

DIVINE LEADING

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning September 15th, 1867

by Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 9 Number 461

“These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.” Isaiah 42:16

TAKING, as I shall do, the whole of this verse, it is one of those scriptures descriptive both of the essentials and of the circumstantials of the gospel. Hence the variety of ways in which this verse has been a great help, a great strengthening, and a great comfort to the people of God. “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.” Great is the variety of ways in which these words have been a help to the people of God. And you will also perceive that there is something in them essential for us to know. For this verse is in reality a description of those dealings of the Lord with a people with whom he deals as he does not with any other people; as says the Psalmist, when looking at the specialty of the dealings of the Lord with his own people, “He has not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them.” And so, we may truly say that he deals with his own people as described in this verse; that he does not deal so with any other people. So that if we can this morning find out what these dealings are and feel that we ourselves are taken in hand by the Lord, and that he is dealing with us after the same manner, then what is implied in the last clause belongs to us, namely, “I will not forsake them.” Our subject, then, this morning is, first, *the special dealings of the Lord with his people*; and secondly, *the unalterable decision on their behalf*, “and not forsake them.”

First then, *the special dealings of the Lord with his people*, “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not.” The blind here will mean persons who are convinced of their blindness by nature, but now their eyes begin to be opened, “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not.” What then, is this way? The answer is very simple and clear; the way they knew not is the Lord Jesus Christ, the substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ in its completeness. Hence in the 53rd chapter of this book there is a kind of test as to whether the Lord has taken us in hand. If so, we shall feel and see our need, and shall fall in most solemnly, earnestly, and I was going to say everlastingly, with the representation of the Savior there given, and in many other scriptures, in

relation to his substitutional character and work. Let us have just a few things from that chapter, to make clear the first part of the dealings of the Lord with his people. Jesus Christ is there said to be "a root out of a dry ground." That dry ground I take to be the Jewish nation, that nation had become dry ground because it had lost all vitality; it had parted with God's truth, it had shut out that which alone can be the life of any nation, the life of any man in that nation; it had got rid of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it had got rid of the truths of the everlasting gospel. That nation is therefore called a dry ground, being destitute of vitality; a barren ground, bearing thorns and briars, enemies to God's truth and God's Christ. So, then, where the Lord intends salvation, he implants in the soul this root, that, as far as it descended from the Jewish nation, was a root out of a dry ground; and that ground, the Jewish nation, is cursed, and to be, that land, cursed forever. When the Savior, in Matthew 21:19, cursed the fig tree, and is not that fig tree a symbol of the Jewish nation? he said, "Let no fruit grow on you hence forward for ever; and presently the fig tree withered away:" and again, Mark 11:14, "Let no man eat fruit of you hereafter forever," no restoration here, the curse is final. There is another covenant of which Jesus Christ is the Mediator; and just what we are told in Isaiah is true to the present day, if the words be rightly understood, namely, that "he was despised and rejected of men." Now, for myself, I never did despise the Savior's name, but I was just doing what thousands are, receiving him in name, but not in the reality of the characters he bears. Now that chapter sets before us very clearly and beautifully these three things: first, that he took our sorrows, our griefs, that he was wounded for our transgressions, that he was bruised for our iniquities, that the chastisement of our peace was upon him. That chapter then shows that Jesus Christ has taken away all the penal sorrows of sin; and then it next shows that all our sin was laid upon him; that while we like sheep have gone astray, turning everyone to his own way, the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all. And then comes, lastly, his final exaltation; because he poured out his soul unto death, therefore he is exalted forever; and because he was numbered with the transgressors, that he might put an end to their transgressions, therefore he is exalted; and because he bare the sin of many, and because he makes intercession for the transgressors, therefore it is that he is exalted forever. Now the Lord brings those with whom he deals thus to see that Jesus Christ is the end of all their sorrow, because he is the end of all their sin, and that he is eternally exalted by what he has done. This is that by which we are to live, and this is the way which we knew not. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not." We are brought to see that in this substitution of Christ there is everything that we can need for time and for eternity; that there is not a sorrow left; for not only did the Lord Jesus Christ represent sin and the curse, but he is also the representative of his people in his present state, and in his present state he is comforted on every side, and possesses a fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. There is not one trouble left. So that whenever you read in the Scriptures that "they shall sorrow no more at all," and that "they shall see evil no more at all," and many may feel rather perplexed as to the meaning, seeing they do from time to time have more sorrow than joy, you must look for the fulfilment of such scriptures as you stand in Christ. We have no sorrow in Christ, because there is no sin there, for "he shall appear the second time without sin," having put sin away; therefore, there is no sin and no sorrow. So, when it is said, "They shall sorrow no more at all, it means they shall not sorrow in Christ. I think one of the most impressive representations of this to the mind is this, that Jesus Christ is the last Adam. Now in the first Adam, in our first natural and federal head, there we sorrow; we have nothing but sorrow there, because we have nothing but sin. But in Jesus Christ, the last Adam, our spiritual and our covenant head, there we have no sorrow, because there we have no sin; he has put sin away. So, then, he having by his substitutional work put sin away, God is on our side. What a precious thing is faith here, to stand and see how

