

A GOOD PROPOSITION

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning September 27th, 1868

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 11 Number 516

“For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry,
Arise you, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God.” Jeremiah 31:6

THE fall of man has brought us into a fearful and destructive darkness, so that “darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people;” and so we all should have groped our way through life until we had lifted up our eyes in hell, but for Him who has said, in opposition to all that sin, and Satan, and death, and hell could do, “There shall be a day.” He who commands the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of his dear Son. And what is this day but the Lord Jesus Christ himself? He is the beginning of the day, he is the brightness of the day, he is the perfection of the day, and he is the eternity of the day. Hence the beautiful words, “Your sun shall no more go down, neither shall your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.” The Lord does thus reveal the day, and Christ is that day; he has brought us out of darkness into his marvelous light, and Jesus Christ himself is that marvelous light, for it is by him that we understand and realize the marvelous love of God, the marvelous grace, mercy, and counsels of God in sending us such a Savior. We may well say in the light of Christ, “This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes:” or again as also in the 118th Psalm, “This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” Therefore, to be called out of darkness into his marvelous light is to be called out of the darkness of the first Adam into the light of the last Adam; and he never would have been called the last Adam if there had been any separation from him. From the first Adam and from God there was separation. Christ, as I have often said to you, and I say it again with pleasure, is called the last Adam, because no one will ever take his place. He is the head of his people, and the head of his people he will remain; he is their representative, and their representative he will remain; he is their life, their ruler, and will continue forever to be so; and he holds for them that Paradise into which the dying, or rather living thief entered; and he will never lose either the Paradise that is held for the people, or the people destined for the Paradise. To be called out of darkness into this day is to be called out of the darkness of the law into the light of Christ, who is the embodiment and the essence of the gospel; to be called out of the darkness of death into the knowledge of Christ, who is our eternal life. “He that believes has everlasting life.”

I suppose you have no doubt in your minds that our text must be understood mystically, in the spiritual sense. Indeed, this chapter altogether is what we may call a new covenant chapter; we must therefore understand our text in accordance with the same. And in passing by the first clause, "There shall be a day," we have to bless God that we have been led to see that day, a morning and a day without clouds, without termination. "In him is no darkness at all." There is not anything there to discourage, but everything to encourage; and the reason we are so much discouraged is because we see not so clearly as we shall by-and-by the love which our God has to us, and the infinite wisdom by which he directs and manages us and all that appertains to us. I will notice, then, first *the watchmen*; secondly, *their position*; thirdly, *their proposition*; "they shall cry, Arise you, and let us go up to Zion, unto the Lord our God."

First, then, *the watchmen*. These watchmen represent, of course, not only the ministers of the gospel, but also all the people of God. And the words of the apostle include all parts of the work of the minister, and I may say, all parts of the work of the Christian, where he says, "I am set for the defense of the gospel." The business of a watchman is the protecting of property, and the good of those that are interested in that property. Just so it is the business of the minister to defend the gospel, and that is the property, the exceeding great and precious promises; in other words, the infinite, variety of eternal mercies and blessings that are in Christ; and in so doing he defends the rights and the liberties, the privileges and the good, of the people interested in the same. I will just set before you, in the first place, the theme of the watchmen, and let us see whether we ourselves are brought into their testimony. First, then, they are represented as discovering these two things. "When the question was put, "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" the beautiful answer is, "The morning comes, and also the night." I like that inquiry very much, "Watchman, what of the night?" When a sinner is convinced of his condition, he feels that his sinful condition is a dark night; he feels that his soul is in the darkness of the worst kind of night; and he sees that there is no day in hell; and such a one wants to know what will become of such a poor, benighted, blind, ignorant, lost creature as he is. "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" And the answer would be, if we were to give it in detail, How long have you felt that you are as a sinner in the dark? How long have you known that as a sinner you are blind? for Christ came that they which were blind might see; and that they which see, or think they see without him, might be made blind, or proved to be blind. The answer is, "The morning comes and that morning is the Lord Jesus Christ; but he is not welcomed nor appreciated, truly so, by any but those who are thus convinced of their darkness and their ignorance. It is one of the devices of Satan to persuade men that they do know what they do not know; and they undergo a change of opinion, and become a little religious, and make a decent profession, and they are received into the churches; and this passes for religion; while at the same time such persons have never so seen and felt their darkness, blindness, and lost condition, as truly to receive the Savior. "The morning comes." Let me once more remind you how the Savior is the morning. He is the morning by his being the entire end of sin. You want no other end; you want no other pardon, you want nothing else; it is done. He has hereby put an entire end to the night. And being the end of sin, he is the end of the law; we want no other end; he is the end of death, he is the end of Satan's power, he is the end of the powers of hell, he is the end of the power of tribulation; in a word, he is the end of all darkness. "The morning comes." But with whom does it come? Why, to those that are conscious that as sinners they are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. To them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death has a great light arisen, and they see in that light the termination of all darkness. Ah! let the Holy Spirit once seal this home to a poor sinner's heart, and let him see how

