

KINGS THAT NEVER DIE

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning December 15th, 1867

by Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 9 Number 475

“We shall reign on the earth.” Revelation 5:10

THIS book of the Revelation has been so secularized by almost all the learned that have written upon it, and the book has become thereby so obscured, that there are many worthy ministers in this country who have not had the privilege of much human learning, nor the time to read long church histories, who conclude, therefore, that this book to them must remain forever sealed, thus making that great mistake which a little attention to the book itself would correct. For in the 10th chapter, it is stated that the mystery of God is to be “finished,” or completed, “as he has declared to his servants the prophets.” I therefore must go, not to the learning of men, but to the Old Testament, to get an explanation of what is recorded in this apparently ambiguous book. There are ministers who do in effect actually prohibit the book altogether, and who ridicule those that attempt to meddle with it. These are men that have a certain system to carry out, and they wish to bring others into their system, and therefore do not wish them to read the Scriptures without those limitations which will secure their system, so that the people will then be in less danger of seeing for themselves. Whereas the great object of an honest minister is that the people should see for themselves. Why, the apostle Paul says, “Not for that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of our joy;” and again he says, “I speak as unto wise men; judge you what we say.” We also read that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable.” And what is said of this book especially? “Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words this prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein, for the time is at hand.” Is not this enough to settle the matter? “Blessed is he that reads” well, then, it is right that we should read, and they that hear” well, then, it is right that we should listen to the contents of this book, for it contains nothing but that which is contained all through the Old Testament, “and that keep the things that are written therein.” And what are written therein? Why, the exploits of the Lord Jesus Christ; the goings forth of his Spirit in the ingathering of sinners. And so, we find in the 7th chapter of this book a multitude that no man can number gathered into the blessedness achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Then it is said, “The time is at hand.” This puzzles those who take the chronograms of this book in a chronological manner, and suppose that they have a strict literal meaning. It puzzles them very much when they read that “the time is at hand.” This is more than eighteen hundred years ago, for while it says at the top in the margin “96,” indicating that this book was written in the year 96, you

must pay no attention to that; it is simply a lie. The book was written before 96; it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem. If we take this, as it ought to be taken, in the relative sense, how true it is. Was there ever an age when death was not at hand with every man? We are here this morning, but then we are here only a little longer; our death is at hand; and when we come to that time we shall either come into the judgments recorded in this book (and you all know what they are; you read in this book of the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, and of the characters that shall be cast therein), or else we shall realize the blessedness of the dead that die in the Lord, who rest from their labors, and whose works, that is, their good works, do follow them. Their bad ones cannot follow them, because they are all swallowed up and put away by the one sacrifice of Christ; and they themselves are approved, accepted, because they are complete in him. The time, then, in this relative sense, is at hand in all ages, and it will be, in this relative sense, down to the end.

Our text presents itself in a twofold form. I will try and give a sample of its meaning, and that is all I can do in the little time I have to speak. I will, in the first place, *point out the persons included in the pronoun "we"* and secondly, *the nature of their reign.*

First, then, *the persons included in the pronoun "we;"* the persons that shall thus reign with Christ; the persons that are thus delivered from the reign of sin, death, and error delivered from every hostile power, brought into the faith of Christ, and that faith holding fast Jesus Christ they thereby, not as in their own feelings and circumstances, but as they are one with Christ, have dominion virtually over everything that stands against them. Let us look at them as they are represented in this beautiful chapter. In the first place, we read that the Savior opened the book, and I may just observe that we cannot doubt but that this book sealed with seven seals is intended to represent the holy Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, and that the Holy Scriptures are to the natural man a sealed book. He may get at many things in them, but he cannot get at the vitality that is in them; he cannot get at the mercy that is in them; he cannot get savingly at the mysteries which are in them. They are to him a sealed book. John seems to have lost sight of Jesus Christ as the way in which the promises of the Old Testament should be carried out, and hence he says, "I wept much." He wept because he felt that if there were a stop put to the promises of God then his hope was cut off. John, like the rest of us, though more deeply than we can, felt the insufficiency of the things of time to satisfy or give rest to the powers of the immortal soul; that there is that in Christ, and in Christ alone, that can wholly satisfy the soul with favor, or fill it with the blessing of the Lord. He therefore wept much until the angel revealed to him the delightful truth that Jesus Christ had, by virtue of what he had wrought, confirmed the promises, and that, while he died to save, he lived to carry out the fulfillment of those promises. And when John, and the living creatures, and the elders saw this, they might well fall down and worship him that sits upon the throne, and that lives for ever and ever. But let us see how they are distinguished. First, they are distinguished by having the harps of God. They had every one of them harps. These musical instruments represent the truths of the gospel in their power to charm the souls of the people of God. And you cannot be strangers to this truth. You sometimes sing, and truly sing:

"No angel's harp such music yields,
As what my Shepherd speaks."

