

Timely Warning

A SERMON – Preached on Sunday Morning July 7th 1867, by

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AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

"To show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass."— Revelation i. 1.

This, of course, is a form of speech that must be understood relatively, — namely, that the things that pertain more, I may say, perfect realization, would with that generation of Christians shortly come to pass; and so with the next generation, and so with generation after generation down to the end of time; because the life of each Christian is short, and therefore those blessings and that glory which the Lord hath in reserve will thus shortly come to pass. And it must, I think, be in this sense that we should understand the following scriptures: — "The coming of the Lord draweth nigh;" "I go," says the Savior, "to prepare a place for you; and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself." And that time would be short, for their lives were short; and "the coming of the Lord," to take his children one after the other to a better world, "draweth nigh." And again, "the Judge," he who is our Judge, "standeth before the door." Again, "Waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven." And so here, then, there is a revelation of God given unto Jesus Christ, to show unto his servants things that should, in the sense I have stated, shortly come to pass. There is not, that I am aware of, any more than one event spoken of in this Book of the Revelation of which this is not true—that it should shortly come to pass; and that is the event spoken of in the latter part of the 20th chapter—namely, the final judgment of the world. It would not be said at that time that this final judgment of the world should shortly come to pass; for when Daniel was led into the things which should be revealed and accomplished by the humiliation and work of the Savior, and by the spread of the gospel, that being a little more than five hundred years before the coming of Christ, it says, "The vision is yet for many days." And as to the ultimate end of the world the Bible gives only one sign that ever I have been able to ascertain, and that sign of the ultimate end of the world is the most deplorable, the most lamentable, and the most terrible sign that we can have; and it seems to answer to the Savior's words when he says, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" So you will find towards the end of this dispensation that Gog and Magog, the multitudinous enemy, come up like a cloud, and that the people of God are contracted to a little camp — to a comparatively small number; so that when the apostasy of the so-called Christian church shall thus be completed, then comes the end. As the old world was drowned when but few of the Lord's people were in it, as the cities of the plain were destroyed when but few good people were in them, so it appears that it will be the case with the ultimate end of the world. It is a very solemn contemplation of things, and I am sure the more we enter into the solemnity of these things the more we shall prize any acquaintance we have with the mercy and the salvation of God, and with that divine revelation that makes known to us this eternal salvation.

I shall, therefore, this morning notice the doctrines which appear to be contained in our text, and I will take a fourfold view of the same. Here is, first, timely revelation; second, confirmation,— "to show unto his servants;" the people who are already warned, and already his servants; still they need confirmation.

Thirdly, direction. Fourth, and lastly, the things which were to shortly to come to pass, upon which I will be as definite as possible when I come to that part.

First, timely revelation,—“to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.” There was a time when we did not see into the evil of sin as we were afterwards let to do when the Lord convinced us of sin. There was a time when we did not see into the infallible certainty of the Judgment of God as we did when the Lord was pleased to cause the weighty matters of judgment to sink down deep into our souls. There was a time when with us the Savior was a mere hearsay person. There was a time when the Bible with us was an old book, very well to refer to now and then. There was a time, in a word, when we had no definite understanding, and no definite feeling upon anything that was to come. By and by the Lord is pleased to open our eyes, and we see sin is that which God has infinitely and eternally hated, and will forever condemn. We were led to see that his law can be nothing to a sinner but a fiery law; and therefore to meet God in that law is to meet him in all the strength of his fiery indignation and of his almighty wrath. Then the question was, How are we to escape this tremendous evil? Not by annihilation, for the soul is immortal. Not by escaping God, for even at death the spirit returns to God, either to meet him as a sin-avenging God or as a saved soul to enter into his approving presence; so it cannot be by escaping God. And it cannot be by escaping the judgment of the last day for when the Savior shall descend, not a hoof, as it were, shall be left behind—it is a solemn thought,—but all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and come forth. And ever let us remember, as I have often before said, and I repeat it, that this globe we inhabit is in the hands of Omnipotence as a mere mustard-seed and he will find out all that have ever lived and died, as well as those that are alive at that day. So there is no escape. What, then, is to be done? we said. Some of us ran one way, and some another but ere long the Lord showed unto us that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. What did he do with sin? Why, he bare it in his own body on the tree; he suffered the hell that was due to it; he put it away by the sacrifice of himself. He blotted it out from the book of God's remembrance, and by what he hath done the Lord comes in and says “ I, even I ”—that might have condemned you to eternity, and that justly,- “I, even I”—that might have followed you to eternity with one wave of wrath after another, with curse upon curse, anger upon anger, bitterness upon bitterness,—“I, even I, blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins. We were led to see this, and we began to cleave to Jesus; we began to look to him; we began to recognize the friendship of heaven, the love of God, the mercy of God, and the grace of God. And when the inquiry arose in our minds, - Which it did not, I suppose at the first, but in the Lord's own time it doth, - when we read that not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail, the precept must stand eternally true an eternally good. What is to be done with the precept? We began to read with rapture and delight the blessed truth that the Lord Jesus Christ did, in his obedient life, obey the law, that he has established the law, magnified the law, confirmed the law, and brought in eternal righteousness. So the precept and the penalty are set at rest; mercy and truth meet together righteousness and peace embrace each other; and now a way was opened to us of reconciliation to God, and in came the testimony that “God committed to us the word of reconciliation; to wit, that God was reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” And those words that you have again and again will apply to all the departments of salvation, - namely, “Whosoever believeth.” Christ is the end of the law unto the man that believes he is the end of the law for righteousness, and receives him as such. Christ has obtained eternal redemption for the man who is brought to feel his need of that redemption, and receives the testimony of what Christ has done. Christ hath accomplished the warfare; in a word, precious faith receives all these testimonies of what he has done. Thus the Lord revealed to us things which shall be hereafter, and from that day to this we have more or less lived in eternity; we have more or less, from that day to this, been enabled in the balancing of the two to see and feel the infinite weightiness of the eternal when set by the side of the temporal. We have all prayed—I am sure we have, if we are real Christians—that we may come more and more into that spirit described by the apostle when he saith, “We look not at the things that are seen, for

