

A PARDONABLE FAULT

A SERMON –Preached on Sunday Morning May, 10th 1868, by

MR. JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

VOL. XI. - No. 496.

" Cursed be the day wherein I was born."—Jeremiah xx. 14.

WE are assured that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God," and therefore must be "profitable for doctrine," to lead us into the deep mysteries of the mind, counsels, and salvation of God; and "for reproof"—this is what from the hand of the Lord we greatly and perpetually need, for the mind, by what there is in us and round about us, is perpetually going wrong, and therefore, it needs correction; and "for instruction in righteousness:" we forget a great many lessons that we have learnt, and therefore we need the continuation of the word of God and the Spirit of the Lord for our instruction: — "That the man of God may be perfect;" that he may possess all that is needful for his present preservation, all that is needful to enable him to walk with God, and all that is needful to enable him to die a saved and a happy man, and to rise in a triumphant and glorious resurrection;— "thoroughly furnished unto all good works." And the wise man says, "He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good; and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." So, the language of, our text this morning, if the Lord shall be pleased to give me wisdom to handle it in a way that shall be profitable, we shall then find that this, part of his word, as well as other parts, is profitable. In attempting, then, to deal with this text, I notice first, the tribulation implied; secondly, the feeling confessed—that he cursed the day of his birth; and thirdly that here is a solemn truth declared.

First, the tribulation implied. And upon this part I wish to treat chiefly of the good of tribulation. But then tribulation can be good only as it stands connected with eternal things; tribulation is good only as the Lord is pleased to make a good use of it, and to bring about good thereby. And before I enter into the details of this department, I may just remind you that all the good that ever was, or ever will be known to man, and the good that you will ever possess to all eternity was brought about by that tribulation, was brought about by that tribulation which was endured by the Lord Jesus Christ, the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Though he never cursed the day of his birth, he had a greater reason than any, in one sense, to do so—as far as this life was concerned; for this life was indeed a dreary scene to the Lord Jesus Christ. But he set his face like a flint, worked his way through it, came off with honor, went incorruptible into the grave, rose triumphant, and legally in that resurrection brought from the dead every one for whom he died. Tribulation, then, is a good thing when it stands connected with eternal things. I will take for my guide in the beginning of this subject what the wise man said in Ecclesiastes vii. He there reminds us of the excellency of tribulation; but very judiciously, very wisely, reminds us of something to begin with, something that we are to take with us into our tribulation. Hence, he said, "A good name is better than precious ointment." Then, if we go back to the proverbial writings of the same man, he said, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold." I need not say that of course this good name is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and one of the first lessons learnt by everyone taught of God is his need of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. "His name shall be called Jesus,

because he shall save his people from their sins." The sinner convinced of what he is feels his need of a Savior, and he sees that salvation is in and by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus. Now, what earthly riches can compare with this name? Why, for you to have the name of Jesus as your hope, to have what he has done for your foundation—what riches can compare with the blessedness of the eternal salvation of your souls? "And loving favor rather than silver and gold." Ah, what are silver and gold compared with the loving favor of that loving Father that sent us such a Savior; compared with the loving favor of the Lord Jesus Christ, compared with the loving favor of the Eternal Spirit. Just notice the expression—there is not, perhaps, a more beautiful form of expression to be found anywhere than that—"loving favor." Many favors are often shown from various motives, but there is no kindness like loving kindness, and there is no favor like loving favor; because when the kindness is loving kindness, when the favor is loving favor, whatever delight the object of that love may have in being favored, the person who shows the favor, it being loving favor, hath infinitely more delight in showing the favor than the favored one has in receiving the favor. Therefore, our God is represented as rejoicing over the salvation of sinners; he is represented as joying over them with singing, as resting in his love, as delighting in mercy. So then "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold. Let me stop here for a moment; I will be as simple as possible, as I have but one end in view, and that is the good of the souls of those to whom I speak. Now, it is said of Mary that she had "chosen that good part." How is it with us? Can we say that our lost condition as sinners has been brought to light to us; that we have seen it, and felt it, and that we are led to understand that Jesus Christ is not only a Savior, but a complete Savior, and brought to choose his name as our only life, as our only hope, our only sanctification, justification, acceptance with God? If so driven to him of necessity, he never turned such a one away, and never will. Happy are the people who are thus favored. And it is enough to make one sweat drops of blood, and to tremble at the thought of not being thus favored. Hell, is a dreadful place; it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Oh, to be made to fly to him for refuge, to be made sensible of our state, and to be led to choose that good part, with "Lord save me,"—what an infinite favor is this! Now, those who are thus favored, in order to go deeply into God's love and mercy, and in order to be weaned from all that would be injurious to them, they must be tried. Solomon there says, and we will follow what he says, that "the day of death is better than the day of one's birth." Now, that is not true of the natural man; because the natural man, the man that is not born of God, in the day of his death he bids a last farewell to everything he ever desired. "The things thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all; nothing for thee but everlasting chains, everlasting darkness." Therefore, for a man's death to be better than his birth, he must be a believing man, led to choose Jesus Christ, to rest upon him, to look to him. Then, when such a one dies, while he bids farewell to many things that he loves, and that have been a comfort and a support to him through life, yet at the same time he departs to have something put into the place of those things infinitely better; and on the other hand he departs also from many things that have burdened, grieved, and distressed him, and made him unhappy; and into the place of those things shall be put something infinitely better. Now, says the wise man, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart." And so, if we are taught the value of our souls, and the value of eternal salvation, we shall come into the house of mourning. We shall mourn the absence of the Lord; we shall feel that we need that which is so essential to our eternal welfare; and there will be a mourning over our sinfulness, our helplessness, our solitude, our destitution; and Satan says, You had better throw it all off; what is the good of all this? But, no; there is something in this mourning after the Lord, in this soul trouble, in this godly sorrow, that the soul born of God appreciates and even loves the Lord for it. Ah, he says, I would rather be a mourner in Zion all my days than to be lost at last; I would rather weep now than have to weep hereafter; I would rather hunger now than have to hunger hereafter; I would rather thirst now than have to thirst in hell hereafter. So, he feels it is good to be in the house of mourning; Those troubles and those