These harps, then, represent the truths of the gospel. I will in this part give a sample, in order to make the matter clear, of what the truths are that were held by these persons, and if we hold the same truths in the same spirit then we are a part of the happy people that shall thus reign. You may almost, and perhaps quite, anticipate the psalm to which I am going, namely the 71st. There you have a beautiful sample of what the testimony of the gospel is that these people held. Thanks to the Lord for that verse, which I believe is the only one in all the Bible that clearly explains the spiritual meaning of the literal musical instruments that were used in the temple, the 22nd verse of the 71st Psalm: "I will praise you with the psaltery, even your truth, O my God; unto you will I sing with the harp, O you holy One of Israel." Here you have the psaltery spiritualized: "I will praise you with the psaltery, even your truth." There is an explanation. Now let us get from that psalm a sample of what the truth is, before we come to the beautiful testimony which they held as represented in this chapter. The first thing that the people taught of the Holy Spirit are here represented as holding is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that that righteousness gave them such an apprehension of God, such a confidence in God, such an admiration of God, that it seems to overwhelm them with gratitude and delight. The words are these: "Your righteousness, also, O God", meaning of course Christ's righteousness, "is very high, who have done great things; O God, who is like unto you." Ah, if you would see God to advantage, you must see him by what Jesus Christ has done, and see how he has brought in this righteousness, and has left the challenge upon record, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" The church of old entered into this, and they thus saw God in that infinite and eternal advantage which we have by precious faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Then the next thing mentioned in that beautiful paragraph is the tribulations of the people of God; and those tribulations will go on, to endear these eternal testimonies of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the Lord being by that righteousness eternally on our side, working in us and working for us, and will continue to do so. "You, which have showed me great and sore troubles." Is there a Christian I am speaking to this morning that has not had many sore troubles, that perhaps he has told to no one? There is a common saying among us, and you will forgive me for using it, that "no one knows so well where the shoe pinches as he that wears it." I think we often look upon our brethren and sisters, and are ready to say, "how happy they all are! they are not plagued, and troubled, and cast down as I am there is no sorrow like my sorrow. My experience is so wretched, my path is so dark, that I do not think there is anyone like me." Yet we find sometimes, when we come into close conversation with some of our brethren and sisters that we think are going on very easily, that they have their sore troubles, their griefs, their burdens, their trembling. These tribulation-like experiences make the music of the gospel the more charming, will make its truths the dearer. And then see the sweet confidence which the church of old had in the Lord. "You, which have showed me great and sore troubles, shall quicken me again, and shall bring me up again out of the depths of the earth." I like that expression, "you shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth." What a lamentable thing it is that while our precious souls are born for heaven, formed like unto Christ, yet there are times when this world and the cares of it so deaden it and so overwhelm it, that you seem spiritually as though you were both dead and buried; ready to say, "why, there is no life in me; I am buried in the depths of worldly care, and I am afraid I shall prove at last to be but a mere stony ground hearer, for everything seems gone." But are we happy in that state? No; there is an aching void; we feel it is not right; we feel we are not at home, and we are glad to see such a promise as this, "I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the land of Israel." "You, which have showed me great and sore troubles, shall quicken me again, and shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth. You shall increase my greatness", that is, you shall

