put to the test upon this matter of God's truth, could all the monarchs in the world, with all their racks, and all their tortures, and all the agencies they employed, could they sever one from the truth? No, they reigned in spite of all. Now I hope you understand this; because if you cannot understand the sense in which they reign, that it is by faith in Christ Jesus, and that he is their power, their victory, their dominion, if you do not understand this clearly, then, you see, you will not understand the 8th of the Romans, where the apostle says, "For your sake we are killed all the daylong." Just as they were killing sacrifices in the temple to offer to God, as it were, all the day long, just so our enemies are killing us all the day long; that is, when they have killed one, they seek for another, and so they kill us all the day long. And what does the apostle add to this? Something very strange to flesh and blood; something that you cannot understand if you do not take it spiritually. "No," he says, "in all these things we are more than conquerors." So, then, Paul the apostle is Paul the apostle still; the believer is a believer still, he is a king still, he is a priest to God still. But if once your faith give way, and you cease to carry mediatorial perfection with you, then you are dethroned. If faith give way, and you cease to carry the new covenant with you, then you are dethroned; for God will never be with you in any way but by mediatorial perfection, by his sworn covenant, and by that faith that receives him in this revelation of himself, which when Abraham did he was called the friend of God. Thus, then, they are kings in dignity and kings in power, they reign. And what a blessed power it is! Why, this oneness with Jesus Christ, this holding fast of his truth, is that power to which the Savior refers when he makes a kind of universal sweep of all adverse power. He says, "Nothing shall by any means hurt you;" that is, finally and fatally hurt you. A great many things may hurt you temporarily, and we do not wish to be hurt even temporarily, for no man in his senses wishes to be wounded for the sake of being healed; but, finally, nothing shall hurt you. This is because of that reigning power we have in oneness with Christ. So, it is a great mercy then to be favored thus to hold fast the truth, and having done all, to hold it fast. But these persons are kings also in possession. They have a kingdom, and they are the only people in the world that have a kingdom that cannot be moved. Now, just see the opposite conclusion to which the Holy Spirit leadeth us to the conclusion to which the natural man comes. We have a kingdom that cannot be moved, that cannot be destroyed, Ah, says the natural man, I see what it is; that is your doctrine; you have that kingdom that cannot be moved, and therefore you may live just as you like; you need not care for anything. You have a kingdom that cannot be moved, and you settle down in that; you do not care about God or godliness, or anything pertaining thereto. Now what is the conclusion the Holy Spirit comes to, and that the man born of God comes to; that the man that possesses this faith by which he reigns now with the Lord, and shall reign with him forever, comes to? Or if we put them together, what is their proposition, what is their feeling? Let us do them justice, for they get but little justice from men. What is their conclusion? Seeing, then, that our God is so good as to found a kingdom that cannot be moved, and to make us like that kingdom, for "they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed, but abide forever what goodness is this! what love is this! what mercy is this! what a wonderful display of infinite grace is this! What shall we do? Oh, let us have grace, God our Father give us grace; dear and blest Redeemer, give us grace; Holy, Holy, Holy Spirit, that is the Spirit of grace, give us grace that we may go on all our days to serve God acceptably with reverence and with godly fear. And if we have a right apprehension of what he has done, we shall revere him most deeply. You may think perhaps I am going too far, but

I hope I shall be understood when I tell you that I do not believe the Israelites had at Sinai that reverence for God, that holy, shall I call it sweet? for it is to the soul born of God, filial reverence for God that Jacob had when he was going to Padan-aram. They trembled, but there was no voluntary reverence; and even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake;" and they would have fled from it. But when we come to new covenant matters, the glorious possession, the yea and amen promise, the stability of the kingdom, then it is "Surely the Lord is in this place" in these immutable promises, in this immoveable kingdom; "and I knew it not;" for the world told me God was almost anywhere but there. He is not in that doctrine, say they; and Jacob said, "I knew it not." I am not giving this as the real meaning of Jacob's words; I am merely accommodating the words, that is all: mind that. "How dreadful is this place!" Hence, we have by mistake spoilt the beginning of that hymn in our book,

"How sweet and awful is the place."

We have got the word "sacred" put in that line instead of the word "awful." It does not make it so weighty, nor so impressive. "How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." That is the conclusion to which the man comes that is taught of God, when he becomes established in the stability of the everlasting kingdom. So, then they are kings in dignity, they are kings in ruling power, and they are kings in possession.

