

THE SURE WORD

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning June 9th, 1867

by Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 9 Number 447

“But Esaias is very bold, and said, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he said, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto, a disobedient and gainsaying people.” Romans 10:20, 21

THE first verse of our text is the voice of God in the gospel of Christ; the second verse of our text is the voice of God in the old covenant. The second is the word of God as much as the first verse, but this second verse is not the gospel of God. This verse is given by inspiration of the Spirit of God, but it is not the ministration of the Spirit. This verse is given not in any relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, except to bring before us our need of that better covenant of which Christ is the mediator. Of course, I am aware that this last verse is taken by a great many people to mean that God stretches forth his hands to people in order to save them, and that he fails because they fail to recognize his hand and his voice. This is nothing else than the doctrine of human duty and of divine attempts. This is a doctrine that is delusive, and it is of vast importance that we should beware of false doctrine. Remember, the fall of man took place by false doctrine. And there is no doubt that Cain held fast Satan's doctrine, by which he was led into acts of hostility to God's truth, and those acts of hostility carried him so far as to slay his brother Abel. Cain's works not being works of faith, they were therefore evil; for “whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” and “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” It was also by false doctrine that the Israelites of old were from time to time brought into the captivity of which we read; and it was by false doctrine that so many were led to oppose the prophets and to slay them and to bring swift destruction upon themselves. It was by false doctrine that the Pharisees of old crucified the Savior, opposed the gospel, and persecuted the apostles; and it has been by false doctrine that persecuting powers have, in different ages, persecuted the saints of God. Even good people in times past have been so far led in that respect by false doctrine as to persecute others; for on going through the history of our own country there is no sect which, whenever it was in the ascendant, did not persecute the other. This was from false doctrine; for had they been rightly led they would have seen that the very fact of their persecuting

others was a denial of their own principles. For if it be the Lord that makes us to differ, what right have I to be angry with that man, to persecute that man, or to try to put that man down, upon whom the Lord has not been pleased to bestow the grace he has upon me? He is not my creature, he is God's creature, and therefore I must leave him in the hands of the Lord; any farther than if I have a heart to pray for, such a one, and indeed for everyone, so far so good. It therefore behooves us to be very cautious. For false doctrines may be buoyed up by a great many Scripture quotations, and this is what people are deceived by; but then we must look into the real meaning of things. The Savior not only cautions us as to our hearing, to take heed what we hear and how we hear; but he also cautions us against false prophets. "Take heed and beware of false prophets; you shall know them by their fruits." Now mind, not by their leaves, but by their fruit. There is many a tree whose foliage is very attractive, and you will hardly see a dead leaf on it, a most admirable tree; yet when you come to close quarters there is no fruit on it. And such trees, notwithstanding all their beautiful foliage, are destined to be cursed. So, we are not to know false prophets merely by their character before the world. Many of them are of the most admirable character. Where, for instance, do we find a more admirable character than Dr. Pusey? He is a most admirable man, his leaves are green; not a single stain, or shadow of a moral stain, upon the man's character, most admirable. But where is there a man that knows his own heart, and that knows the truth that does not feel as satisfied as to whose servant Dr. Pusey is as much as he does as to whose servant the Pope of Rome is; for no man taught of God could introduce such infamous delusions as are advocated by some men. So it is that the ministers of Satan are transformed as the ministers of light. Now you are not to know them by their leaves, but by their fruits. People are apt, in this sense, to take leaves for fruits, and to say, ah, he is so amiable. The apostle Paul was in this secret, and he says, You may plead the amiableness of these men, but "if an angel from heaven bring any other gospel than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." We are to know them by their fruits; that is, we are to know them by their testimonies. If they can bring forward good treasure out of their own hearts, experiences of God's truth, if they can bring forward the doctrines of the everlasting covenant, from an experimental acquaintance with them, these are the fruits. And the consequence is, that where this is the case the people get some food. The true prophet is thus distinguished from the false by bringing forth fruits. You will very often see in an orchard or a garden a most beautiful tree, covered with foliage, not a dead leaf on it; but no fruit. There is a tree a little distance from it that looks rather shabby about the leaves, but loaded with fruit. When you come near you say, What beautiful fruit there is on this tree! Now we should like to see a little more foliage on it; but with all the drawbacks, and all the want of leaves, for myself I would rather have the one with the fruit than the other with all its leaves and no fruit. Therefore, "you shall know them by their fruits;" that is, by the testimonies which they bear. This is just the way you judge of people when you have to receive them into the church. You inquire first as to their leaves, as to their moral character, then you have to look for the fruits; and if they cannot bring forward some fruits, those testimonies that shall make you recognize the life of the soul, if you find no experimental acquaintance with the things of God, then such cannot be received. A good tree is sure to bring forth a good testimony; and that testimony is food to the living soul; that testimony is as apples of gold in pictures of silver; for such are words that are fitly spoken unto those that are alive from the dead and that understand this matter.

