

UNCHANGABLE TIMES

A SERMON – Preached on Sunday Morning 14th April, 1867 by

Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

And he shall ... think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time." Daniel 7, 25

The greatest revolution that time ever underwent, or ever will undergo, is that which the Savior himself wrought when he put an end to Levitical time, and introduced his own eternal sacrificial time; when he put an end to the earthly royalty, and established his own eternal royalty; when he put an end to the old covenant, and established and brought in the new and everlasting covenant. Then it was that the Savior, when he ascended on high and took possession of universal dominion, then it was that he stood with one foot upon the sea, and the other upon the land, and declared that time namely, Jewish time should be no longer. Then he put an end to Jewish time and established Christian time. But Christian time or times will never end; for eternity itself is nothing else but the lengthening out and continuation of Christian time. Christ shall thus live and reign for ever and ever: And the greatness of this revolution lay in the greatness of the work that he did-namely, the putting away of sin and the swallowing up of death in victory; his bringing life and immortality to light and bringing in everlasting righteousness. It was a matter of essential importance that certain signs should attend this new time that certain signs should attend the Christian times, in order to demonstrate that they were Christian times that Christ was come. Hence the Savior in his birth was a sign to angels; they knew that Christian time had now commenced. In his birth he was a sign to the shepherds; they knew that Christian time had commenced. He was a sign also to the wise men; they knew by his presence there the fulfilment of the prediction concerning the birth of Christ. To them he was the sign that Christian time was now commenced, that Christ was now come. And to Simeon and others in the temple at the same time he was the sign, the sure sign, that Christian time was now come. All his miracles were to his own disciple's signs and demonstration that Christian times had commenced. His death, and the things that attended that death, were also signs of his Messiahship. His resurrection also to his own people was another sign of his Messiahship. And passing by for a moment his ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and that power not only to preach the gospel to the salvation of souls, but that power to work miracles which the apostles had, these also were signs. Thus, if you take the Savior's birth, his ministry, his miracles, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the heavenly power with which the apostles were favored. If you put these things altogether, as you find then recorded from Matthew to the end of the Revelation, these were the signs: Of the times; that is, they were proofs that Christian times had commenced. And we shall never have, while the world stands, any other signs. Christ's birth still stands to us as a sign, and his life still stands to us a sign of the presence of God. His miracles still stand as a sign, and so his resurrection. The power the apostles were favored with still remains with us as a sign. And then we ourselves, having been brought into soul-trouble, and

having realized mercy by this same gospel which was demonstrated externally by these signs, we have in addition to those outward signs the witness in ourselves. And now we cannot find a single prediction in the Old Testament, from Genesis to the end of Malachi, pertaining to Christ's humiliation, which was not fulfilled. He went as it was written of him. There are no signs given in the word of God by which men can tell what age of the world we are living in. Some undertake to tell us that Jesus Christ will soon come on the earth, but they give us no proof. They try to make some scriptures apply to their theories; but they can find none. The Lord will never give any more signs than those he has given; he has now given all that he will give. He will never give another Jesus Christ; he will never give another gospel, he will never give another Spirit, he will never give another covenant. So that there is no sign, there is no circumstance by which we can judge of the duration of the future period of the world. The thousand years in Revelation 20 I take myself leaving you, of course, to do as I do namely, Judge for yourselves - to mean the whole of the gospel dispensation. Some learned men - Dr. Cumming, I believe, among the rest-are inclined to think that we should take that thousand years to mean a day for a year. Well, then, taking it in that way, it will amount to three hundred and sixty-five thousand years and we have not yet reached two thousand years towards the 365,000. So that if this interpretation be right, we are in the infancy of the gospel dispensation, and of the world with a witness! What the world will be in 300,000 years' time is what, of course, no one can form any idea of. But the truth is, the greatest light we can get upon these scriptures arises from their obscurity. Their very obscurity is their light. It is written, "It is not for you to know the times and these seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." Consequently, taking that to be our guide, we must take the various dates given, as I have often before noticed, to denote periods the full length of which is known to none but God himself. We must therefore take the 1,260 days, the forty and two months, the three days and a half, the thousand years, we must take them all mystically to mean periods known only to the Lord himself. What thousands of books have come to naught! Some predict one thing some another; while the truth is, as I have said, nothing new will be given. What we have now the same Jesus Christ, the same gospel, the same Spirit, the same God will do, down to the end of time, all that is to be done in the way of the salvation of men.