Who then are the kings, and who are the queens? Well, if we come to definition, I shall say that the kings are Christian men, and that the queens are Christian women. Let us see if we can find a scripture that will help us out in this, that the kings here are Christian men, kings of the east, kings of the sunrising, and everything in their way is dried up, to make way for them to find their way home; and Christian women, they are the queens, honorable women. David, in the 144th Psalm, seems rather disposed to separation, to discrimination, and he seems there inclined to think that the people are best to dwell alone; he seems there inclined to think that it is best for them not to be reckoned among the nations; he seems there to think that they are better off in their own way of things. Hence, he said, "Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children;" that profess to be children of God, yet the truth of God is a strange thing to them. "I have written to Ephraim the great things of my law," the law of truth; that is, I have written to him the substitutional work of my Son, my immutable covenant, and my yea and amen promise; "but they were counted as a strange thing." "whose mouth speaks vanity," because they advocate that that never can save a soul; "and their right hand the right hand of falsehood," because they swear that it is all of grace, when at the same time they do not mean it; for while they have one minute the doctrines of grace on their tongue, they have something to say the next minute against those truths. Now, then, coming back to the dignity of the people of God; "That our sons" there are the kings, Christian men, "may be as plants grown up in their youth." Perhaps it would be as well here just to observe that the ancients attached, unwisely, of course, certainly they did, a great deal of importance to the physical appearance of a man. They do not seem to have entered much into the idea of the mind being the standard of the man. The Orientals can hardly endure a short man for a king; they like to have a tall man. Hence it was that Saul was taller than the others "from his shoulders and upward he must be a good king because he is so tall. Now that is their idea, and we must be instructed by the ideas that are brought before us. Well, David says, "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth;" that these kings may rise higher than people in general. And John Bunyan has a good remark upon this; he says that the tallest giant was only nine cubits, but the pillars of the

temple were eighteen cubits, just as tall again. So the people of God are to grow up, and to look down upon the things of this world as being little in comparison of the weighty realities of God's everlasting love, "That our daughters", there it is, "maybe as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace." There is their royalty. They are to be at right angles with Christ, who is the palace; and they are to be of royal birth; they are of royal descent, royal standing, and royal destiny. No wonder they are called "honorable women." What honor is there like it? There is no honor like it, not in heaven itself; there is no honor greater than being thus related to the blessed God. And then mark the state of things. "That our garners may be full, affording all manner of store and so he goes on to speak of the safety of these people, and then to declare that "happy is that people that is in such a case; yes, happy is that people whose God is the Lord." Thus, then, they are kings and queens in dignity, in power to reign; faith is faith, grace is grace, and grace reigns in the heart of one as effectually, though perhaps not always so conspicuously, as in the heart of the other; but in the hearts of all it shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life. Kings, then, are Christian men; queens are Christian women.

Secondly, I notice *their work*. These kings are to be nursing fathers. Here we have the advantages of the church being a congregational church, in order to explain this, as well as many other scriptures. Now many of you, of course, know how a father feels towards his children, and that is just the way a Christian is to feel towards the church of God. Hence the apostle said, "Though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers;" and in his second chapter of First Thessalonians he said, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children." Therefore, this fatherly feeling is expressive of that Christian love which all real believers have to the church of God. Only you must not mistake. You must not take Hagar, and think she is Sarah; you must not take Jezebel, and think she is the Lamb's bride. If you do, you will make a terrible mistake. Now, then, how is each Christian a nursing father to the church, a father denoting the relative feeling? He feels one with them. He says, That man has just such an experience as I have in kind, if it is not the same in degree; and that man has just the same hope that I have, it is a hope through grace; and that man serves the same God that I do, and that man delights to see the same God glorified that I delight to see glorified. That man, therefore, prays for the people of God, joins with them to support the cause of God, joins with them in their practical sympathies with the ministers of God and to the poor of the Lord's people, and to the cause, in whatever way it may need assistance. Now herein they help each other by prayer. Ah, we help each other, friends, greatly in this way sometimes. I will take one Christian man: he helps others sometimes in private when no eye but the Lord's sees him. He says, Lord, be merciful, continue to bless my soul, bless the people I am connected with, bless the minister, bless the place. Ah, those prayers may go out of your souls sometimes in your lawful avocations; for surely you do think of the cause in all places. I am sure every man that is sent of God as a minister does, and every Christian does too. And then there is even a kind of locality in the sympathies of the people of God. The place where they have been blessed, they think of it, and they say, Lord, has not that place been as the path of Padan-aram was to Jacob? Has it not been solemn to many? has it not been as the house of God and the gate of heaven? Have they not seen your glory, and felt your power, and have not those blessings been received there by the word that has been with us in private life, that has borne us up? And thus, the people of God do by prayer and in a variety of ways nourish, as it were, one another. So that each king must look upon all the rest as the church, and must become a nursing father. Not a word of gossip, not a word of slander, not a word of ill-will, no, no envy, nor anything of the sort. I am sure no right-minded parent would envy his