the fire descended upon him, and to see how the fiery law is ended, and to see how the Lord has taken away all our judgments, cast out our enemy, and we shall not see evil anymore! Ah, it is a grievous thing, it is that that it distresses one to think of, that the professing world is at this present time in such a state that if there be much said concerning this blessedness of the substitution of Jesus Christ, they are offended. They like a little of this; but that that charms them the most is a great noise about human doings. You may abundantly utter the memory of man's great goodness; you may talk of the mighty acts of man; but bring in this substitutional perfection of Christ, they say, Ah, well, that is merely doctrine. Whereas to the Christian it is everything. How is it with us? because the Savior has said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Can we truly say that every other confidence, every other hope is gone, and that if we have any hope in God it must be in this way, by the substitutional completeness of the Savior; that he has finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation, and brought in everlasting righteousness? Well, then, this way of life, of light, of sanctification, of justification, of salvation, of consolation, of peace, of access to God, this being real religion, this is the way which we once knew not; the way we had sought but found it not. But now we have found it, and if you find this you find everything. Here God is in Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in Christ, all the promises are in Christ, and all our blessedness is in Christ, "complete in him, and of his fullness have we received, and grace for grace."

Now if the Lord be our teacher, this will be our illumination, this will be our light; we shall thus see our need, and how Jesus Christ has met it. And upon looking into the glass of God's word, there will be times when in our happy experience we shall be changed into the same image, as from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of our God. I think, then, this is the meaning of this part, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not." It seems simple, but at the same time it is deep, where men fail is in these two things first, in the completeness of the substitution of Christ: and secondly, in the application of that completeness. There are many that admit this work is complete, but they do not allow it its full scope of application. For notwithstanding the completeness, we have in Christ, and that people insist upon; and that though we are complete in Christ yet say they that completeness that is in Christ does not so apply as to bring all the people to an equality of glory hereafter. There will be degrees of glory hereafter, and those degrees will be regulated by the amount of good that has been done by several persons. Thus, you see that they are denying its application in its completeness to sever us from the law forever, and thus denying it bringing us to ultimate completeness. They admit the completeness of Christ but deny its application. Well, then, there is another application of this completeness in Christ which has been to my soul a great comfort, and also I am sure to yours, namely, that not only are we dead to the law, and the law requires nothing more of us; not only do we all stand upon an equal footing as we stand in Christ, but there is another application of this completeness of Christ's substitution; and that is this, that our God ever delights to hold us and to view as by that completeness. Hence those beautiful words, where is there a man sensible of his state that is not glad to run to them for shelter? where is there a man convinced of his condition that does not bless God for such an open door of mercy, for such a shelter? namely, that "he will not behold iniquity in Jacob;" and Jacob means the seed of Jacob as well as Jacob himself. Yes, it means Jacob mystically, all the seed of Jacob that are brought to receive the same blessed testimony; that "he will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. The Lord his God is with him." Ah, poor sinner, if you wouldst run for shelter, run to where God can be just and yet justify you; run to where there is a sinless place and you will be reckoned sinless by being there; run to where God is in the light of his countenance, where he is