griefs that press you down, and make you reflect, and make you tremble, they are all good. They make you lay eternal things to your heart, and say to yourself, Well, if I am thus running with the footmen, as it were, and they weary me, how shall I contend with greater powers? And if in a land of comparative peace I am thus at times cast down, how shall I do in the swelling of Jordan? This mourning, this sorrow, this solemn reflection, brings a vast amount of good to the soul. If you are led to know something of this, the Lord steps in and secretly says, "What manner of communications are these that ye have, and are sad?" They were sad, they were deeply reflective, and were going off in despair; but the Lord had his eye and his heart upon them. This house of mourning is good. But let us hear what Solomon says further. "Sorrow is better than laughter." We can point out plenty of cases in which laughter is no harm, and even may perhaps be good; but sorrow is better. This is not what we should naturally believe. "Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." I like attending weddings very well, but I like attending funerals better; there is something that makes one reflect, and it brings one into very deep feeling sometimes; makes one think, Well, here is the house appointed for all living. Here is the mother sorrowing, the father sorrowing, the brother sorrowing, the sister sorrowing. A man said to me some time ago, "I cannot think how you can like to be at a funeral, where they are all crying." I said, "That is just where I like to be." And in that dark scene of family privation, where the departed died in the Lord, it sets forth the Savior to wonderful advantage. He is the only Star then seen in that domestic sky; his truth is the only voice, then, that can speak real consolation; his assurance that he will be a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless is the only power, then, that can at all soothe our sorrows, set our affections on high, and make us thus feel that sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance of the one, the other receives the impression, and begins to reflect, and recognizes a solemn advantage, therein; though Solomon refers there to foolish, ungodly laughter. "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool;" that is, the ungodly. "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning." Why, say you, is it possible for a man to love it, for a man to like it? Yes, it is; because when we are brought into solemn feeling, then the heart is prepared for the fulfilment of the promise. "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." But how can that be when there is no sorrow? "The valley shall be filled up;" but how can that be if we are not down in the valley? The impediments implied in the mountains shall be lowered; but how can that be if there are no impediments seen and felt between us and God that seem to hinder our access to him? "And crooked things shall be made straight;" but how can that be if there be no crook? "And rough places shall be made plain;" but how can that be if our souls are never by stormy temptations treated roughly by the enemy? "And darkness shall be turned into light;" but how can that be if we do not walk in darkness under the hidings of God's countenance, and feel, shall I say, the infinite difference between the absence and the presence of the Lord? So then, "the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning;" that is, the man that is made wise as to what he is, and wise unto salvation, he chooses a serious path; he says, Mine is a serious work; prayer is a serious work. "They shall look upon him and shall mourn, being in bitterness." The salvation of my soul is a serious work; for me to escape the ten thousand delusions by which so many of my fellow-creatures will be fatally deluded is a serious work; and therefore I cannot trifle, He chooses the house of mourning; he chooses to be serious; he chooses to be in earnest.