This morning, instead of following the words of our text, I mean to proceed thus: First, *to bring out the gospel of the first verse in our text*; second, *to bring before you proof which the word of*

God gives us that this last verse is an old covenant scripture, and that it is not gospel, nor is it addressed to men in general, but belongs entirely to the old covenant.

First, then, I will try to *bring out the gospel of the first verse in our text*. You will perceive that both verses are a quotation from the 65th of Isaiah; and the reason that the apostle says that “Esaias is very bold” in this first verse, for he does not apply the word to the second verse, but only to the first, is because Esaias is here speaking of the gospel. The gospel having put away all sin, and every promise of the gospel being yea and amen, he could here speak boldly; for “the righteous is bold as a lion.” But then he must first be righteous, and when once justified by faith in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and having God eternally on his side according to the worth and worthiness of that righteousness by which he is justified, such may well be bold; for “if God be for us, who then can be against us?” But we will trace out in that 65th chapter the gospel of our text. Now in that chapter the prophet seems to give our text as a kind of text to something else he has to say. And there are four things which he there presents to us, which may the Lord help me to open up clearly, and you to understand advantageously. The first thing is the preservation of the tribe of Judah, because the Lord Jesus Christ was there; that is the first part of the gospel that the prophet brings out of what is implied in this verse. Hence, he says, “As the new wine is found in the cluster” that is, in the cluster of grapes, “and one says, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants sakes, that I may not destroy them all.” I think the cluster of grapes here means the tribe of Judah, and the new wine in that cluster means the Lord Jesus Christ, that he was to descend from the tribe of Judah. “And one says, Destroy it not.” Now it is open to all to observe that the other tribes were broken up and scattered, never to regain, as I believe, their tribal distinction again: I believe the Jews are lost as to their tribal distinction, and lost forever. They answered their purpose, and they are gone as to their tribal distinction forever: the Jews as to their nationality are gone forever. But all the time this new wine, Christ Jesus, was in that tribe, that tribe was preserved. They underwent many captivities; they were in Babylon, as you are aware, seventy years; yet that could not break up the tribe of Judah. They returned, and experienced very much oppression under foreign nations even after they returned to their land. Hence the wars in the north and south of Canaan, called in Daniel the kings of the north and of the south, these made very frequently Canaan their battleground; so that Josephus says, “We were like a ship tossed between two seas.” Yet none of these things could break up the tribe of Judah. There stood the prophecy that it was from the royal house that Christ was to descend; that he was to be born at Bethlehem, and that tribe was preserved; not anything could destroy it. By and by the time came, and the Babe was born in Bethlehem just as the Lord predicted. “One says, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it;” that is, Christ was in that tribe. And I dare not enter upon what is there said; perhaps I had better leave it as it is; for you will at once see that there is unfathomable depth, that there is immeasurable height, incomprehensible breadth, and eternal duration in the one word “blessing” as there expressed, “for a blessing is in it.” Ah! if Christ were in that tribe, which he was, a blessing was in it indeed; and if Christ be formed in your heart the hope of glory, a blessing is in you indeed; and where he is there can be no curse. Jesus Christ is in the gospel, and a blessing is in the gospel indeed; for where he is there is no curse. Jesus Christ is in heaven, and there is a blessing indeed; for where he is there is no curse, no sighing, no crying. “Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so, will I do for my servants sakes, that I may not destroy them all.” Though the enemy shall cut off the Jewish nation, yet there shall be exceptions; there shall be a remnant according to the election of grace: and these, having Christ with them, shall not be destroyed. We may take from this a great deal of encouragement. Many, many centuries rolled over before the