enlarge my acquaintance with the greatness of your love, your mercy, your salvation, and your glory, “and comfort me on every side.” So that you may look backward, and look forward, on the right hand and on the left, and be comforted on every side by this testimony, that “as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people forever.” Then comes the sweet music: “I will also praise you with the psaltery, even your truth.” And what is that truth? Why, the righteousness that Jesus Christ has brought in, and that you will quicken me, I cannot quicken myself, that is a truth; and that you will increase my greatness, that is a truth; and that you will comfort me on every side, that is a truth. And David then goes on, and plunges as it were sweetly into eternal redemption. He says, “my lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto you; and my soul, which you have redeemed.” Here he comes into eternal redemption. Now go to the 14th chapter of Revelation, and what have you there? There you have the harpers harping with their harps; and what was their theme? Why, the song of eternal redemption, which none could learn but those that were redeemed from the earth. So says David, “And my soul, which you have redeemed.” And then notice his conclusion. Oh, if you are enabled this morning in a humble measure to come to the same conclusion, and to take the universal sweep which the psalmist there takes by faith in Christ's righteousness, then you will see yourself standing indeed where David was when he said, “He set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.” Hence David, after thus presenting to us the righteousness of Christ, the tribulation path, God's care over us, not to let us remain in that dead state too long, and to enlarge our coasts, and comfort us on every side, to make his blessed truth that music that can charm our sorrows away, he then, as I have said, plunges into eternal redemption, and then comes to the sweet conclusion, “My tongue also shall talk of your righteousness all the day long; for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.” What does that mean? It means that all our sins are confounded; it means that they are all put away; it means that all our fears, all our tribulations, death itself, everything that would hurt us is confounded, but we ourselves are never to be confounded, for “he that believes on him shall not be ashamed.” “They are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.” Therefore, whatever there is that would hurt you is by the incoming of this eternal righteousness forever overcome. These are the persons that shall reign. They receive God's testimony, they know this tribulation-like path; the gospel to them at times is a joyful sound, and blessed is the soul to whom it is a joyful sound; they shall be quickened again and again, their greatness shall be increased, they shall be comforted on every side, having on their side this eternal righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the persons that are thus brought to receive God's eternal truth. It is also said of those that shall thus reign, that they have “golden vials, full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.” Huntington says the golden vials mean the new heart. Well, I am not disposed to differ from that. If we say the golden vials mean precious faith, which is more precious than gold, it will come to the same thing in substance; and you read of the prayer of faith. I like, for myself, Mister Huntington's thought upon it, that it means the new heart; and the vials full of odors are the prayers of the saints. What is it that thus makes the soul full of odors? Go to Solomon's Song, and I hope and trust all of you that know the Lord have had seasons when that testimony in Solomon's Song has been realized in your soul, where it is written, “Because of the savor of your good ointments your name is as ointment poured forth.” The saints of God, in their prayers, savor of God's Christ, not of man's Christ, but of God's Christ; they savor of his death, they savor of all the free-grace testimonies of his word. There is not a natural man nor a woman under the heavens can pray as the believer prays. The natural man cannot honestly, understandingly, truly, pray with David in the 106th Psalm, “Remember me, O Lord, with the favor that you bear unto your people;” there he takes the

sovereignty of God into his prayer; "O visit me with your salvation;" he knew that was the remedy; "that I may see the good of your chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance." These are the prayers of faith that are pleasing to the Savior. All those petitions presented to him in the days of his humiliation that arose from a renunciation of all other confidence but in him, they were the prayers that were pleasing unto him. Hence the woman that had spent all her living upon physicians, and was no better, but rather grew worse, all her confidence was destroyed in every other respect; but just in proportion as her confidence in other respects was destroyed, her confidence in the Savior increased. "If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be whole;" and so the Savior honored that confidence.

Let us now look at the character of these people. "You are worthy to take the book." "Worthy" there not only means a right, but also ability, in contrast to the inability of any mere creature to carry out the promises of the everlasting gospel. "For you were slain." Shall I give you here a sevenfold representation of the Savior's death? There are in the Old Testament seven instances, apart from the regular daily worship, of sacrifice being received by fire, and all pointing to Christ's death, who met the fiery law in its penalty for us; and if you trace out all these seven circumstances, I am sure you will say it is right to call his death a wondrous death. Take the first instance, that of Abel. Fire descended, and the sacrifice was accepted. What is the reigning feature there? Why, Abel obtained witness that he was righteous; that is, that while Jesus Christ should by his life work out eternal righteousness, he should by his death bring in that righteousness, so that Christ is thus the end of the law to him that believes, the end of the law for righteousness; and you stand righteous before God. That is the 4th of Genesis. Then you go to the 9th of Leviticus, and you read that "Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people and blessed them." If he had met them by their sins, he must have cursed them; but there was the sin offering, that took away the sin; there was the burnt offering, that took away the wrath; there was the meat offering, that took away the famine; so the curse is gone out, and the blessing is come in. And Moses, a little suspicious, as though he should say, Aaron, you are blessing the people; let us make sure, "Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation," to see the Lord, and know whether this blessing might really go on. And when they came out, Moses did not say, Aaron has been too fast in blessing you; I have been in to see the Lord, and I find there is some curse left. "no", "Moses and Aaron came out, and blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat, which, when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces," and well they might. Thus, in the 4th of Genesis we get the righteousness; in the 9th of Leviticus we get the blessing. Then I come to the 6th of Judges, and the fire descended, accepting the offering; and poor Gideon, like the rest of us, was afraid. Why, he says, I shall die now: the Lord means to kill me. I have had such a sight and sense of what I am as a sinner, and that fire came with such awful fierceness, and consumed the sacrifice in a moment; if the fire of God's law thus deals with an innocent victim, how will it deal with me? I shall die, I shall die. Oh, the Lord says, "I do not mean your death I mean another dying for you." Fear not, you shall "not die." Oh, well then, Lord if that is it, if the sacrifice is for me, then I will build an altar, and I will call it Jehovah-shalom, "the Lord will send peace." Thus, then I get the righteousness, the blessing, and the peace; the fierce wrath is forever gone. Then I go to the 13th of Judges, and there is another sacrifice offered on a rock, to denote the stability of the love of Him that provided the sacrifice, the stability of his promise, his truth, his priesthood, the fire came, "and the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar" and Manoah and his wife did the best thing they could do, they stood and looked on, while the angel of the Lord did