Jesus is the end of all darkness, let such an one see that in receiving Jesus Christ he receives all that he needs while he lives, and all that he will need when he comes to die, and all that he will need to eternity; oh! how will he bless God that ever this Morning Star dawned upon his soul, that ever this Dayspring from on high visited him. Ah! said one, I was in darkness; now, through mercy, I am brought into the light; once I was blind, but now I see; once I hated the light; it was because I knew not what the light was, nor my need of it. But now I love the light, and rejoice in the light, and bless God that he himself is my everlasting light; how therefore can I ever be left in fatal darkness? But the watchman had to say not only, "The morning comes," but "also the night." Yes, the man who is careless about his precious soul, it is daylight with him, such light as it is; all is pleasant, all is attractive, and all is pleasing; his light has not been turned into darkness. Now unto such, that live and die, and are not born of God, that do not undergo that great transition, "You must be born again," unto such the night comes commencing, shall I say, with affliction, or rather perhaps I had better say commencing with death. Oh, what a dark scene is the dying bed of the man that knows not God, and that obeys not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, what a dark scene! But, generally speaking, the delusion is followed up to the last. You can no more get a dying man into a real honest concern for his soul, or get him to see the truth, than you can a living man. I have in my time visited persons in that state, and they have sent word to me afterwards that they did not wish to see me anymore, for that the clergyman had been, and given them a little wine and a piece of bread, which they called the sacrament, and now they were very happy. Only look at it! is it possible that a man is so deluded that he will place the hope of his eternal salvation upon a piece of bread, which must rot and come to nothing, and a drop of wine? Why, only just look at it! And yet there are millions that believe one of the most daring, arrogant blasphemies, I think, that Satan could ever invent, that poor, dying, sinful worms have it in their power to bring the flesh, the blood, the deity, of Jesus Christ into a piece of bread and a drop of wine, and thereby make it saving. The Lord have mercy upon poor, benighted men. We may preach to them while they live, we may preach to them when they are dying; but unless the Holy and Eternal Spirit attend the word with quickening and with lightning power, they are but dry bones, still as willing in their last moments to be deluded as they have been all their lifetime. What shall some of us say that see these delusions, and are delivered therefrom, and led to see that our dependence for eternal life must be upon the person, the atonement, the righteousness, the grace, the mercy, the promises, and the covenant, of the everlasting God? If these foundations be removed, what then could the righteous do? Thus, then, the watchman is a man that sees and knows what it is to be benighted, and knows what the morning is that is to come, namely, Christ Jesus; and also knows something of the awful, the everlasting darkness that awaits those that live and die without Christ, without hope, and without God in the world. Whether we live many years or few, the Lord increase our zeal in his service. As far as I am concerned, if I had the bodily strength, which unhappily I have not, not a day, except Saturdays, should pass over my head, but I would be somewhere, especially as the people seem so willing to hear, setting forth these vital, these divine, and eternal things. Oh, my hearers, we shall never be able to praise the Lord enough for bringing us out of darkness into the light of the person and the mediatorial work of his dear Son. But again, the theme of these watchmen is the glad tidings of the gospel. Just see where they are placed in the 52nd of Isaiah. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that brings good tidings, that publishes peace;" that is, reconciliation to God; not imputing our sins unto us, having imputed them to one who has put them eternally away. That is a part of the good tidings. "That brings good tidings of good;" that is another part of the good tidings. We have heard a great many bad tidings of good, but in the gospel, you get no evil tidings of good. Ah! say you, how, where, when, have we heard