in the love of his heart, where he is in the promises of his word, where he is in the riches of his grace, where he is in all the purposes of eternal mercy, “will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel.” Ministers in our day are very busy in cautioning the people of God against the truth of God, and even against searching the Scriptures for themselves. They are beginning now to exclude some of the books of the Bible, lest the people, I suppose, should become wiser than their teachers. That being the case, I must practice, as a public man, a little counter advice upon this matter. There are many persons that will admit that the substitutional work of Christ is complete, but they fail in the use they make of it, they fail in its application. And if you fail in the use of it, why, then you fail altogether. Because what is Jesus Christ to me if I fail in the use of him? If I do not make him to be by precious faith what God has made him, then I fail to make that use of him which the Bible makes, and which God makes. The Lord will not only bring his own people to this substitutional perfection of Christ, but he will give them to see the various ways in which this substitution applies and stands on their behalf. Indeed, this substitutional work of Christ and its application in a great many ways I have not named is the key to the Scriptures. Why, if we are not a little bit earnest, we shall have no gospel left soon. Here is pretty well one-half the gospel now-a-days taken away from Christ, and from his kingdom, and from eternal things, and turned into materials to build up a millenarian delusion; and then a large number of promises and prophecies are taken away from Christ, and taken away from his kingdom, and away from his people, to reconstruct the Jewish nationality. So that by the time they have taken as much as they want to build up their millenarian delusion, and as much as they want to reconstruct the Jewish nationality, we have hardly anything left. So that really, we must be a little upon the alert, or else these thieves will rob us of all we have. It is true their millenarian delusion and their reconstruction of the Jewish nationality answers worldly purposes, tends to fleshly popularity, and to bring applause upon men. But I say, cleave to the perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ, where God has said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” If he be your teacher, you will thus be led to receive this substitution of Christ. You will see that there is not one prophecy of mercy of grace, of pardon, of blessing, that does not center, I mean spiritually, in, and that is not confirmed by the substitutional completeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not.” It is a blessed shelter to run to. And it is by this substitutional work of Christ the latter part of our text stands good, “and not forsake them.” And I will anticipate that part here before I come to it. The apostle says that God is “abundantly willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, that we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge” to where the Lord does not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel, “who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” Here is the way to heaven, the way to God, the way to life, the way to everything you need. Once then we were blind, but now we see the best of all sights, we see Jesus, see him in his completeness, and in the universal application of that completeness to all our necessities in life spiritually, and to all our necessities in death, and to our necessities in an eternal world. The apostle was in this sacred secret, which made him say, “That I may be found in him.” And he would be there alone, that is, apart from any goodness of his own. He would not take his own righteousness with him, “not having my own righteousness, for that is of the law, but the righteousness of faith”, the righteousness of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

The second part of the Lord's dealings with his people is the paths in which he leads them. "I will lead them in paths which they have not known." He will bring you down. What the means may be, that I must leave. But you will have to say, Well, a Christian walks in light, but I am nothing but darkness. "He has brought me into darkness," says Jeremiah, "but not into light. He has enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he has made my paths crooked. He has hedged me about, that I cannot get out." Well, but, man, you should. If you were alive now, I do not know what you would not be called, thus proclaiming your own helplessness, and darkness, and wretchedness. Yet he says, "I cannot get out." Well, but, Jeremiah, the moderns tell you that it is your own fault; that you should pray. Ah, he says, so I do; but "when I cry and shout, he shuts out my prayer." Ah, you should pray in faith. Where am I to get the faith from? How am I to obtain the faith? Here he was, cast down, wretched and miserable. So, if the Lord has displaced Satan from your soul, this is one of the paths in which you will be led. None but the Christian knows what the plague of the heart is. Why, our troubles arise from it. What are our earthly troubles, bereavements, losses, and affections? Why, the loss of his property and his family, and all the rest of it, was not such a trouble to Job as his own heart. All the time Job could deal with the circumstantial by faith in the promises of God, and in the assurance that, however mysterious it was it was right, then he charged not God foolishly. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." That is how he could deal with it all the time faith was in exercise. But let the Lord hide his face, and let Job's own heart come in to deal with his outward circumstances, how was it then? Why, he cursed, as you know, the very day of his birth. As though he should say, if I could but annihilate myself! God was wrong in creating me; I am wrong to be in existence at all. Oh, that I had been as them that never saw light! wretched to the last degree. "Even today is my complaint bitter; my stroke is heavier than my groaning," nor could he say anything that would express the wretchedness which he felt. These are the secret sorrows and troubles that the people of God more or less are led into. And it is this that delivers them, wonderfully delivers them from all false gospels. He is shut up and cannot come forth. And more than that, the Lord does not intend you shall. He intends to keep you there as long as it pleases him; for you shall find that your times are in his hands. Now this is a path unknown to mere professors. We live in a day when a speculative faith will do. Why, there are many churches where a man has nothing to do but go before the church: Well, you believe in Jesus Christ? Yes, sir. You believe he will take you to heaven? Yes, sir. You believe you are a Christian? Yes, sir. Excellent experience! That will do. Let us have another. This is the deception carried on in the day in which we live. But I tell you this, if you are taught of God, some tremendous questions will arise in your mind. Well, I believe in the Bible, and believe in Christ; but have I the Spirit of Christ? Am I under the chastening hand of God? for he declares his people everyone, no exception, shall know the plague of his own heart. Am I the subject of those trials, those struggles, these sorrows, and that wretchedness which I can see, independently of ministers, in the Bible has been the path of saints in all ages? Even the great apostle Paul, favored as he was, when he comes home to the hidden path of his own downward experience, does he not in the 7th of Romans describe his inner life, how that when he would do good evil was present with him: the good that he would do that he did not; and the evil that he would not, that he did? And does, he not sum up the whole in this way? "O wretched man that I am" Where did he find shelter? In the great testimony that notwithstanding all this wretchedness, for this wretchedness makes way for the application of the completeness of Christ to our necessity, "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "So, then," he says, "with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin." Thus, this downward path is a great teacher. And what will be the consequence? This very experience of which I am now speaking will lead you into every truth of

