

# Humility before Honor

A SERMON – Preached on Sunday Morning, June 24th, 1866, by

MR. JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against."-Luke ii. 34.

What a succession of excellences were revealed unto Simeon when he was brought into the temple, and there met with the holy child Jesus! He saw that this child Jesus was by his atonement to make peace with God on our behalf; therefore he said, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," seeing that here is that wondrous Person who, by his atonement, is to put away sin and bring about reconciliation to God. Secondly, he saw the Saviour as the way in which the promise is yea and amen;-"according to thy word." So if we have realized the fulfilment of any promise it is by Jesus Christ -"It is by faith that it might be by grace that the promise might be sure unto all the seed." He then saw him as salvation: - "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation," everlasting salvation, saved from everything that stood against us. He then saw the world wide character of this salvation;-"which thou hast prepared before the face of all people." He then saw the Gentiles rise into this wondrous light, the light of this morning Star, this Sun that should never go down. He then saw in the spirit of prophecy the whole of God's people Israel glorying there in;-"the glory of thy people Israel." Our text describes the process by which these great ends are brought about, by which men are brought into the peace of God, and to understand the promise of God, and to see the salvation of God, and to see that by that salvation there is a better country than the one in which we now live, and to see that he is indeed the true light, and to see that he is God's glory-, and that God becomes our glory by Christ Jesus the Lord. Our text then describes the process of this-"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. "When the great enemy of our souls proposed the fall of man, he proposed it not as a fall, but as a rise, "Ye shall be as gods;" you shall be something more than you are now. And as Satan commenced his deadly deception by trying to set man above God, and trying to persuade man that that was the better way, so Satan has, in the same spirit and by some degree of analogous means, carried on to this day the same delusion. Hence the necessity, then, of men being taught of God, and brought down low enough to come into God's way. All of us, as the word of God declares, were out of the way, but the Lord is pleased by his grace to bring poor sinners into the way; and in order to do so, they must be brought down in that way that I will this morning carefully describe. Just observe, then, that the fall of man was not, as Satan proposed, a rise; it was a fall. And one feels overwhelmed in the contemplation of the greatness of that fall. It was a fall into all the sin that has ever been committed; it was a fall into all the miseries that have marked the progress of time. It was a fall into the grave; it was a fall, into the hands of a sin-avenging God; it was a fall into everlasting ruin. But unless these great matters of judgment are brought into the conscience by the power of the Eternal Spirit, we all remain blind to it, we, all remain unconscious; that is, we have no real consciousness of it, so as to be humbled down before God in a way that shall lead us to receive the only remedy. How solemn then is my position this morning; to set forth the way in which a soul is saved from death, so great a death; from which a soul is saved, when

saved at all, from the wrath to come, and made to know where there is forgiveness, and the way in which it can be sanctified, and made a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. They are to be brought down on account of Jesus Christ-" This child is set for the fall." Jesus Christ is set forth in the various saving characters which he bears; and in order that men may receive him, those men must fall; that is, they must fall under a conviction of their state, they must fall under a sight and sense of what and where they are! and this prepares the heart for the reception of the Savior. First, here is the humiliation. Secondly, here is the exaltation. Thirdly, here is the opposition implied, we may say expressed, in the words, "a sign which shall be spoken against."