evil tidings of good? Why, friends, Paradise was good, but the tidings reached us that that was lost. Adam was good, as from the hands of his Maker, but the tidings reached us that Adam sinned and died. And so, in many other respects just so with the Jews; their land, and city, and establishment were good; but we have had the tidings that all this good through their apostasy is lost. Now, as a contrast to this, it there says, "good tidings of good;" that is, we shall always have to say the same things concerning the Paradise above; we shall always have to say the same things concerning the love of God, and concerning the salvation of Christ, and concerning the welfare of his people; the time will never come when we shall hear evil tidings of that God who is indeed to us good, and whose mercy endures forever. But, say you, what has this to do with the watchmen? Why, this is that gospel that they are to defend. Then again, "that publishes salvation;" that is another part of the good tidings, embodying the sweet truth that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. "That said unto Zion, Your God reigns." Every miracle the Savior did preaches that one truth, "Your God reigns." In everything he undertook he succeeded. Where will you look, then, for a more perfect illustration, in the first place, or confirmation of the truth that Zion's God reigns? Nor need I trace out the reign of our God's mercy in the ingathering of sinners, turning them into saints, in their preservation and eternal glorification. In the 52nd of Isaiah you have the tidings that the watchmen are to sound out. Hence the next verse says, "Your watchmen shall lift up the voice;" that is, the voice of the verse I have just quoted; "Your watchmen," referring there especially to the apostles; they should lift up the voice of the truth, declaring that Jesus Christ has made reconciliation; they should lift up the voice of truth, declaring the immutability of the mercy of our God; they should lift up the voice of truth, declaring God's salvation and his eternal dominion. And they should do this with very great pleasure, for it says, "With the voice" not without it, but "With the voice together shall they sing;" that is, God's truth shall make them happy. I need not here bring forward circumstances illustrative of this point; I may just name one, and that will be enough. When Paul and Silas prayed, and the Lord turned their prayers into praises, how then did they lift up the voice with singing? "For they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." The first time the Lord brought Zion was out of the literal Egypt; that was a typical Zion. But the second time, when he again brings Zion, is to be understood spiritually, that he brings the people out of a state of nature. And how was this work wonderfully begun in the apostolic age. And "your watchmen shall see eye to eye;" so at that time they did. Take the New Testament; see how the apostles saw eye to eye; and they so saw eye to eye that not one difference in doctrine existed among them; and the New Testament is sealed and closed, and a curse is pronounced upon the man who shall take anything from it, or add anything to it; because the apostles were the last class of ministers that did perfectly see eye to eye, and they were the last class of men while the world shall stand that will see perfectly eye to eye. All the people of God shall see eye to eye while they are in this world far enough for their eternal salvation, but they shall not so see eye to eye as not to have minor differences; whereas the apostles so saw eye to eye so as to have no minor differences. When I take up this book, the holy scriptures, I get two classes of men such as I defy any man to find in the whole range of the universe anywhere else. I get first the holy prophets, that is one class; they all saw eye to eye. And is there any wonder at this, when we are told that "holy men of old spoke," not by the will of man, but "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," by that infinite, eternal, and almighty Spirit who can never err. When the Holy Spirit had done his work by one prophet, he then raised up another; and when he had raised up that other, he did not forget what he had taught the first prophet; he taught them all the same thing, "To him give all the prophets witness." Thus, I get two classes of men, the prophets and the apostles, that saw eye to eye; there never were such men before, and there never will be again. We bless God for any

likeness we have to them, for any conformity we have to them. These are the watchmen, then, that cry with one voice, proclaim the same theme, the same good tidings of good, the same salvation, the same God, the same reign, the same certainty, the same glory. And yet, notwithstanding this sameness, there is to the astonishment, I may say, of every one a wonderful variety; but then the variety is like the variety of a well-constructed building, all is symmetrical, and one part suits another; so that the variety, so far from interfering with the harmony, makes up that beautiful harmony in variety, and variety in harmony, that the holy scriptures, as I sometimes say, when they discover to you one beauty, that one beauty will discover to you another, and so you may go on till you fall back in despair of discovering the whole, and adopt the language of Watts concerning Christ:

“His beauties we can never trace,
Till we behold him face to face.”