wondrously. Manoah took a little discouragement from it; he thought he should die, but his wife was a better minister than Manoah was, she began to reason as a woman can do when she is puzzled a little. "If," she said, "the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would he have showed us all these things, nor would he as at this time have told us such things as these." Here, then, the angel ascended to heaven in a fame of fire, pointing to the dear truth that the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven by virtue of his own sacrifice that he rose to eternal glory by the living virtue of his own sacrifice. As his own sacrifice carried him triumphantly to heaven, it shall carry every believer triumphantly to heaven. Well may it be written that "they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony." Then I go on to the 21st chapter of First Chronicles, and there I find poor David in a sad plight. The plague had set in, there was the angel with his threatening sword, and all the pious doings in the world could not move the angel. Ah, what is to be done? Build an altar, come unto the Lord with sacrifice. The fire descended, the sacrifice was accepted; not a man died after that. The Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed. Oh, how often has faith in Jesus stayed our plagues and troubles, and we have been happy. Then I go to the 7th chapter of Second Chronicles, and there I find "the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house;" to denote that by the sacrifice of Christ the people of God shall be filled with a fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. Then I go to the 18th chapter of First Kings, and I find the fire descends, accepts the sacrifice of Elijah, the enemies were confounded, the people brought to God, and showers of blessing descended. Now then run through these. In the first place, you get righteousness, that is what we need; then you get the blessing, that is what we need; then you get peace, that is what we need; then you get the ascension of the Savior to glory, that we need; then you get the plague stopped, and that we need; then you get the house full of the Lord's presence, that we need; and then we get the enemy confounded, we no longer afar off, but brought to God. "A sound of abundance of rain;" "a cloud like a man's hand;" the hand of the God-man mediator. Not "a cloud about the size of a man's hand", do not quote it that way; it does not read that way; but "a cloud like a man's hand." Jesus as the fountain of life rolls in upon us blessing after blessing, and will continue to do so to all eternity. Now, the Lamb that was slain, see the testimony that they gave, see the prayers they prayed, and see what is contained in the death of Christ. This is only a mere sample. And then the people of God are careful upon something else. There was no chance work about it. "You were slain and have redeemed us to God;" perhaps that was a few from some pious part of the earth, where the people were unusually good, unusual civilized, and unusually improved, where the social improvements of man had brought up souls to God. Ah, but it so happens it is "out of every kindred and tongue, and people, and nation", savage and civilized, Jew and Gentile, Fenians of the deepest die. But when grace lays hold of them, oh! it turns the lion into the lamb, the fool into the saint, yes, exalts the poor degraded creature into what is here described: "you have made us unto our God kings and priests, redeemed us to God." It is no use to tell us that some are lost for whom Christ died. He died for us, and his atonement has brought us here, brought us to God, and there is no going away again. There is no breaking in, no going out, no complaining in these heavenly streets. "Happy is the people that is in such a case; yes, happy is the people whose God is the Lord."

Now let us in conclusion look at *the nature of the reign of the people*. This reign is entirely spiritual. It must not be presented in any other way; it must be understood purely in the spiritual sense. The Lord brought the Israelites into the promised land and, all the time they held fast his covenant, and