When the Sabbath morning comes, it is not, to what place shall I go for what they call recreation? To what den of vanity, to what resort of amusement shall I go? No. If a child of God ever does so, he is in a woeful condition, and there is a rod of correction laid up for him that will someday be sent, not in a way of retribution, but in order that he may be brought out of that unprofitable into a profitable state; that rod of correction shall fall heavily upon him, and the Lord will not spare him for his crying; he will blast the gourd, lay him low, and bring him into that spirit by which he shall be prepared to live, prepared to die, and prepared for God. How much there is in us that needs in ten thousand ways mortifying. And then, again, Solomon says, "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of a fool."

On looking at those words, "the rebuke of the wise," a scripture came to my mind that rebuked me very much; and I thought, I hardly know on which side of that scripture I stand; and yet I gained a little hope—where the Lord said, "I would thou were cold or hot;" and I hardly knew where I was. "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Oh, I said, then the Lord will soon have done with me; I am a poor lukewarm creature; I read the Bible in a lukewarm way, and I pray in a lukewarm way, and preach in a lukewarm way, and I live in a lukewarm way; I am a poor creature, sometimes so far gone that I am obliged to say with the poet—words some have despised, but I solemnly and to my on shame confess that I am obliged to say the words sometimes, -

"Tis a point I long to know,
oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his or am I not?"

These rebukes do us good; for the Lord, does not rebuke us for the sake of rebuking us, but he rebukes us for our profit. Hence, he says, "as many as I love I chasten and rebuke." Well, I said, Lord, what will thou have me to do? Well, he said, "Buy of me gold tried in the fire, that, thou mayest be rich." But the other words I could not exactly take to myself—namely, "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." I could not take those words to myself, because I do know what a poor blind creature I am; I do know that I am wretched and miserable, and need everything. Well then, the Lord says, "Buy of me gold." Well, I thought, to get the Lord's truth in greater abundance is the best gold. David said, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver." All then, the best gold we can get is his grace; the best gold we can get are his blessed promises on our side. "And white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed;" meaning, I suppose, his righteousness; "and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Religion is after all a personal, close, and solemn reality. Now I have not said much upon the tribulations of the people of God; but these are some of the experiences into which you must come. We live in a day when to my mind—I may give offence by saying it, but I cannot help it if I do, to some—we live in a day when to my mind the majority of conversions that take place are merely natural. There seems no soul trouble, there seems no cutting down, there seems no rooting up, and consequently there is no knowledge of a covenant God, or of the truth in the minds and souls of such. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is not taught of God; if he is not the subject of this divine discipline, then he is not a child of God; "for if ye be without chastisement" (and these experiences are the chastisement whereof all are partakers), "then are ye bastards, and not sons."

I now notice secondly, the feeling confessed; "Cursed be the day wherein I was born." Now the man thus taught, there are times when the Lord thwarts him and crosses him, and everything goes as contrary as things well can go. As we sometimes say, one trouble never comes alone. One thing cuts him up, another thing cuts him up, he looks about, and this life seems almost a hell; this life seems to him such a wretched scene of things he hardly knows what to think, what to make of it. Perhaps some of you are strangers to this part of experience. I am not going to tell you that you must before you die curse the day that you were born. I am not going to tell you that it is essential to your salvation; but I am going to tell you that it is put upon record as descriptive of what many of the people of God would be the subjects of, and also to keep them from despair when they are the subjects of these things. You know what Job said upon this; he says, "He that is ready to slip with his feet" —that is, the man that is so tried that he is just ready to give up all hope; he feels, as we said last Sunday morning, as though his strength and his hope were perished from the Lord— "He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him