I will notice that conviction under which a sinner in order to be saved must more or less fall. Take the second Psalm; - "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now this is very strong language; but when conviction enters into the soul of a sinner it breaks all his goodness, all his righteousness, all his formalities, all his native religion; for man by nature, though he has a religion, he has by nature no true religion, such as God approves, or such as God will accept; and he is broken to pieces as the vessel of a potter. Only think of an earthen vessel broken to pieces; what a worthless, helpless thing it is. Just so it will be with you; you must be cut all to pieces as regards your fleshly confidences, supposed holiness and supposed goodness, and be brought to feel that you are a worthless, helpless, poor creature, and that God could justly with the "besom of destruction sweep you into everlasting ruin, if he were pleased so to do. Then again, in the 2nd of Isaiah, sinners are represented as cedars, and oaks, and mountains, and towers, and walls, all to set forth their supposed strength. "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon everyone that is proud and lofty, and upon everyone one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low; and upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up." Saul of Tarsus was a high cedar; God laid the axe to the root, and cut him down. "And upon all the oaks of Bashan." There is another stubborn oak, but the axe must be laid to the root, down he must come. There is another, firm as a mountain; you cannot shake him; you may talk to him; you may pray with him -cannot move him. But when Jesus Christ comes, or when the power of God comes, it overturns his mountainous confidences, and he feels that he has no hope, destitute of hope before God. "And upon every high tower." So there are some like mighty war like towers; they stand against God's truth. "I'll never believe this, and I'll never belong to that sect; I will never come to that; I will not have this man reign over me." But when God begins the work, cuts the sinner down, then he sees and feels what a poor creature he is. I will give you another version of this, in the 7<sup>th</sup> of Micah. It is there said that "the nations," referring to the extension of the gospel, "shall see and be confounded at all their might." They suppose they have a might; that is, they suppose they have some strength; they suppose they have some goodness of their own; but when the law, when conviction enters, you can understand that remark more clearly perhaps- when conviction enters the mind, then you are confounded. Where is your might now? Where is your power now? The law demands perfection, sir, of heart, and lip, and life; and where are you now? And as to the gospel; no man can receive anything by the gospel except it be given him from above. And thus they shall be confounded, and acknowledge before God what poor creatures they are. "They shall lay their hand upon their mouth," lest they should say another word against God. I'll never say another word against God. I wonder that I am not in hell; I wonder he has borne with me so long; I wonder he has spare me so long, that I am not yet cut off by his judgment. "Their ears shall be deaf." I will not hear a word against God again; I will not hear another word that would lead me away from God. "They shall lick the dust like a serpent;" that is, the sinner shall acknowledge his likeness to Satan. He says, "Lord, I am in a serpentine state; I am by nature satanised; I am as wicked as Satan himself." Thus they shall be brought down into the deepest humility. "They shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth," as Saul of Tarsus did. He crept into his "Hebrew of the

Hebrews, and touching the law blameless," and various ceremonies that belonged to his sect; but he was glad to move out of them all; found that there was no safety there, no refuge there, and therefore now he would reckon all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord. Thus, then, they are humbled down. "They shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee." And I may here just say that the Lord's dealings with you all your lifetime will be to sink you lower and lower. I speak no fable, I speak no fancy, I speak no mere theory, I speak no mere opinion; but I speak an experimental, a practical fact, when I tell you that I am fathoms lower now than I was years ago. I see ten times, I may say a thousand times, more of my haughtiness and worthlessness now than I did then. Thus the Lord fulfills his own word, leads his people about the wilderness, that they might know what is in their hearts, to humble them, to prove them, and to try them. This conviction, this humility before God, this being broken down, is indeed a sacred thing, a secret thing; it is that into which none can enter but those who are born of God; and if any man have not this spirit of conviction he does not belong to Christ. Christ's Spirit, amongst the other characters he bears, is a spirit of conviction. "He shall convince you of sin." When thus wrought down you will understand what is meant by Habakkuk, when he says, "When I heard, my belly trembled, my lips quivered at the voice; rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble." Religion then, is a ponderous reality. When we are thus convinced of our state it outweighs every other consideration. The heaviest concerns of the earth on our hands are but passing vapors in comparison of the fixed and overwhelming realities of that eternity to which we are hastening. I will notice now what you must come to. First, you must come down to the death of Jesus Christ as the only way in which the law, sin, and death are ended. Your own works, you must cast them all away; that is, in that respect, you must think nothing of them whatever. You must be made to tremble at the thought of mixing anything of your own doing with the work of Christ. Abraham would not take of the king of Sodom from a thread even to a shoe latchet. "I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich." Thou shalt be brought down so low as to soliloquize thus: If the righteousness of Jesus Christ be not complete, and if I am not to be justified freely by his grace, by his righteousness there is no hope for me. If the atonement of Jesus Christ doth not take away every sin, past, present, and to come, and make me as spotless before a holy God as Christ himself is spotless, there is no hope for me; and if his atonement hath not swallowed up death in victory, and brought life and immortality to light, there is no hope for me. Now, are you brought so low as this? This is the religion that is hidden from the world; this is the religion that is kept close from the fowls of the air; this is the path that the vulture's eye hath not seen; this is that secret of which the deep saith "It is not in me," and of which the sea saith: "It is not in me;" and it cannot be gotten for gold, nor shall choice silver be weighed for the price thereof. Thus, then, for the Savior's sake sinners are thus humbled and brought down to be planted together in the likeness of his death. This is one thing to which you must be brought down. And what will be the consequence? Why, one of the consequences will be that the Savior's righteousness, the Savior's atonement, will indeed be to you better than thousands of gold and silver, and will indeed be wonderful in your eyes; and you will not at all wonder at the Apostle Peter's definition of faith when he saith, "To you that believe he is precious: Now, my hearers, how is it with us? Suppose we were going to die today. Are we thus convinced, are we thus humbled, are we thus broken down, and have we from this valley of humility sent up the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner?" Have we from this solitary wilderness, forlorn, outcast condition, sought God's mercy and salvation? If not, we are not yet in that narrow path that leads unto everlasting life. Second, you must fall down low enough or be thrown down, rooted up-you must come down low enough to receive in the understanding and love there of eternal election. Ah, says one, eternal election is one of those doctrines I will never believe. Stop! for "not any can enter heaven but those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world." "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." You shall be brought down so low as to see and feel that if it doth not please God, as a matter of his own good pleasure, to save you, saved you cannot be. And when you are thus