they are temporal, but at the things that are not seen”—that is, not seen by the world, or seen by mortal eye,—“for they are eternal.” And from that day to this we have more or less lived in God’s eternal and sworn covenant, in God’s eternal love, in God’s eternal salvation, in God’s eternal redemption, in that life that is eternal. And it is surprising how sensitive the Christian is upon this matter. If any man should come that would bring a doctrine that would imply a terminus to any one of these glorious truths of the gospel, the soul of the Christian would rise in indignation against such a doctrine. The Christian is made to know that God’s love is like himself, that it runs on to eternity; that God’s choice, which was an act of grace, runs on to eternity, unaltered and unalterable; and that the perfection of Christ is a perfection that runs on to eternity; that God’s sworn covenant runs on to eternity; and that the joys and pleasures of the saints of God run on to eternity. Now we must, before we die, be thus brought to know our state as sinners; we must, before we die, be thus made acquainted with God’s truth, with God’s Christ, and with God’s salvation, for we cannot die in the Lord if we are not first planted in the faith. It is said of the ancients, “These all died in faith;” but we cannot die in the faith if we are not brought into that faith. This, I think, then, is one thing fairly implied. And now what shall I say in this part? Is there one man or woman here this morning whose eyes are opened to see these things, that can contrast what you once were with your present state without feeling that you do owe a debt of infinite gratitude to the Lord, who, so rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved you when dead in sin, hath thus quickened you together? Ah, then, remember what you were, saith the apostle, and where you were; contrast the two, and ask the two questions, “Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received? ”If, therefore, this difference is by the mercy and good pleasure of the Lord, wherefore dost thou boast, as though thou hadst done it thyself? It is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

But I think the second thing here implied is confirmation. Now these are the servants of the Lord that are thus brought to serve him in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter; that are thus brought to serve him, not at Mount Gerizim, nor at Jerusalem, nor any other earthly locality, but brought to serve him in spirit and in truth, and consequently to worship him everywhere. “I will,” saith the apostle, “that men pray everywhere; lifting up holy hands, without wrath” —against God or his truth—“and doubting” his blessed truth. And what a sweet privilege is it that the Lord is with his people (for the promises run in that form) from time to time, in all places whither they go! “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Confirmation, then, is the next thing. And we need confirming in these things, or else our unbelief, our many infirmities, our many troubles, and many trials, would deal with us as tribulations dealt with the stony-ground hearer—put an end to his religion. And so we need confirming from time to time in God’s truth in order to keep us pursuing, and to keep us in the ways of the Lord. Samuel, in the 7th chapter of his Second Book, saith, “Thy people, which thou redeemed to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods, thou hast confirmed to thyself to be a people unto thee forever: and thou, Lord, art become their God.” Let Egypt stand as the representative of all evil; and let the gods stand as the representatives of idolatry and error; and thou hast thus confirmed thy people unto thee forever. How does the Lord confirm us now? Is it not by a fresh manifestation of the redeeming power of the blood of the Lamb? Is it not by a fresh opening up unto us of the excellency of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ? I do readily admit that even now I know but very little of the redeeming power of the blood of Christ; I know but little of the power of his eternal redemption; I know but little of the efficacy of his precious blood. But little as I know, I do know more of it than I did twenty years ago; and I had not the least Idea when I was first brought into the liberty of the gospel that I should so need this atonement from time to time. It is then the fresh assurance that his blood cleanses from all sin; it is the fresh assurance of the infallible efficacy of his atonement; it is the fresh, as it were, sprinkling of his precious blood upon the conscience; it is another word in addition to the words that have been spoken to us—speaking home with peace. This is our confirmation, and this shows us the good things to come; for whenever we realize the blessedness of the redemption of Christ, we can then see that we are interested in the good things to come; and in