time for the Messiah to appear; but he did come. So, then, the Lord give us not only faith, but give us patience, not to be in too great a hurry; not to think that everything is over with us when it appears to be so; because some of us have already learned that our extremity is God's opportunity; and that when we are shut up and there is no strength left, and everything seems as bad as it can be, then the Lord steps in. So, all the time Christ was one with this tribe it could not be broken up; and after he was gone that tribe could no more be kept together than it could be broken up before. This is a beautiful representation of Zion, the antitypical Judah, the church of the blessed God, that can never be broken up while Christ is there; and as Christ dwells in Zion forever, as he dwells in the true Judah forever, the true Judah can never be broken up. It is a church formed, organized, and quickened into oneness with the dear Savior, never to be broken up. It is a building never to fall into decay, to be thrown down, or to be taken down. They are trees of immortality, the people of God that must live forever. The second representation that we have in that chapter is the coming and the prosperity of the Savior. "I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob," there it is, you see, that helps us to understand the preceding verse. The prophet immediately follows up the subject: The Lord said, "I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains and my elect shall inherit it." That does not look like stretching forth his hands to a rebellious and gainsaying people, and failing to get them. "your elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there." Now the Lord Jesus Christ is there said to be an inheritor of God's mountains. Do not let us pass away from that without understanding it, because it is as we receive the truth in the understanding of it that we thereby profit. Now why is he said to be an inheritor of God's mountains? Is it not a form of speech to denote the elevation, the exaltation, the superiority, the supernatural character and surpassing glory of his kingdom? To help us out with this department, we will go to the 24th of Numbers, which, I think, beautifully explains what the prophet there means. My idea is that it means the exaltation of the Savior's kingdom, that this a kingdom that stands above every other kingdom, established as on the tops of the mountains and surpassing every other kingdom, that every other kingdom is to become as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. Now the Lord does, by a false prophet, trace this out very beautifully; You have in the 21th of Numbers the goodness of the dwellings of the saints set forth, that they have a paradisiacal dwelling by Jesus Christ, that they dwell by Jesus Christ in a land of plenty, in a kingdom of exaltation, in defiant strength, in sure, universal, and entire victory, in eternal security. These are the things there beautifully traced out. "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, and your tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth," that is, fertile valleys. It is expressive of that pleasantness into which we are brought by Jesus Christ; it is a kind of paradisiacal representation. And so, by Jesus Christ we are brought out of everything that is unpleasant into everything that is pleasant, in sweet accordance with those words in Solomon's Song, "At our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved." "As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side." These valleys represent the state of things into which Christ brings us; these gardens also represent the gospel state of things into which he brings us. "As the trees of lign aloes which the Lord has planted." These lign aloes, noted for fragrance, as the learned in those matters tell us, represent the Savior in the fragrance of his blessed name. "And as cedar trees beside the waters." The cedar is represented as the great center of attraction, for to this cedar shall be drawn all fowl, said the prophet, of every wing. Therefore, it is that paradisiacal and happy state into which the people of God are to be brought. But then we cannot recognize much of it here, because we are now in the plains of mortality, and we know these things only partially, we have them by faith. Now he goes on to illustrate what is meant by the Savior inheriting God's mountains, His kingdom being above every other kingdom. "He shall pour the

water out of his buckets.” His buckets are the clouds of heaven, spiritually, the truths of the gospel that shall drop as the rain and distil as the dew. “And his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.” So it is that the Lord Jesus Christ reigns over all. If there were one thing that he did not reign over, where would be your confidence? Your confidence in him for pardon, for presentation to God without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing; your confidence in him for everything you need, must be the same as your confidence in his power. We often have confidence in his power, and we believe in his power; but we think we are such sinners that he will never receive us, and so it is we seem to have comparatively little confidence in the riches of his grace, the efficacy of his blood, or the abundance of his mercy.