that is at ease." But perhaps before I enter further into this subject, I had better just remind you of something the prophet did not do. You observe that Job did not serve Satan as Satan wished to be served. Satan said that Job would curse God, what Satan wanted to get Job to do was to anathematize God. And Job might well say to his wife that she spoke like one of the foolish women when she said, "Anathematize God, and die." Job was kept from this; Job did hold fast God's truth; the truth of that perfection he had in Christ, the truth of that uprightness in the faith with which he was blessed, the truth of godly fear. Job would not go over to any other god; he stood fast by the one true God; he knew that his redeemer lived; he did not anathematize God. Just so with the Christian. I will presently name some who did anathematize God. There you do something fatal. But here is only a feeling and experience arising from pressure and trial which many of the people of God are subjected to. And not only does everything like love to God seem to vanish, but you will have the worst thoughts of God. It would not be wise, I think it would be very foolish of me to define, when I have been so tried, some of the thoughts I have had of God; and in this way I have many, many times heartily used the language of the text, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born." Well, say you, you must be very vile to do so. No question about that. But I have blessed the Lord many times that I have not done something worse, that I have not done what Satan said Job would do, and this the Christian cannot do. Let me say a word here: — You have been tried, some of you, in all sorts of ways, and the thought has come in, If I were a child of God I never should be such a wretch as this, never should have been so rebellious. A child of God? A child of the devil rather, say you to yourself. "I am as a beast before thee; more brutish than any man." And yet with all that you have not been able to part with God's truth; with it all you have not been able to turn around and throw away the shield of truth, for his truth is our shield and buckler. Ah, said the tried man, the only good thing that I have done is that I have been able to hold fast God's truth; I have kept the faith, through the faith keeping me; and I can say hardly anything else. Well, if you can say that, you can say everything, for the fact is you have lost nothing in reality; and you will soon find that you are a great gainer by these trying experiences. I am persuaded if many of our ministers were walking in such a path as this they would preach a very different gospel from that which they now do. Now I will just remind you of a people that did blindly curse God, thought they could do without him. What cannot Satan blind the mind of the natural man to do against God? What has not the world done in different ages against God? Hence it says, in the 8th of Isaiah, referring to the Jews, "They shall pass through it," that is, through this affliction, "hardly bestead," that is, hardly beset; matters should be very difficult with them, dreadful should be their sufferings; "and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God," and yet be so deluded as to "look upward." Now who was that God and who was that king they did curse Jesus Christ—they crucified Jesus Christ. He was their king and he was their God; that is, they were chosen as his nation; he came unto his own. He was not their God in the same sense that he is the God of his own people, or the shepherd of his own sheep; he was their God as far as national, old covenant times were concerned; and they cursed him, their God and their king; even as man he was their king, he was the heir apparent to the Jewish throne. And yet, though they cursed him, they looked upward, and believed that they were safe and that God would appear for them. Ah, how many thousands there are now that anathematize God's truth, that repudiate his truth, and yet look to God—that yet look upward. What signifies it what tribulations you undergo if they do but make you so vile in your own eyes, so base in your own sight, as to lead you to receive God's blessed truth in the love of it, and stand fast by it. Now Jeremiah did not abstain from cursing God because he had not depravity enough in him to do so. And what I say of the human heart. I must say a word or two. What is it? the Word of God declares that it is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." What would this world be if one-thousandth part of the evil that is in the human heart were brought into practice? Take the 18th of Leviticus and the 1st of the Romans, and see what revolting developments you have there of the human heart. Those nations, what were they? Why, a perfect hell. Such is the human heart. So, that the worst things you read in the Bible, you have got the root of them all in your heart; the elements and seeds of them all are there, and that heart lies open