the everlasting gospel. Do you speak of the love of God? What will this downward experience do? Why, it will convince you that if the Lord has loved you with an eternal love, not only shall that love continue, but it shall continue the same. This downward experience will be one thing by which the freeness of that love to you will be demonstrated; and you will say, if my name, my worthless name, a wretch like me, if my name be written in heaven, then I am sure I might with propriety sing that hymn:

“Twas grace that first inscribed my name
In God's eternal book.”

It was an election of grace; and if grace had not put me there, where should I have been? And there is the sworn covenant. You will say, If God were not in his sworn covenant on my side, a poor, changeable, capricious, rebellious creature as I am, not anything belonging to God that I have not sinned against and rebelled against, and very often have the hardest thoughts of God, ah, were it not for that sworn covenant of which Jesus is the Mediator, where should I be? The Lord may well say, and my experience demonstrates the same, “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed.” I will not undertake here to describe, and I say it, I hope, without exaggeration, I do not think it at all extravagant to say that none can really and fully describe how dear these blessed truths are to the man that thus knows his own heart, his own wretchedness. I can solemnly say that for the forty years I have been favored to go on preaching the gospel this downward experience has done more to keep me in the truth than anything else. And I believe the apostle alludes to something of the same when he says, “Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.” Whatever that thorn was, it brought to light more of the hidden evils of his heart. And he besought the Lord thrice that it might be removed from him; and the Lord's answer suited not the apostle's idea but suited his real necessity; for the Lord knew better than the apostle what the purpose was; and therefore said, “My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” The apostle understanding this, he would rather be an infirm creature in himself, and dependent upon the grace of God, than be a good creature in himself and trust upon that. Therefore he says, “Most gladly would I rather glory in my infirmities;” which I understand to mean that I will glory in being a poor infirm creature; I will glory in acknowledging what I am; “that the power of Christ may rest upon me;” and if the power of Christ's mediation rest upon me, put that into the opposite scale, it will outweigh my infirmities and sins, and I shall stand well with the eternal and the blessed God. What a difference between the man that has this downward work, and the man that has the truth merely in a speculative form! Why, those that have not this downward experience, when they speak of the truths of the gospel, they cannot speak of them as a child of God does. They are dearer to the child of God than language can describe. Hear the testimony of one that was not mistaken, could not be mistaken, was infallibly inspired, and said it from his own experience, in the 19th Psalm, after going through those testimonies that are realized more or less in the experience of the people of God, what does he say? “More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” Here, then, was the love of the truth. Why, when some of these men speak lightly of these great truths, they do not know that they touch us in a tender place. If they think they are going to moderate us, and lower us, and bring us somewhat over to them, then they must not say a single syllable against any one of these testimonies; for if they do, they will set us on fire, and make us ten times worse than we are, that is, in their estimation. Like David, when Michal, the representative of the

Pharisaic church, despised him because he danced before the ark, Ah, he said, you will not shame me out of that, I can tell you; I am not going to be ashamed of that. I care not for being vile in your eyes, you hypocrite, as though he should say, so that I appear right before the Lord, "which chose me before your father, and before all his house to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore, will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be viler than this and will be base in my own sight." Thus, then, the Lord has brought us by a way we knew not, but we know it now. When you are in trouble, you know what to plead before the Lord, the promise that is in Christ, as suited to your trouble, let it be what it may. When you come to die, you know what to look to, what is the meaning of it; and when you rise at the last great day, you know what you will rise in, namely, the likeness of Jesus Christ, and shall appear at his right hand; the 15th of First Corinthians realizes almost the scene of that glorious day. Thus, he has brought us by a way we knew not and has led us into paths which we did not heretofore understand. And those words apply to circumstances as well. Many of you will perhaps have many crooked and difficult circumstances; many things will what we call turn out rather awkward with you. All this will be to teach you. "He led him about, he instructed him, and he kept him as the apple of his eyes."