abode by him, that promised land was everything to them which the Lord had promised it should be. So, he brings us into the gospel land into the liberty of the gospel. And here is the mighty differences, for one of them at least, between the temporal and the spiritual, that the Holy Spirit carries on the work, and Christ prays that our faith fail not; so that the new covenant child of God cannot err where they erred. They erred in disbelieving God's truth; whereas we as we go on feel more and more our need of it. Now while they held fast God's truth, they reigned over everything; there was no adversary that could deprive them of anything. Just so we are brought by precious faith into the liberty of the gospel, and the promise stands thus: that "He will not suffer your foot to be moved; he that keeps Israel will not slumber nor sleep." So, it is said that "he shall preserve you from all evil; and here is evidently a contrast intended between the old and new covenant; "He shall preserve you from all evil." Now what was the evil that they were not preserved from? First, they lost the favor of God, that favor which he had to them, for he said, "I will love them no more." But in the new covenant that can never take place. He will never say to his new covenant people, "I will love you no more." They lost the distinction of God's election of them from another nation. But God's elect can never lose their distinction; they are chosen in Christ Jesus. Again, they lost the promises, the promises were conditional. But the Christian can never lose the promises, because the promises will not lose him. "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." They also lost the salvation from Egypt, it ceased to be any good to them. But will the salvation which Christ has wrought ever cease to be of good to us? Never. Thus, then, we reign in the promised land so as to hold fast the truth, and no evil as we stand there can befall us; all other evils shall be turned to advantage; all afflictions shall be subservient to the working out of a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. I take this to be one part of the meaning: "We shall reign on the earth," on the promised land; and some of us have been so now for many years. Then there is another reading which it will bear. The Greek word here translated "on" is a preposition very frequently rendered "over;" and so we may read the text thus, "We shall reign over the earth." Hence in the 149th Psalm, "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand;" that must be understood spiritually, of course, the sword of the Spirit, "to execute vengeance upon the heathen," that is as a testimony; Noah condemned the world as a testimony; and as the people of God are one with him in his judgments; they are spoken of as executing vengeance upon the heathen; and punishments upon the people; "to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron," all to be understood spiritually; "to execute upon them the judgment written; this honor have all his Saints." Now the Lord's people have always been kind where they could (at least, when they have been in their right minds), I must put in that parenthetical remark, because they are human like other people; but how Joseph bound Pharaoh. But Pharaoh was willing to be bound in such chains. All the magicians in Egypt could not explain that mysterious dream; Joseph comes and reveals the secret, and the consequence was that he bound the king, as it were, in golden chains. By and by, when Daniel opens up to Nebuchadnezzar the secret, how did Daniel there bind him? Ah, Daniel, I feel bound to you; I feel bound to make a decree that if anyone say a word against your God he shall be cut in pieces, and his house made a dunghill. That was Nebuchadnezzar's way of doing it; still, it does not alter the fact that Daniel did bind this mighty monarch, as it were, with fetters and chains. And how was he bound by the three worthies. They are loosed. Why, says Nebuchadnezzar, I bound them. Ah, if God unbind, what is the use of your binding? You thought you were going to burn them to ashes; but you do not know their God. So, Nebuchadnezzar felt bound to honor these three men. Daniel, again, in the lion's den. See how Mordecai bound Ahasuerus; see how Daniel bound Belshazzar. Oh, my hearer, what will not faith and prayer do? What will not that access we have to God do? And I am sure we live

in times when we need access to God, even on behalf of the nation in which we live; for we see the adversary taking every possible means to disturb that peace with which the Lord has blessed us. And perhaps these things are to stir us up, and to remind us that the blessings we have, even in those respects, are from the Lord, and that they are not given to us on the ground of any merit in us, but on the ground of his good pleasure; and there are many ways in which he leads us to make us see how easily he can take from us many favors we have. Nevertheless, having this access to God, as it is stated of Judah of old, I trust it is true at present of us and of other churches as well where truth and grace prevail, that "Judah yet rules with God, and is faithful with the saints." "We shall reign over the earth." Neither height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able so to reign over us as to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus; and at the last you will be constrained to acknowledge of every trouble that you have not only got over it, but that the Lord has made it a part of the all things that shall work for good. Then the next feature that I notice of this reign is to my mind infinitely delightful, and that is, it is a substitutional reign. It is a kingdom, an inheritance, held for us by the Lord, and held by us by faith, when we have nothing else to possess. It is a life, a light, a fullness of joy, eternal glory, held for us by the Lord, and held by us by faith, in order to come in when we have nothing else to possess. And that, you know, will come to pass. A dying hour every moment approaches nearer and nearer. Oh, how sweet then to have this substitutional kingdom, when all other kingdoms shall and must be merely as the chaff of the summer threshing door, with us they shall have passed away. But here is a kingdom, here is a life, here is a reign, here is a conquest, that stretches on to eternity. And so, you will find in the very last chapter of this book it is written of these same people, "They shall see his face, and shall reign for ever and ever." And then this reign is also final. The apostle Paul says, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Now that is a very difficult scripture. The best way I could ever get at it is this, that all the victories that men have ever wrought in this world, and whatever advances they have gained by those victories, death comes and deprives them of all those advantages. But the victory Jesus Christ has wrought, neither death nor life can ever deprive us of the advantages thereof. The wonderful developments of the hidden powers of the soul, the great achievements of men in science, mechanics, and other branches, I would not say a word to disparage them, because they have been and are of great usefulness to us.