this confirmation in the truth we see clearly the good things that are to come by Christ Jesus. How beautiful the words are, "Christ being come a high priest of good things to come"! and if they are to come by his priesthood, they are sure to come. Perhaps we are in a solitary, destitute, wretched condition, and our religion seems to have left us, everything seems to have left us; nay, one went so far that he said, "My hope and my strength are perished from the Lord." We seem to get nothing from the Bible, nothing from the ministry, nothing from prayer; weary and worn out. Where is my religion, and where is my faith, and where is the Lord? Surely, surely, I have never had any religion at all. By and by the Lord comes in, and makes you as happy as you were before miserable; the Lord steps in, takes all this solitude away, and once more your soul can feed upon his blessed word; once more you can say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they were sweet unto my taste sweeter than honey and the honeycomb." Hence, in the 68th Psalm, "Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain" —alluding, perhaps, to the manna in the wilderness,—“whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary. Thy congregation hath dwelt therein,”—hath dwelt in that order of things, in that faith, for they lived by faith, by which these blessings came. "Thou, O God," it goes on to say, "hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor." It is then by these renewed manifestations that we can clearly see that the Lord is our God for ever, and will be our guide even unto death.

Then it means also direction. What a mercy this is! We see how many of the people of God in different ages have been perplexed as to what step to take; and time would fail me to name the numerous circumstances—how the Lord has stepped in when his people have been perplexed, not knowing what to do. For instance, when the coming of the flood was revealed to Noah, if the Lord did not at the same time—perhaps he did not; I cannot say he did or did not;—but if he did not just at the same time reveal to Noah the way of escape, you see how at a loss he would be. But the Lord stepped in and directed him what to do. And I need not remind you of Moses, when he went on that to him tremendous mission—I, a solitary individual, go to deliver Israel! But when the Lord said, "Take that rod in thine hand," how simple! Pharaoh—little did he think what was in that rod, and in that man. And when the magicians succeeded, by some art of theirs, in making their rods appear as serpents, that would lower the rod of Moses very much in the estimation of Pharaoh; but it would not lower the rod in the estimation of Moses. And so there are plenty in our day of imitation gospels, by which the true gospel of God is very much lowered in the eyes of the Egyptians, in the eyes of those that know not the Lord. But the rod was not lowered in the estimation of Moses. He knew it was still the rod of God, notwithstanding the many imitations. And so we know the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to ever one that believeth. With that rod the plagues were brought, and the distinction made; the Israelites directed, the sea divided, water brought from the rock; and so the Lord directed them. But, as I have said, time would fail me to dwell upon the many beautiful circumstances wherein the Lord appears directing his people what to do. There is one which appears to be a kind of vague direction, which I think is a very pleasing one; I am very glad that such an instance is recorded in the Bible. I refer now to the widow whose son Elisha had raised from the dead. When the famine came, this widow knew not what to do; she knew not which way to look. How am I to live? What will become of me? Where shall I go? I love the Lord, I love the prophet; that prophet is a holy man of God, and I revere him, and esteem him, and love him. Surely the God of such a prophet, surely the God that supplied the widow of Zarephath in Elijah's time will not forsake me? Surely the God that even bade the ravens feed his servant Elijah will take care of me? And so Elisha gave her this direction, which seems vague, yet there is something about it so natural, and so pleasing, and so useful in application;—he told her to go out and sojourn whither she could. Go out and sojourn where you can. Just so with you; you must watch the hand of the Lord; and where there is a way opened for you to get a little bread honestly, go there; and where there is a way opened for you to hear the truth, go that way; and where there is a way opened for you to get along, go on in that way. Well, but supposing there is no way open. Well, but there will be by and by. Now where this woman lived, what