children for doing well, I am sure no right-minded parent would be grieved to see his children happy, and get on well. And so whenever Christians envy one another they must be out of their minds; they are not then in their Christian minds, they are in their creature minds, in their sinner-ship minds, in their old Adam minds; they are not then in the new Adam mind, they are not then in the mind of Christ; for when in the mind of Christ, then there is meekness and lowliness of heart, esteeming others better than ourselves, and seeing something in the humblest Christian that we might well envy. Now, then, in this sense Christian men and Christian women are nursing fathers and nursing mothers. This cause is what it is through the blessing of the Lord, and we all know that Christian women among us have had a great deal of power and influence, and have been great helps in bringing about the building, and in a few months' time, I trust, the entire clearance of the debt of this place. Surely, they are worthy of the name, then, of queens and of nursing mothers. They have borne it with patience, they have labored, they have sympathized, they have persevered. They have had their discouragements, but every step that has been taken in the right direction has cheered their hearts, it has comforted them, and we do not hear a murmur, no. We bless the Lord for this great amount of good feeling. May the Lord still increase us, then, in these divine feelings, these divine sympathies, these Christian motives. They are truly, truly pleasing in his sight. Let me go back again to the words, "That our sons may be as plants," you see what a peaceful thing a plant is, "that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace at right angles with Christ, shining in his perfection. And what a peaceful thing such a corner-stone is! They get into their place, and there they stop. You know "A place for everything, and everything in its place," is a saying. I suppose most of you tradespeople take care to maintain a place for everything, and everything in its place, and by that means you avoid confusion, and get on better with order than you would do with disorder. Now, then, these are the nursing fathers and the nursing mothers; they love the church, their mother. But let us come to their mother now; let us say a word about her. I will define the church now to be a new covenant body of people, and that new covenant body of people is called "the Jerusalem which is free." Hence, then, we must distinguish between Hagar and Sarah. Hagar represents Sinai, which genders to bondage, and answers to the old Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with all her people, and will be down to the end of time. It is a mere figment, a mere empty imagination, to suppose that that city will he ever anything with God again. No, God has entered into the last Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem, which is free. That is the church, then, this new Jerusalem, this new covenant church, of which Sarah is the representative. Now Isaac is represented as the son of Sarah; so, each Christian is the son of the true church, of the new Jerusalem, which is free. And now, as we have said very lately, what was the promise to Isaac? Was it not yea and amen? Was it not, "I *will* bless you, and in your seed" meaning Christ, "shall all the families of the earth, be blessed"? Now those who are brought into these same truths, we have no less authority than the authority of the holy and eternal Spirit of God himself for the conclusion: Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. We are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. The bondage is to be cast out, liberty is to be retained. Here, then, are the nursing fathers and nursing mothers. The seed of the serpent cannot love the seed of the woman. God has placed enmity between the two. And God is my witness, while I do not hate their persons, nor a hair of their heads, I hate their religion as I hate the devil; I hate everything that is contrary to that freedom that I have in Christ Jesus the Lord. Say not, A confederacy; stand out for your covenant God, and he will take care of you. Nursing fathers, let it be the right material, let it be the new Jerusalem, made up of new creatures in Christ Jesus; old things passed away, all things made new.

But “they shall bow down to you with their face toward the earth,” decidedly so, “and lick up the dust of your feet.” That is nothing but an Orientalism, to denote the humble services they are willing to take. There are many among you, I can say it with truth; I do not say it to flatter you, the Lord forbid I should, there are many among you, you hear of a good man or a good woman in deep affliction of body, on a sick bed, and in a state of destitution. What do you do? Why, you run off, bless the Lord for the feeling, many of you from time to time, and minister to them as far as the Lord enables you. When I look at what the Lord has done here in this respect, when I look at the ill-will of people out of doors and then look indoors here, when I see £500 or £600 arising in this place every year for the poor in all directions, Ah, I think, what is this but bowing down, as it were, to the earth? what is this but licking up, as it were, the dust of their feet, and making their path as comfortable as you can? Friends, never get weary in this well doing; the Lord will reward you. John Bunyan spoke, no doubt, from observation and experience when he said,

“There was a man, though some did count him mad,
The more he gave away, the more he had.”