This universal victory which the Savior has wrought, where the Lord immutably interposes and opposes all that oppose us, and puts a negative upon anything and everything that would put a, negative upon his people. Would sin put a negative upon them? He puts a negative upon that. Would Satan put a negative upon them? He puts a negative upon Satan. Would tribulation put them down? He puts down tribulation and lifts them up. Would death put them down? He puts death down and lifts them up. And would error put them down? He puts down error and lifts them up.

Now after the prophet had thus represented this glorious gospel, the certainty of prediction, the order of Christ’s kingdom, and how the people are brought by precious faith to dwell with God in this paradisiacal peace and tranquility, he then goes on very solemnly to distinguish between those that belong to the Lord, and those that do not. He says, “Your servants shall eat,” that is, they shall eat of the bread of eternal life; they shall receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and he shall be their life. Is it not just so with us? Have we not, through his mercy, received Jesus Christ? and is not his sacrifice the very life of our hope and of our confidence? Is he not to us the bread of life? “My servants shall eat, but you” that are not my servants that are not my elect, that do not come into this order of things, that do not serve me in the newness of the Spirit, after the due order, “you shall be hungry;” that is to say, you shall be deprived of everything you have, and shall come to entire destitution. “My servants shall drink;” that is, they shall drink the water of eternal life; “the water that I shall give shall be in you a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life.” And is it not just so? Do we not receive the blessed gospel of God? and is not the gospel of God the word of life, and called by figure the water of life? Therefore, to take the water of life freely is to take the word of life freely. “My servants shall drink” of this water of everlasting life, “but you” that are not my servants, “shall be thirsty my servants shall rejoice, but you shall be ashamed.” And why are not the Lord’s servants ashamed? Because the Lord Jesus Christ has taken away their shame. They have as much cause to be ashamed as others; but then the Lord Jesus Christ has rolled away their reproach, and they appear before God, by what the Savior has done, free from fault, spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. “Behold, my servants,” whom you despised, calling them high doctrine people, Antinomians, and I do not know what all, “my servants shall sing for joy of heart,” but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. Here, then, let me stop a moment. Now it is clear that the doctrine declared concerning the cluster of new wine, the blessing that was in it, and therefore the tribe was kept together till Christ came, that there is, doctrine of certainty. Secondly, that Christ coming from the tribe of Juda was a doctrine of certainty; that he is an inheritor of God’s mountains, heir to this eternal glory, is a truth of certainty; that God’s elect shall be brought to understand this, is a doctrine of certainty; that his servants shall dwell there, is a doctrine of certainty. It is not for me to label men to hell or to heaven; I must leave