I will take one more instance of these watchmen, their position. “I have set watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem,” What is the language of these watchmen upon the walls? They stand upon the walls of Zion; and there is a poor creature, wandering about, hungry, thirsty, footsore, conscience-sore, heart-sore, miserable; they look round, there is another; look round, there is another; look round, there is another. When the watchmen see these, what then is their voice? They stand on the wall, and can be heard from afar, “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come you to the waters; come, buy wine and milk.” Ah! says one, but I can’t come; I am penniless, and almost infinitely in debt as well; therefore, I cannot come and buy. Stop! hear the message out: “buy wine and milk without money and without price” without trying to settle matters with the husk of human doings. Hear what your Creator says; hear what the God of salvation says! “Incline your ear, and come unto me, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” These watchmen are not to hold their peace, not to give the Lord any rest, “till he establishes, and till he makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” Now how does this city, the new Jerusalem, become a praise in the earth? Why, when the soul finds there is a refuge for it, the water of life for it, the wine of the kingdom for it, the bread of life for it, the sure mercies of David for it, everything that it can possibly need. So, then, these watchmen are not to keep silence, and to give the Lord no rest, “till he establishes and till he makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth,” attractive to poor sinners. So, then, the watchman must abide by his credentials, he must abide by the good tidings, and he must give the Lord no rest, and he himself must have no rest, but go straight on. What work is there to equal it? Only think of it, a minister goes and bears his humble and earnest testimony; God carries home that word to the regeneration of one soul; why, that soul is blessed to all eternity by the instrumentality of the testimony thus born. Oh, it’s a great work, a glorious work! The watchmen therefore must not sleep; and they must not be wine bibbers. We read of some that were watchmen, and that were blind, and great drinkers of wine. Come, say they, find us plenty of wine; we shall do. Oh, my hearers, anything and everything that has a tendency to divert the mind from the contemplation on the one hand of God’s eternal mercy, on the other hand, of his wrath, to the good of souls, everything that has a tendency to divert from this must be trodden under foot, according to the precious promise, “You shall tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under feet.” The people of God they are to look to themselves, see that they and the Lord are reconciled, that the reconciliation is real, and then they are to continue in these blessed truths; and in so doing they shall save themselves from this untoward generation. And the watchmen must be very careful to watch that no false gods be

brought in, no false doctrines; bundle them out as soon as ever they come; for if you bring a false god in, once do that, the gospel by slow degrees goes out, and something else takes its place.

But, secondly, I notice *their position*, is upon Mount Ephraim. This represents the position that the ministers and people of God are brought to take. Of course, we must understand this mountain spiritually; and how shall we understand it spiritually? In this way, that Ephraim, as you are aware, was included in the blessing of Joseph, therefore, whatever blessing was promised to Joseph belonged to Ephraim and Manasseh. Now, if Ephraim was included in the blessing bestowed upon Joseph, then it stands in this way: "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall." Joseph is thus, of course, a type of Christ; and this is where we are to take our position, by this fruitful branch, Christ Jesus the Lord, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Now the branches "run over the wall;" meaning, I think, that the fruit is for those that are outside. The Gentiles were outside. We must not, of course, drive the simile too close, but it does I think naturally convey that idea, that the branches running over the wall of the ceremonial law, these branches were for them that were outside. Hence, when Peter was sent for to go to Cornelius, see how freely the gospel was preached to them; and see how the Old Testament again and again speaks of the ingathering of the Gentiles. And then we apply it in another way. Some of you, perhaps, that are here this morning have never been so brought into the love of God as to be sure that you stand in that love; perhaps you have not been so brought into the knowledge of your election of God as to know your name is in the book of life; you have not been so brought into the enjoyment of the liberty of the gospel as to enable you to believe with an unwavering faith that you really have a standing in the city of God; you have not been so brought into the bond of the covenant as to say with the confidence that David said, "He has made with me an everlasting covenant." You are still outside. But while you are outside, yet just the same fruit that suits the taste of those that are inside of the city suits the taste of you seekers. Nothing but a free-grace gospel does for them that are inside the city, and that are brought into the enjoyment of these things; and nothing but the same gospel can suit the sincere seeker. So, then, if there be not a oneness between you in a way of assurance of interest, there is a oneness between you in a way of unity of faith, both believing the same things; there is a oneness of taste and spirit with you; so that while you have the faith of adherence, and not yet the faith of assurance, yet you like to see that the promises come over the wall, as it were, to them that are outside; and as sure as the Lord has made these blessed promises attractive to your soul, the Lord will someday, at an hour when you think not, open the city gate, and kindly say unto you, "Come in, you blessed of the Lord," for "blessed is he that is not offended in me;" "why stand you without?" And then, with the Orientals, the position of the bough or tree would have great weight, "even a fruitful bough by a well." In that country of heat and drought, such, similes would make great impression upon their imaginations; but we, having such abundance of that element, do not recognize so much the force of the simile as the Orientals would. But if we are spiritually taught, we shall say, Well, if the Orientals had a scarcity of water literally, I have found out what it is to be in a scarcity spiritually; and the Lord has said, "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." Then, again, it is said of Joseph, "His bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." Here I hardly know what to say; I can think better than I can speak. Oh, when I look at the precious truth that Jesus' bow abode in strength, never one symptom of weakness, "the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob," for "he gave not the Spirit by measure unto him." The dear redeemer in his humiliation