brought down, you will not at all wonder at the Savior's words, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." And you will say what a mystery this is. What is to become of the others that are not chosen? My answer to that is, that is not my business, and it is not your business, and it is the business of no other creature whatever. God giveth not account of any of his matters in that respect; secret things belong to God, but those things which are revealed belong to us. Now this is the way that eternal election is received rightly and savingly. Hence it was with Saul of Tarsus, "the God of our fathers hath chosen thee." And Saul learned, soon learned, if he did not understand then, that this choice of him was before the world was; as he himself tells us, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings," on a firm ground, on heavenly ground, on sure ground, that election might not stand of works, but of him that calleth,—"blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ;" not according to anything in us, for if that had been made the ground, it would have been sure to fail, and so all the blessings would fail; but "according as he hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world." Therefore see the firmness of it; how firm it stands. Here is the book of life, the Lamb's book of life, and all shall worship the beast whose names are not written therein; all shall be deceived whose names are not written therein; and if it were possible he should deceive the very elect; but eternal election comes in, the soul is made to understand it, and to receive it, and to rejoice that its name is written in heaven. Your taking your hat off when you come into church, and your bowing and turning to the east and the west, and your wonderful humility you put on, that is all of the flesh together; that is no use; that is only a little bit of theatrical performance, that is all,—a little creature formality, the invention of man. There must be something more than that; you must be brought to feel and see what a poor, worthless creature you are; how helpless you are, and that if God had not chosen you, or in other words, if he had not freely undertaken your cause, there could have been no hope for you. And what is the language of election? "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out!" Oh, if I am not one of the elect it is no use to strive. Stop; if you are one of the elect, God will make you receive election, and if you are one that is given to Jesus Christ he will make you receive Jesus Christ; and when you once receive and understand election you will never give it up: you will find there a firm and sure standing place that will never give way. Thus the Savior is set for the fall of many. Bless the Lord, his arrows are indeed sharp in the hearts of the enemies, whereby the people fall under him, receive him in his perfection, receive God in his grace and mercy, choosing us in Christ Jesus; for the election is of grace. I am what I am of necessity. I am a receiver of this perfect work of Christ from necessity. I am a receiver of eternal election from necessity, and yet as willingly as though there were no necessity in it. And when I thus look at Christ's work, and look: at God in eternal election, if my sins were ten millions twice told the number they are, and of a thousand times the magnitude they are, as I stand by the perfect work of Christ and the rights of eternal election, I could smile at them all, and see they are all like Samson's dead lion; the life is gone, the power is gone; Immanuel has bled, Immanuel has died, election has inscribed my name in God's eternal book. And thus it is that grace gave us to the Lamb, who all our sorrows took. Third, we must be brought down to God's sworn covenant. Shall we ever get to the depth, the height, the breadth, or full blessedness of that scripture, "Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself" I meet with men calling themselves ministers, who say they must not preach too much of that. But the word of God says that he was abundantly willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirming it by an oath, that they might have strong consolation. Your Maker entered into a sworn covenant on your behalf. The Lord swore, even in another aspect of that oath, by that which is as infallible as himself. He swore by Jesus Christ, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." So he hath sworn by Jesus Christ, and also by his own being, by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength. And I will tell you this morning, if you are taught of God, there will be that wretchedness, that feeling of your sinfulness, that bubbling up of innumerable evils in your heart which the enemy keeps quiet in the hearts of those who are dead in sin. "When the strong man, Satan, keepeth the house, the goods are in peace;" but when God takes hold of the soul, then Satan stirs up these Canaanites within, and you will not wonder at the language of one

when he saith, "I am as a beast before thee, so ignorant was I." You will find no term too strong to express what a poor, miserable creature you are in and of yourself; and so far from your saying you are rich. and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, you will freely confess that you are poor, and blind, and wretched, and miserable, and that you need everything, and that the reason you are not consumed, and cannot be consumed, is because the Lord changeth not. "I am God, I change not, and therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