that to God; but I will solemnly declare that I do not believe that any man ever did or can serve God acceptably after any other order of things. You must be brought down low enough for all your legality to be destroyed, and you must be conformed to this glorious order of things; or how you can be saved God alone knows, I do not, I shall not venture myself, I have no desire to venture myself into those ambiguous ways of going to heaven, it does not matter about doctrine, they say; it does not matter about this or the other. I would rather myself be in the open, plain highway of holiness. "There shall be an highway, and it shall be called the way of holiness;" and I know of no way of holiness but that kind of holiness that God approves, Christ himself; I know of nothing that cleanses from all sin but the blood of Christ; I know of nothing that justifies from all things but the righteousness of Christ; I know of nothing that secures the soul to eternal glory but this order of divine and eternal certainty. See, then, the difference: "My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry, my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty." It is true they have their feasting times now, and we our fasting times; they have their drinking times now, and some of them, poor things! in the worst sense of that word; we have our thirsting times; they have their joyful times now, and we our sorrowful times; they have their exaltation now, and we have our humiliation; but the prophet goes beyond all this, and he sees that blessed are they that hunger now, that thirst now, that are sorrowful now, that are cast down now; blessed are they that mourn now. One of old, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, and everything apparently on their side, was amazed, until he went into the sanctuary of God. Ah, he says, then I understood their end. Alas! their feasting, their drinking, their rejoicing will soon close; their exaltation will soon be a thing of nothing, and the dunghill of eternal infamy will be their portion. Ah, then he says, "So foolish was I!" Well, I must say he was foolish; and I am sure I myself have sometimes been as foolish. So foolish was I to be envious of the wicked, because the Christian in his right mind ought not to be envious of any. Why, what can equal the standing of the Christian, the blessedness of the Christian? Are there such glorious things spoken of any city as are said of the city of God? But again, the prophet gives us another representation, and just see how beautifully he goes on. He says, "That he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth." You see it meets us just where we are. Take the word "truth" there to mean not the Bible at large all the word of God is true, but it is not all true in the sense there intended. It is evident there that the word "truth" means God's sworn truth by Christ Jesus. Hence for instance, the manna in the wilderness was true manna of its kind; but the Savior, to point out the eternity of the life we have by him, says, "My Father giveth you the true bread." And so, you read of the true riches, and of the true light, and of the true vine. Now the manna was true of the kind; but to denote eternal stability Christ as the bread of life is called the true bread. And the riches that endure forever, expressive of their stability in contrast with the temporary, they are called the true riches. And then that sun that will never go down, namely, Christ Jesus, is called the true light. Now the light of the sun is a true light of the kind; but to contrast the eternal with the temporal, Christ is called the true light. Then, again, the vine is true of the kind; but to contrast Christ's immortality as the vine with mere earthly vines, he says, "I am the true vine." Then the prophet says, "And he that swears in the earth", that is, takes the oath of allegiance to God, "shall swear by the God of truth," after this same order of things. And now mark the winding up; the summing up is lovely to the last degree: "because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from my eyes." What are the former troubles? I cannot say without stopping just a moment to bless God that we can call them the former troubles. What are they? Our sins. But then the time will arrive when they will cease to be, and then we shall call them "the *former* troubles." And we may call them the former troubles now, for Christ has put them away. Hence said the apostle, "God be thanked, that you were the servants of sin, but you

have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” Mind, I do not mean there, nor do I believe the apostle means, to thank God for sin, or to thank God that sin did with us what it did. I think his meaning is that he thanks God that sin is past that the time is gone, that it can no longer blind our eyes and keep us in unbelief, ignorance, and enmity. You are no longer its servants as you once were, but are now brought to serve the Lord. “The former troubles are forgotten.” “I am He that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins.” “They are hidden from my eyes.” “You have cast all my sins behind your back;” “hidden from my eyes.” “You have cast all their sins into the depths of the sea;” “hidden from my eyes.” He has blotted out the handwriting that was against us, having taken it out of the way and nailed it to his cross;” “hidden from my eyes.” Oh, what a lovely scripture is that! and we that know his name, we that love his truth, shall certainly realize the fulfilment of it, that “God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces.” And he will, if you do not believe me now, you will before you die, he will bring you into such circumstances that he alone can wipe your tears away. Job's friends could not wipe his tears; and his wife could not wipe his tears away; she does not seem to have tried. And so, it is that the Lord will bring you into such trouble that none but himself can soothe you in it. When He brings you into that trouble, you may go to this friend, that, and the other; you may go to the minister, and take a thousand different steps, but all will fail unless the Lord is pleased to make use of such means; but unless he does so, your troubles must remain. So, then, bless his dear name that his glorious gospel is such that it made Esaias bold.

“No man can be beforehand with you;
His grace is almighty, preventing, and free.”