But he will also turn darkness into light. This is another part of his dealings. There is a twofold way I notice in which he has turned our darkness into light. First, in blotting out our sins. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions; and, as a cloud, your sins;" and in another place, "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins." The second sense in which he has turned darkness into light is that of lighting up our path all the way to heaven. Now when the Israelites came out of Egypt, Moses, if I may use the idea, set up lights, a light to start with, and lights all through the wilderness, and a light at Jordan, and a light in the Promised Land. The salvation from Egypt was the light they had to start with; they must take that with them. Jesus Christ's salvation is the light we have to commence with; we start with that; his salvation coming forth as a lamp that burns. "You in your mercy have led forth the people which you have redeemed; you have guided them in your strength unto your holy habitation." And the right-minded commenced with that light, and whenever they felt a little gloomy, they looked back to that light, and could see it shining like a word saying, "This is the way, walk you in it." That is what they had to start with. Now, Moses, you set up lights all through the wilderness. It is rather dark at Edom. Oh no! "the dukes of Edom shall be amazed;" they shall be all subdued and overcome. Well, but how will you get on with Moab? "The mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them," and they shall be overcome. So, wherever the Lord's people went, he would be with them. Now the right-minded Israelite saw that, and he would say to himself, This is the God to abide by; this is the God that I wish to be my God and my Judge; these are the testimonies we are to rest upon. Well, but then comes the Jordan; how will it be there? Then he sets up a brilliant lamp at Jordan, and he says, "Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of your arm they shall be as still as a stone; till your people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which you have purchased," says the right-minded Israelite, this is it: I will take this light of salvation with me. When I come to the Jordan of death, the enemy, by the greatness of your arm shall be as still as a stone, and shall pass clean over, and have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. Then he sets up the light of certainty, the light of eternity, in the Promised Land. "You shall bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which you have made for you to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever." Thus, these testimonies turned all the darkness of the wilderness into light. So, the right-minded Israelite could see all the way to the land, and could see the sure

possession of the land, and know that he had not to get the land in possession by his own arm, neither was his own sword to save him, but the Lord's right hand, and his arm, and the light of his countenance, because he had a favor unto them. And does not the New Testament light up the Christian's path all the way to heaven? Jesus having loved his own, he loved them unto the end. "So, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself", that "where I am, there you may be also;" and "my sheep shall never perish." Now the right-minded Israelite abode by these testimonies. What cared he for the burning sun? for "the sun shall not smite you." What cared he for the burning sands? What cared he for the drought? He had plenty of water from the rock. What cared he for surrounding famine? He had the daily manna. What cared he for numerous enemies? God was his shield, and was with him; and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" So that the right-minded Israelite could march through the gloomy desert in full assurance that all was well. God had turned darkness for him into light; he could see his way, and seeing his way could rejoice, and so he became safe at last.

"And crooked things straight," that is another part of this promise. Now the first crooked thing to be made straight, you know, is yourself; that is the principal thing to be made straight. You are aware that the word "crooked," as I have lately said, when applied to character, means oneness with Satan, for he is the crooked serpent; and all of you by nature are as crooked with God's truth as Satan himself. He is a liar, and "let God be true, and every man a liar." But now, through the mercy of God, we have been delivered from that crookedness, from that enmity, and led by faith to stand in sweet harmony with the testimonies of his word, in sweet harmony with that eternal mercy by which we are saved, and by which he himself is glorified. "I will make crooked things straight." It is a beautiful scripture, and a scripture upon which one can hardly speak with safety; for there are some weak ones among the people of God, and there are some good people, I am sorry to say it, but there are some good people that seem to be so much concerned about what the world will think of them, and what the world will say of them if they hold certain doctrines. Why, we ought not to feel like that; because we ought not to be ashamed of the truth, let the world think what they may of us on account of it.