she worked at, I do not know; but I do know one thing; I know that at the end of the famine she came back again all safe to Elisha. And the old servant of Elisha, who had been telling the king of the many things Elisha had done, Why, he said, here is the very woman whose son he raised from the dead; so now you may see her. And the king was so pleased that he commanded that her land should be given to her, and that all the fruits that it had borne or should bear should be hers. So that she had her captivity by and by turned. It is a great thing to be guided by the Lord; there is not anything too hard for him. There are, perhaps, some of you that can hardly receive this saying, but many of you can receive it. I have found it good in my time to watch the hand of the Lord in all these things. So, then, "to show unto his servants," to direct them; and he does in many of his dealings say, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." How many have almost broken their hearts because they could not take such a step, and gain such an object! and in a few years, or a few months, ay, perhaps in a few weeks they have been shown that if they could have gained their point it would have been pretty well or quite to their ruin. How many wishing to leave one country and go to another have found that the ship has just gone! and they have been so disappointed, so grieved don't know what they shall do now. Presently the tidings come that that very ship is destroyed, and all perhaps that were on board lost. How many instances have we had of this! Indeed, time would fail me to tell of the ten thousand ways in which the Lord guards our life, watches over us, and takes care of us. Are not his mercies well worth acknowledging? are not his mercies to be recognized? and is he not to be glorified for these things? "O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." So, then, he thus awakens up sinners to bring them to himself before death shall overtake them; that they should not see death till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power, that they should not see death until they have seen the Lord's Christ; that they should not see death until they have seen the Savior's victory over death, that they should not see death until they have seen the God of life, that they should not see death until they are made happily to know that the bitterness of death is past, and that life and glory are their eternal portion. And then confirming them in the truth, and then directing them as seems good in his sight. Is there not a meaning in the Savior's words when he says, "Pray unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father that seeth in secret shall reward thee openly"? Do not be too forward in telling your neighbors, nor even your brothers or sisters in the Lord, your troubles for they have their infirmities as well as other people, and they will turn your troubles into an awkward form. Very strange Mr. So-and-so should be in such trouble, they will say; there is something somewhere, I can't make it out. Very strange that such and such a couple, that have neither chick nor child, should be in such trouble, I cannot make it out. Very strange that such and such a couple, that have a large family, should be in such trouble, I cannot make it out. So you had better say but little; go on quietly and say as little as possible. Your better way is to take the Savior's advice, "Pray unto thy Father which is in secret;" and you watch the matter; stand still, as it were, and see the salvation of God. Some troubles, at least, are best kept to yourselves.

But I must come to the last part of our subject—the things that were shortly to come to pass. Now there are two orders of things that were shortly to come to pass; one very unpleasant, and the other exceedingly pleasant. I have not this morning to point out to you quite such heavy clouds as hung over their heads. We know but little of the bitter troubles to which in that day they were subjected for the truth's sake. Now to the church of Smyrna, to which I hope we belong the Lord did not deal out one reproof; not because they were not reportable, but there was nothing essentially the matter. And the Savior there appears to that church in testimony of what he was to every Christian church. "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich;)" rich in faith, and heirs of the eternal kingdom. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." They could not make a profession long in that day without encountering great persecution. "Fear none of those things" —none of them. "Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison." See how comfortably