But before I enter upon the subject, the question, of course, may arise, Are there no signs of the times? Yes there are signs of the times certainly, and always were and always will be. There are but two orders or classes of signs of the times that exist at this day; but they are not of that nature that can enable us to form the least idea of the duration of the world; when the great and awful Day of Judgment will be. If no man, no, not even the Son, knew the day of Jerusalem's judgment, much less doth any man now know the day and hour when the final summing up of all things shall be. Now there are two orders of signs existing now, the one unfavorable, and the other favorable. The Lord's people are called signs. Every true Christian is good sign; he is a sign of good, and the more real Christians we have in the land, the more good signs we have. Had there been ten righteous men in the cities of the plain, the reservoirs would have slumbered, and would not have burst forth to the destruction of these cities. And as long as the Lord hath a goodly number of Christians in this or any other country, He will, for their sakes, preserve the land. Every man that is not a Christian is an evil sign; he is a sign that evil is coming. Every unbeliever, every enemy, is a sign that evil is coming. And they themselves will sometimes ingenuously acknowledge it; for in great trouble, in calamity and affliction, the vilest enemy will sometimes feel a safety under the roof of a righteous man that he does not feel under his own; he will feel a kind of safety in the company of a godly man that he cannot feel in the company of his ungodly companions. So, then, the present

state of things stands thus: - in proportion as we have Christians, and those Christians are in a lively, working, spiritual state of mind, desiring not only to get good but to do good, these are living and good, signs. They are signs of the Lord's presence, and mercy, and blessing, and they are signs of good things to come. On the other hand, every unregenerate man, every enemy to the truth of God, is a sign for evil. That man is a sign to himself for evil, though he does not know it. He is a sign for evil to the very place in which he is, to the very house in which he lives; for the very curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked! While he blesseth the habitation of the just. Thus, then, signs were given demonstrating the fact that Christian times had commenced and that those times will last forever, and that there are these two classes of signs existing that I have noticed.

Now our text may seem to some of you perhaps a little ambiguous, but I think before I get halfway through it you will see that it is in reality as plain as any text in the Bible. I must confess that to my mind there is not the least difficulty about it. I have to deal in the first place here with times and laws. Here is an adversary that thinks to change times and laws. That is the first thing we have to show the meaning of. Second, here is the tribulation of the people and that tribulation according to the sovereignty of God; for they shall be given into the enemy's hands for a limited time, -until a time and times and the dividing of time. And then, third and last, I will notice the opposite destiny of these two classes of people-the enemy and the friend.

We have first, then, to notice times and laws. This enemy shall think to change the times. All you have to do is to find out what were the characteristics of the times which the Savior established, and then the mystery is unlocked at once. What, then, are the characteristics of the times the Savior established? The first is that of salvation; "Behold now"-now that Christ has come-" is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." He hath established, therefore, a time, a state of things, in which we can be accepted of God. It is an acceptable time-the acceptable year. Let us look into this for a moment. "Now is the accepted time." Then the Apostle explains what he means by that, - "now is the day of salvation." I always enter with great pleasure upon this subject namely, the accepted time. When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared under God's law, he was the first that that law ever did or ever would accept on behalf of sinners: When Jesus Christ came to Calvary's cross to lay down his own precious life, to shed his blood, to bear our sins in his own body on the tree, and to pay for the release of sinners such a price that he should by that price-his own infinitely valuable life obtain eternal redemption, this is the first atonement that was ever acceptable to God for sin. The other sacrifices were but typical. Here is a person, now, that is accepted of God. And I am sure you must all see how important it is for our hope that we should clearly see that Jesus Christ was accepted. If there were the least obscurity upon this question, whether he in his obedient life, as the Lord our righteousness, were accepted of God-if there were the least obscurity upon that, where should we look for justification? Where should we look then for an answer to the great question: "How shall man be just with God?" And if there were any doubt or any obscurity about the acceptance of Christ in his suffering, in his atonement; if there were any obscurity or doubt about his being received when he said, "It is finished," and "Into thy hands I committ my spirit;" If there were any doubt about this matter, oh! What a darkness, what a despair would it throw over everything! If there were any doubt about the Father bringing him again from the dead by virtue of the blood of the everlasting covenant; If there were any doubt about his ascending to the right hand of God; if there were any doubt as to his being received there and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles; if there were any doubt upon the acceptance of Christ, what hope could