to God's immense sinner. And where is this knowledge of self, I am sure you will not only wonder that you have cursed the day of your birth, that you had never been born, or as to wish it would please God to destroy you. But you will wonder at these two things—first, that you have not given up the truth altogether; and secondly, that God does not cut you down. You will indeed acknowledge that it is of his mercy that you are not consumed. “God suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.” Oh, what ways were they! Why, even in our nation, with the number of wholesome laws, powers, restraints, and moral agencies that we have at work, we are, with them all, nothing to boast of. Ah, the deceitfulness of the human heart! Why, the whole world if left to itself, would come in a few centuries to what one of the islands in the South Seas came to, as described by the late Mr. Williams. The first time he visited it he found only sixty inhabitants. He went there about five years afterwards, and they had killed each other down to about five left, and those five were disputing which should be king. And I dare to say, if that laborious missionary had gone there again after some time, he would have found four out of the five gone, and perhaps the whole five. What a perfect hell would this world be if Satan could bring out into active operation all the principles of the human heart. I do not wonder, therefore, at Jeremiah cursing the day of his birth. Why, that is a mere nothing of what he would have done if he had been left entirely to himself. The Lord left Hezekiah, and he leaves all his people, withdraws from them, leaves them to themselves, but always limitedly, always to a certain extent, there to stop. He will not suffer you to be tried above that you are able to bear. You have heard of the patience of Job, and Job's patience lay in his not getting out of patience with God's truth; it did not lie in his fleshly patience. Here is the great secret—holding fast to God's truth. So then, this cursing the day of our birth arises from the evils of the heart, connected with those tribulations of which the people of God are the subjects. It is a difficult subject to handle; lest I should seem, as it were, to make out that we are perfectly right in cursing the day of our birth. I do not mean that. What I mean is this, that everyone is capable of damp; not only this, but that which is infinitely worse —namely, breaking out into deadly enmity against God. What a mercy it is, amidst it all, to be preserved from this. But all the time your faith does not fail, all the time you stand in harmony with God's truth, then you stand in such a position, that just so sure as Jeremiah's captivity was turned, and just so sure as Job's captivity was turned, so shall the captivity of such. Such, then, is the house of mourning into which they are brought, or in other words, they are led to choose that good name after which they are named, and by which name they stand faultless before God. Secondly, they love the house of mourning; they love that spirit of solemnity and godly sorrow that fits them for this service of God. Oh, how important this is in hearing the Word. You can never hear the Word profitably unless the heart is prepared, and God alone by his dealing with you can prepare the heart. The preparation consists in our need; but unless we are tried and driven about in a variety of ways there is no deep need felt, and consequently the heart is not prepared. But when we are tried, and cut up, and cast down, and come to the house of God, perhaps, in, almost despair; why, “to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet;” while the full soul cares nothing even for the honeycomb or the sweetness thereof. The Lord alone can prepare us for reading his Word, or for hearing it. Then secondly, here is the weakness expressed in times of trouble. “cursed the day wherein I was born.” But then the Lord turns this captivity. Let us be thankful that, while we are the subjects of this, we are not left, as I have said, to curse God to give up his blessed truth, but still kept in solemn decision for that. The man that is favored with this decision, let him be tried how he may, that blessed truth that he abides by will abide by him. “Ye are they that have continued with me”; and there is a kingdom for you; matters will come right in due time.

But thirdly, here is a solemn truth declared. Our natural birth is an accursed birth; and if we get clearly at that, I think we shall see our need of the remedy, and what the remedy is. Is it not a curse to be like the devil? Is it not a curse to be a constitutional liar? Is it not a curse to be in deadly enmity against God? Hear the word of the Lord. David says, “I was shapen in iniquity,” born into the world with a mind in an iniquitous shape. 51st Psalm, — “The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they

be born, speaking lies"; lies against their own souls and against God. "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"; I came into the world with an iniquitous mind, in the shape of the devil, in the shape of sin, in the shape of hell, spiritually dead; as destitute of holiness, righteousness, or anything that is good, as Satan himself. Is not this an accursed birth? I think so. And think you that the Lord has not a further meaning than the mere letter when he says, "Thou was cast into the open field, to the loathing of thy person"? Does he not there speak of us in the degradation of our natural birth? Ah, what is our state by nature? Frightful to the last degree. Great is the misery of man. Well might the Savior say, "Ye must be born again"! Unless the soul thus shaped be brought by the quickening power of the Eternal Spirit out of that shape into the life of Christ, and into the light of the gospel, so that Christ becomes its sanctification and its justification, and God become its God in the bond of an everlasting covenant, and in his immutable counsel, —without this change there can be no hope whatever. Let us run a contrast in conclusion between the two births, the natural and the spiritual, for the spiritual birth is the remedy against the natural birth, or what we are by nature. Job 14th, — "Man that is born of a woman" — I have often wondered why there is so much stress there laid upon the word woman; — "man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." "Man, that is born of a woman"; the emphasis there lies upon the word "woman " in order that we may bring in a contrast between being born of God, and being born of a woman. The man that is born of God is not of few days, he is of many days, his happy destiny is to eternal days, and though he be subject to tribulation, he shall get rid of all his troubles, his sorrow and his sighing shall flee eternally away; he cometh forth as a lily, never to be cut down; he is a tree planted by Jehovah's right hand planting, planted in the likeness of Christ's death; he never shall be rooted up, he never shall be cut down, his leaf shall never wither, nor shall he cease from bearing fruit, and finally, he will never fly away from Zion; — "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever."

Now, if born of God, the scene is entirely changed; we can bless God for our first birth, seeing he hath made us heirs of the everlasting kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him. We can thank God that though we were the servants of sin, we have now through grace obeyed from the heart that new covenant form of doctrine delivered unto us.

May the Lord lead us more and more into these things, for his name's sake.