And it was so, and is so, and will be so. Therefore, bowing down, licking up the dust of their feet, means to take the humblest services on behalf of the saints. I need not here stop to remind you of him that has astonished us quite as much as he did Peter when he took a towel, and girded himself, and began to wash the disciple’s feet. There is a humble service! there is condescension! Peter thought it was beneath humility; he thought it was something like degradation. “You shall never wash my feet.” Ah, but I must set you an example. I know, what your haughty nature is. I know how prone you are to be puffed up. “What I do you know not now; but you shall know hereafter.” I will explain it to you presently. “If I, your Lord and Master” if I, the God of heaven and earth, if I, that hold all worlds at my command, “have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another’s feet.” What is there difficult in this part of our text? Christian men are kings, Christian women are queens, and they have these relative, living sympathies towards the true church of God, and they do, to the best of their ability, thus serve him in the humblest of services. Some of you are in the habit of visiting the sick, and I am told that some of our Christian women can engage in prayer with the sick. I wish more of you could do this when you go to visit a woman that is sick. Do not think it any degradation. The Lord enable you to engage in prayer by the side of the dying woman. If you can do it once or twice, you will get by degrees liberty, and you may do a great deal of good in this way; Do not be ashamed of it. If people say, Oh, this is So-and-so; she engaged in prayer. Very glad to hear it. Why, she read a chapter, and gave her views of it. Very glad to hear it. And she read a hymn and opened it up. Very glad to hear it. And she prayed with the woman, as well as the minister does, too, if not better. Very glad to hear it. That is bowing down your face to the earth; that is licking up the dust of their feet, and the dear Savior assures us that not a cup of cold water shall lose its reward. I am sure the Christian will admit he would rather be employed in the humblest part of Christ’s kingdom than in the highest part of the devil’s kingdom, for the humblest service in the church of God is that which is pleasing in the sight of the Lord. That man was in his right mind when he said, “I would rather be a doorkeeper,” or, if you take the marginal reading, “I would rather sit at the threshold of the house of the Lord” if I cannot see the minister, and cannot take a sitting, and there are no free seats, and I cannot get in to sit comfortably, why, if I may get just at the threshold, and my ear can catch some of the blessed truths of the gospel, I would rather be in that position than on a monarch’s throne employed in the devil’s service, and dwelling in the tents of evil. Now take our text literally, it loses all its beauty and its force. Kings,

then, are Christian men; queens are Christian women, nursing fathers and nursing mothers, humble services that smooth the path of the saints of God. I have upon this subject a very strong feeling; I always have had; I cannot help it, and I think every Christian should feel towards other Christians just as he feels towards his own children, and that you would no more injure a brother or sister in the Lord than you would injure one of your children, and that you would no more unnecessarily speak of their faults than you would of the faults of any of your children; and that you would as eagerly help them out of any trouble, and help them to do well, as you would any of your children. Bless the Lord, then, for the amount of brotherly love that does exist.

I should spoil my subject if I were to dwell upon some of the exceptions and drawbacks. I shall not do that; that would be like throwing cold water, so we will now come to the last part, *their happy destiny*. “You shall know that I am the Lord.” That is a promise to the church, and she does know it, and she stands fast; she is the Lamb’s bride. Then comes the promise to the kings and queens. Those same persons who in the first part of my text are called kings and queens, nursing fathers and nursing mothers, are spoken of in the latter part of my text as waiting for the Lord. So, they do, they do wait for the Lord. You came this morning waiting for him; you wait for him from day to day: not in the millenarian sense; we wait for him to manifest himself to us from day to day spiritually; we wait for him to interpose for us from day to day providentially. We wait also for that hour when death shall command us to the upper house; we wait also for that time when the dust in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and leap triumphant into everlasting life. Now it said of these same people, kings and queens, “They shall not be ashamed that wait for me.” I will just name two things here, without enlarging upon them. They shall not be ashamed, first, of their hope. Why not? Because the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. Now, friends, if you profess to have a hope in God’s salvation, and do not love God’s truth; if you profess to have a hope in God; if you profess to have a hope in God, and do not beyond all other things love Christ in the perfection of his work, then your hope is a false hope, because your heart is somewhere else, your affection is somewhere else. He knows whether you love what you hope in. But if the love of God is shed abroad in your heart, then you love what you hope in, and you cannot be ashamed, because your hope is a good hope, love is the substance of it. Second, supply. We shall never be ashamed that we trusted in him for supply; for “my people shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord, that has dealt wonderfully with them, and my people shall never be ashamed.”