went on conquering and to conquer; in his exaltation he goes on conquering and to conquer, and will do till he has brought the last object of infinite and immutable love down to his dear feet. And do you ask how it was the apostles were such conquerors? It was through Him that conquered for them. Do you ask how it is that our bow has, that our bow does, that our bow will abide in strength? The answer is, because Jesus has conquered the whole. Hence the Savior said, "Set me as a seal upon your heart," that will strengthen your confidence; "as a seal upon your arm;" that will give you a kind of omnipotence; you must go on conquering and to conquer until the last enemy is overcome, and you rise to the highest heavens, and shine in the Savior's likeness. "From thence", that is, from God, "is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. We will have a word upon the shepherd presently. "The blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, unto the utmost bound" was language ever more sublime or more beautiful? "unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills." Who were Jacob's progenitors? Adam and Eve, and they were blessed, but not as Jesus Christ is, not as the people of God are; for Jesus Christ is blessed as much beyond Adam as he was in value beyond what Adam was; and the people of God are blessed as much beyond the first Adam as they are in their oneness with Christ above Adam in excellency and quality, being conformed to the image of the Son of God. "Unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills," the hills of eternity, and that utmost bound is infinity; eternity, like space, having no bounds. I have passed by one thing, which I must just name, and that is, that this same person, "the archers have sorely grieved him." Oh, how did they grieve the dear Savior! They said and did everything they could to grieve him. How many things we could name that must have grieved his pure nature! to see his reputation taken entirely away, and to see their vile slanders so prevail on the mob that they all cried out against him, and reckoned him worse than a murderer, "Not this man, but Barabbas." And see how they mocked him, spit upon him, and then to crucify him between two thieves! Is it not enough to make us ashamed of human nature? especially when we remember that these demoniacal doings are nothing but a picture of what we all by nature are. We may well, therefore, denounce human merit, and cleave to the freeness of the mercy of God. They grieved him, "and shot at him;" oh, what bitter arrows they shot at him! "and hated him;" so they hated his servants, and so they hate his truth down to this time. Yet by this wonderful person the holy apostles' abode, and so shall the people of God; nothing shall drive them away; for there are the blessings, and in spite of all the foe can do, "they shall be on the head of Joseph," and upon the head of all his seed; they shall not depart from them forever

Now *the proposition*, what shall I say to it? It is very beautiful. "Let us go up to Zion." This chapter sets forth this going up in a most majestic way. Look at the 10th and 12th verses of this chapter: "Hear you the word of the Lord, O you nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock." Now there is a fourfold idea of a shepherd keeping his flock. First, he keeps them as well as he can; second, he feeds them as well as he can; third, he heals them as well as he can; and lastly, he presents them in as good a condition as he can. That is what a literal good shepherd would do. Now Jesus Christ keeps his people as well as he can, and you know how well he can keep them; he himself tells us, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." So, he keeps them, and he heals them, and he feeds them well, and he will present them at the last in a good condition, yes, "without blame before him in love." "Let us go up to Zion, unto the Lord our God," and read out what he means to do; and as we read out what he means to do, let us watch his hand, and see how he himself carries out these great things. But what next? Why, that "the Lord has redeemed

Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.” There is a sweet field for thought. “Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd”, for everything they require. I must now just name four reasons for this proposition, and then close. The first is that assigned in the 2nd verse of this chapter. “Thus, says the Lord, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest.” How were they left of the sword? By the paschal Lamb. Let us go up unto the Lord our God and bless him for that Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, by whom we escape the sword of justice. Second, they went up to the feast of first fruits; there is our acceptance with God. Let us go up unto the Lord our God, and bless him for accepting poor sinners. Third, there was the feast of tabernacles. And fourth, the reason it is said to be to Zion is because the temple was there, the Lord was there; it was the place he had chosen.