And now I come to another part equally strong, equally important, and that is this; you must come down into infallible sincerity, into infallible uprightness. Job derived his uprightness from his perfection; that is, the perfection he had in Christ. Job was perfect and upright. And so, if you are humbled down, let the Lord deal with you how he may, he may take your property away, he may thwart all your designs, blast your gourds, lay you low, and so far from answering your prayers, he shall seem to do just the reverse. Here is Job offering sacrifices for his family, when just in the center of it all is swept away, and the very things he prayed for seemed denied. These are great parables, I was going to say, difficult parables to human reason. But what the Lord does with you let things go as wrong with you apparently as they may, let happen what may, notwithstanding the momentary rebellions that arise, all these things put together will not be able to make you leave the Lord. It was very natural of Jobs wife, I do not see anything, as it were, unnatural, something very natural, when she said, "Anathematize "--for that is the idea - "anathematize God, and die;" meaning, You would not die: who would serve such a God as this! See, those who have no religion are better off then you are; they have not so many tribulations as you have; and others that have respectable and fashionable religions, such as the world can appreciate, they have not such troubles, they are not plagued and tried as you are. If I were you, Job, I would not belong any longer to that sect that is everywhere spoken against. Now what do you say to this? If you are a mere un-humbled, stony-ground hearer, you will take offence and away you will go. But if you are a really humbled man before God there will be an uprightness, there will be a sincerity, that will enable you to say, and act with divine approbation in saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." I have had myself some solitary deserts and thorny woods to go through, and a great many trials one way and the other; yet they never could make me hate the truth; no, I have been enabled to hold that fast through it all. So I am to remain just where I am. Everything pertaining to the gospel I see now just as I did when I entered into the ministry. But there are some things I see now, and have seen, that I did not think I should have seen; but must resolve that into the weakness of man and the sovereign sufferance of the Most High. I have seen some that have been brought, at least apparently, to what I have described this morning. A little worldly prosperity comes, and how are they altered! Once of a Sunday quite enough for the house of God; as for a week night, that is out of the question. Balancing between the two, whether you go to a horse-race or to the house of God, to a concert or to hear the word of God on a week evening. It is a great mystery. I have seen these things, and I have been astounded, and have been ready to say within myself, I wonder how these men would like to die at a horse-race, at a concert, at their amusements, or at the ale bench. Would they like to die in such places and companied? No, they would say, we do not mean to die there. Ah, that you cannot tell. Now this is a great mystery, that has puzzled me, but certainly, not more than the conduct of Solomon in his old age has puzzled me. It is a great thing, as the apostle says. "It is good to be seriously afflicted always in a good thing." -Oh, it is a great thing to be kept from this worldly minded spirit-this love of worldly pleasures. Come to the house of God-happen to be collection day,--there would as soon see the devil as see the collection-plate; and as to the minister, if he happen to speak a few words about the collection, oh, they are in such pain-do not know what the consequences will be if he speaks much longer. And what is all this? Why, that spirit denounced by the apostle,-"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Oh, my hearer, time is short; a few days, a few weeks, a few months, and lay our heads down we must. Where shall we lay our heads? Are we so living as to be now reclining at times on Jesus' bosom? Are we so living as to glory in his electing grace, in God's immutable oath, and

in decision for God and godliness above all other things? I do not mean that any man, or woman either, can be perfectly faultless; I admit no such fleshly nonsense: all have their faults. But when I see anything so take hold of men as to make them careless about that greatest of all ordinances on earth-the preaching of the gospel,-is there any one thing on earth that the great God has so honored as he has that of preaching the gospel? It is not what the minister may say, or the instruction he may convey, it is the honor that God puts upon his own ordinance, his own institution. And I hope now that before I die, many, many precious souls will be brought here, and be met with the grace and mercy of God, and that we may have as we do continually have, to bless the Lord for testimony after testimony of his gracious presence, that sinners are falling before him, led to seek his mercy, cry out for his salvation, and testify of the things that God has done. Do not be offended, but meditate upon it, and say to yourselves, Well, after all, there is nothing like being with the Lord; there is nothing like rejoicing in his salvation.