you can hear this this morning. There is no inquisitor waiting at the doors to seize you as you go out presently; you are not afraid of seeing three or four emissaries of the Pope come down the aisle and inquire for you. The devil is chained so far, and we rejoice at it. "Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison"—that is, by his agents, out of enmity to the truth; "that ye may be tried," put to the test, see if you can stand it; and of course they did stand it, because "as thy days, so also shall be thy strength." "And ye shall have tribulation"—that is all, that is all, only tribulation. You know what we do, all of us. I cannot help saying it. I do not do it as much as I did many years ago; I think I am getting a little out of that. I used to turn nine out of ten of my troubles into condemnation; but I have learnt now they are only tribulation, that is all. "Ye shall have tribulation." But then we are apt to think it is condemnation that it is the Lord against us; whereas there is no affliction the Christian can have that has in it any condemnation; it is not condemnation, it is only tribulation. And then in comes the statute of limitation, "Ye shall have tribulation ten days. They seem to be a long ten days, but there it is. And that tribulation shortly came to pass; but did it move them? No, and never shall move the man that knows the value of God's blessed truth. "Be thou faithful unto death,"—keep just where you are, decided unto death,— "and I will give thee a crown of life." Here, then, was the tribulation which shortly came to pass. Well, you and I know not what troubles lie in our path yet, but there is not anything too hard for the Lord. I am not going to look to coming troubles,—that is not my business, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;" and the Lord, as you sometimes sing, will love to-morrow as he loves to-day; there is no change in him. So, then, if tribulation shall abound, consolation shall abound also. But now I must be careful in pointing out the pleasant circumstances—"things which must shortly come to pass." To speak plainly, it means that these people should soon be in heaven. You observe that every one of the promises are founded upon victory. "To him that overcometh." It is a legal victory, or victory of right. In righteousness did he judge and make war. He strove for the victory lawfully. In gaining the victory over sin, death, and hell, he did so by a righteous life, by an atoning death. He did so righteously; it is a righteous victory. And the man that receives this work of Christ receives justification. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Then the apostle goes on, as you are aware, in that same chapter, to trace out the various aspects of the Savior's death, and his intercession. Thus, then, it is a righteous victory, and therefore it stands for ever. It is a victory of power—sufficiency of power. His own arm brought salvation. Christ came against what stood against us, in the greatness of his eternal power. He has crushed everything hostile by the omnipotency of his power; cast out Satan forever; swallowed up death in victory for ever. Here, then, this same power that wrought the victory continued. Earthly victories sometimes are gained at the loss of great power. Hence many generals have said, "Another such a victory as this, or another Victory at such a cost as this, would ruin us." Perhaps the nation is so weakened that the nation they have today conquered may come upon them afterwards and conquer them. Not so with Jesus Christ. He lost no power. Here is still the same power to maintain the victory that there was to gain it; and then there is also the certainty of its results. The victory which Christ has wrought is inseparably connected with definite and certain results. This cannot be said of any earthly victory. However great the victory that may be sometimes gained by one nation over the other, we never know definitely what the results may be; but here, in this victory, the results are definite; there is nothing whatever indefinite; all is plain and clear; and it all depends upon that one department,— "Him that overcometh." Now the Lord shows unto his servants the way of victory, and that way is by faith in what the Savior has done. Let us now look, then at the pleasant circumstances that shall shortly come to pass, - "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." The church saith, "As the apple tree amidst the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste." Now if this is said in relation to your experience while in this world, what must the paradise of God be? You that receive the testimony of Christ's victory, what have you before you? Why, this paradise, these delights, this satisfaction,— "I sat down under his shadow

with great delight." There will be ecstasy, and you will show by your cheerfulness that you are at home, that you would be very sorry to be anywhere else.

Then, second, to the church of Smyrna, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." That scripture always seems to me to be very solemn. John Bunyan gives an idea that seems to my mind to associate itself with that scripture. It seems almost to impress one's mind with the idea that when the saved soul leaves the body, it sees, as it were; on its left hand the burning lake; that it passes it by. Through the Lord's mercy, says the saved, I have escaped the fire. I saw it when I was a living man, and now that my soul is out of the body I see more clearly than ever the hell that I have escaped. John Bunyan speaks of there being a way to hell by the gate of heaven, and it puts me in mind of this idea,—there seems to be a way to heaven by the very gate of hell. Not that the departing soul needs this view of hell, as it were, to confirm it in its belief of the greatness of salvation; because you will all, at the last great day, have an open view of the burning lake; it will lie open before you, millions in your presence will sink into that abyss of woe. So, then, "he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Then comes the hidden manna, and the white stone with the new name. This manna stands in contrast to the entire privation of the soul in hell; the white stone, of course, means Jesus Christ, and to denote your entire purity, perfection, consecration to God; the new name means, of course, your eternal adoption; and none can know what adoption is into the family of God but the man that receives that adoption; none other can know what it is to enter into such purity, such privileges, and such advantages. This was shortly to come to pass, and will with us shortly come to pass. Then comes freedom in contrast to bondage,—"He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father." That means that the soul ultimately shall be disentangled from everything that is mortal; as though all the things that held him in bondage before were now broken to shivers like a potter's vessel. "And I will give him the morning star;" that is, Christ is the morning star, and God will give such a one to be like him; and so that soul as a shining star will go laughing on to all eternity,—will go shining on to never-ending ages,—will go delighting on while eternity shall roll round. Then comes their divine array, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels." This was shortly to come to pass. This white garment; represents their justification, and their consecration to God, and his acknowledging them. He will never deny them that do not deny him. Now mark! He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end," that is the man that shall come into this eternal freedom. As they in this world thus acknowledged the Savior, and abode by him, he will acknowledge them. If we deny him he will deny us; but I am sure, if we know his value, we shall not deny him. Then comes their eternal stability, all founded upon this victory. All these similes are but a poor representation in comparison of the things themselves, seeing "we know only in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God" - some of us have realized that stability now;—"and he shall no more go out; and I will write upon him the name of my God."