But I have now, secondly, to bring before you the proof which the word of God gives us that this last verse is an old covenant scripture. “But to Israel He said, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” The Lord stretches forth the hand of everlasting love, and that hand goes back again without its object! That is man's gospel. But God's gospel is, “I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore in loving-kindness have I drawn you.” Whenever everlasting love puts forth its hand, it never withdraws, it always takes the object with it. It does not matter whether it is to stop a fiery Saul of Tarsus, or to lay hold of a thief on the cross, or a mad Gadarene, or a Magdalene, wherever it be, “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” stretches forth the hand of love, lays hold of the object, lifts it up, and deals with it according to that love. What, the hand of eternal redemption stretch itself forth, and go back without its object! Why, all the angels would exclaim in a way much more painful to us than the people of old, when they came to take the Savior, “What, have you not brought him?” Ah, what would heaven say to the Redeemer if he had put forth the hand of eternal redemption to save a sinner from death and hell, and went back without him? That is man's gospel. But God's gospel is, “The redeemed shall return, and shall come.” What, put forth his hand to quicken his soul from death, put forth a life-giving hand, a life-giving power, to bring Lazarus out of the grave, and could not do it! That is man's gospel. God's gospel is, that the Father quickens whom he will, that the Son quickens whom he will, that the Spirit gives to every man severally as he will. Again, the hand of eternal glory put forth itself to the heirs of glory, and suffer some to be plucked out of its hand, so that that man comes short of the glory, though the hand of glory reaches forth itself to receive him! That is man's gospel. But God's gospel is, “Them he justified, them he also glorified.” Let us, then, see what this verse does mean. Now the Lord chose the nation of Israel, and he put them under a temporal, external covenant, and there was nothing in that covenant, nor its laws, which a

natural man may not understand; all because it was a system, a dispensation, after the law of a carnal commandment. It was natural and temporal, there was nothing spiritual whatever in it. It had a spiritual meaning when looked at in its typical character, but taken in itself there was nothing spiritual in it; it was merely temporal. Now God, in his sovereignty, was pleased to put them into that position; but he was not pleased to adopt them as he has adopted his people in Christ. They, therefore, were to be his servants. You may not be disposed to adopt your servants, and make them part of your family. They stand upon a conditional footing, and you sincerely wish them well. There are certain conditions in your house they must comply with to do well; and if they readily comply with all those conditions, then they do well; they are pleased, and you are pleased, and you go on together. But, at the same time, you are not disposed to adopt them as your children, and thereby lay yourself under an obligation to keep them. Yet this is what God has done in the new covenant; he has laid himself under an eternal obligation to keep his own through all. He has sworn by himself that in blessing he will bless them. Now the Lord sent the prophets from time to time under the old covenant to exhort these people, when they were disposed to idols, to leave those idols, and to come to God, and to keep with him; and when they were sometimes very much oppressed, they did turn to God, and cried to God, and God interposed for them, and delivered them. And then they were determined to have something that should improve the Lord's own order of things. It is a remarkable thing that God's order of things has never been holy enough for the professing world; they have generally gone away from it because it is not holy enough for them. Well, now, the stretching forth of his hands seems to allude to the manner of the prophets in their public addresses. You read in the 26th of the Acts that the apostle Paul, when he commenced speaking, stretched forth his hand; and Moses, when at the side of the Red Sea, was commanded to stretch forth his rod. And as these prophets were representatives of the Lord, it is very likely in their manner of speaking, to denote their earnestness, they would stretch forth their hands, sometimes one hand, sometimes both. Now, in allusion to this, the Lord speaks of himself as stretching forth his hands, and entreating the people to give up their idolatry, and to conform to him. At the same time, he did not in that covenant undertake to make them do so; he did not undertake to write his law in their hearts, or fix it in their minds. Therefore, he says the new covenant is not according to the old covenant; that is, the conditionality is gone. He stretched forth his hands all day to a disobedient and a gainsaying people that were everlastingly provoking his wrath. But what has this to do with the gospel? There is nothing spiritual in this. It does appear to me to be a serious thing to represent God as a Father trying to save his children, and yet cannot; to represent the Savior as trying to save a sinner, and yet cannot; to represent the Holy Ghost as trying to save a soul, and yet cannot; and bring this verse to father that delusion.