We now notice the rising. These same that fall shall rise. Now I think you will see at once the propriety of the position I have taken: In the first place, if I am brought to the death of Christ, then I shall rise as high as that death can carry me. If I am brought to the righteousness of Jesus Christ as my only hope, then I shall be carried as high as that righteousness can carry me. And if I am brought to receive election, where will election carry me to? "Him that I have chosen I will cause to draw near unto me." And if we are near the Lord, we are safe; with him we are in safeguard, and we shall rise as high as electing grace can carry us. Then take the immutable oath of God; if brought to receive that, we shall rise as high as that immutable oath can carry us. Then if thou hast the faith of sincerity-this faith of decision, as the old divines called it, - the faith of adherence, then thou shalt rise as high as that faith in God can carry thee, and that faith will bring thee off triumphant at the last, and thou shall be set on high, and rejoice that your record is on high, that your inheritance is on high, that your bliss is on high, and that you yourself shall be on high. Now if you place the rising upon anything in the creature you see the danger at once. You see when angels were put upon a conditional footing they fell. Man was put in the Garden of Eden upon a conditional footing; he fell. The Jews were put in the old covenant upon a conditional footing; they fell. But the apostle Peter, when dwelling upon this very subject, after exhorting us to make our calling and election sure-after exhorting us thus, he says, "For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Now, then, before I say a word or two upon the last point, do we know what it is to be thus brought down, every false hope and every false confidence swept away, and that we have no refuge, no confidence, any were but in Christ after this gospel order of things? If so, then we shall rise into eternal glory. "Whom he justified, them he glorified." This Simeon knew, and this made him wish to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Lastly, the opposition; "a sign which shall be spoken against." Jesus Christ was spoken against by the world; and it is right that we should gather all the instruction we can from that circumstance. Oh, how blind the world was! Could they have known who he was, would they then have crucified him? No, no. Astounding how their minds were stirred up, to prefer a murderer to the Lord Jesus Christ! The gospel is the representative of Christ, and if you speak against eternal election, you speak against Christ; because he is the chosen head of the chosen people. And if you speak against the perfection of his work, you speak against him; and if you speak against God's sworn covenant, you speak against him; and if you adhere to a doctrine or ceremony of which God is not the author, then you are placing yourself in opposition to him. Besides, if we speak against his truth, we also speak against his people; and if we speak against his people, why, then we speak against him; for what is done unto them in a way of unkindness he looks at as done unto himself; and what is done unto them in kindness-if it be but a cup of cold water he reckons it as done unto him. Now he is said here to be "a sign." I will just notice that beautiful scripture-the last verse of the 55th of Isaiah-upon Christ thus being the sign. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead

of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Now there are four or five applications which those words are capable of, that will open up very nicely, I think, the way in which the Savior is a sign. First, he there stands as the end of all our troubles. First, there is the thorn, and then the brier; and what are these but Jesus Christ himself? What! Jesus Christ a thorn? No. Jesus Christ a brier? No. Yet if I say Yea; I am right. He took upon him our thorny state. He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was crowned with thorns and briers; he took our grief's and our sorrows. Oh the thorny path through which he walked, the thorny scene through which he travelled! How was he pierced!-pierced again and again in his pure mind by the contradiction of sinners, as well as pierced at the last in his body. But now he has got rid of the thorn; he has got rid of the brier; now he appears as the fir tree, and he saith in perfection "I am like a green fir tree; from me is thy fruit found." Now he appears as the myrtle tree, giving fragrance to heaven itself; giving fragrance to all the church of the blessed God. So, then, instead of his being now a man of sorrows, he is a man of joys; instead of dying, he lives, instead of enduring the plagues of sin, he now has the pleasures of heaven at God's right hand for evermore. Second, he is also the sign of what we are to be. The thorn and the brier represent our sinner-ship; Christ has put an end to our sinner-ship, and holds us now as paradisiacal trees not as thorns nigh unto the cursing, and whose end is to be burned; but there shall be no more curse. Now we are held as fir trees and myrtle trees, of the Lord's right hand planting; now we are reconciled to God to become enemies to him no more forever. Third, it represents the new state of things. If we were left under the law we should have had to be taught by the thorns and briers of hell to all eternity. Gideon taught the men of Succoth with thorns and briers, and so we must have been taught to eternity with the thorns and briers, the threatening's of the blessed God. But Jesus Christ hath delivered us from all these threats, not one threatening is left; and he has brought us into that land where all is paradisiacal, that gospel land where there is not one sign of thorn or brier. And then, fourthly, it means the people of God themselves, delivered from all trouble, not a thorn left, not a brier remaining. The Lord sees the necessity of our having a thorn in the flesh now sometimes to keep us low enough to make us prize his truth, but the time will come when every tear shall be dried. And then, lastly, the resurrection at the last great day. When the body is raised from the dead, Jesus stands as the sign of all this.