we have of escaping the wrath to come? Was any person ever so accepted before? Never. Did any person ever so live before? Never. Did any person ever so die before, and put away the sin of others? Never did any person ever so rise from the dead as he rose? He rose as the resurrection of unnumbered millions, according to prediction. Thy dead men shall live: with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs." "Now in the accepted time." This is a good time. Why, what can be better time? We talk of good times and bad times; why, the Christian is brought into good times, -he is brought into the acceptable times. Here your sins are blotted out, forgiven, forgotten, never to be named; here not a dog shall, in effect, move his tongue against any of the children of Israel. Here, then is the time that he hath established. And you will observe that this salvation is complete; hence you know that the Savior's mission is very frequently (and well it might be) put into this shape, -that of salvation. The very first name he bears in the New Testament is in this: "for Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." When the angel announced the birth of Christ to Mary, he took care that that name should stand first. "Thou shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus." Oh! It was the delight of this wondrous Shepherd to save the stray, the lost sheep. It was the delight of this wonderful person to receive prodigals; it was his delight to receive sinners, and to eat with them, that they might be saved in him with an everlasting salvation. This is one characteristic of the time. Thus, it was a salvation time accepted of God, and wherein men, by faith in Jesus Christ, are accepted of God. Again, I will mention only one more character of the time, though I might mention many. Jesus Christ changed the times from the old empires to establish his own empire He, Daniel says in his 2nd chapter, changes the times. And how has he changed the times with some of us? When we look back, how different our times were! They were times of darkness, now of light; of unbelief, now of faith; of enmity, now of love; of sin, now of salvation; one with Satan, now one with the Savior; going the downward road, now wending our way up Zion's attractive and pleasing hill, now looking to the everlasting hills. Oh, how different the times are with us now, "What hath God wrought!" He hath indeed changed the times in this sense also with us. But Christ's time is also one of vital and final ingathering; and I think when we get to the end of that you will see what is meant, and can now, no doubt, by the enemy trying to change the times. Ephesians 1, 9 - "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself; that in the dispensation of the fullness of times." -when was the fullness of times? When Christ came. The antediluvian, postdiluvian and Levitical times were gone; they were ended, - "that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven" -that is, the saints there, - "and which are on earth" - that is, the people of God, - "even in him." So, then, it is a time of final ingathering. But let us see how this ingathering is brought about, in order that I may make the matter clear. "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will." Wherein lies the mystery of his will? The first mystery of his will is this - "He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Now he has made known that time; he has revealed it, that he hath blessed his people with all spiritual blessings. They will never have a blessing after time with which they were not blessed in Christ before time. "Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according" -here comes eternal election; that is another part of the mystery of his will, - "according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Then comes the great end of these spiritual blessings and of this eternal choice, - "That we should be holy"- because these blessings secure to us holiness; washed in the blood of the Lamb, - "and without blame" -justified by his righteousness from all things- "before him in love;" "brought into God's presence by Christ Jesus the Lord." "Having predestinated us" -that is another part of the mystery of his will- "unto the

adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

Now these testimonies are declarative of the mystery of his will. Having made known to us these blessings; having made known to us this election of grace, this predestination to adoption, this forgiveness and redemption in Christ, this acceptance in Christ; having made this known to us, what is the consequence? "That he might gather together in one all things in Christ." Now I speak to those of you that know these things, watch your own feelings. When you hear a gospel that is not in Christ, why does your soul shrink from it-recoil at it? Why do you hate it; detest, abhor, and fly from it as you would from the face of a serpent? Because you know that all the blessings are in Christ; and the gospel that is not in Christ is not God's gospel; for "it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell;" and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are there. Now mark, "that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ." In the old covenant they had their three great annual gatherings; but they were only external and temporary. They were often scattered for a time, and by and by finally scattered, to be gathered together no more. But when once gathered in Christ, into the knowledge of these blessings, this eternal election, this adoption, this redemption, this acceptance--once gathered in there, there is no separation afterwards. Mark the next verse: - "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance." So, our eternal inheritance is in Christ; "being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Now perhaps I have gone far enough here. These are the characters of the times the Savior established -salvation; vital, final, and eternal ingathering. If I am right, is there any difficulty in understanding the text?

But the enemy shall think to change the times. How hard he has labored to change God's salvation into something contrary to what it is! How hard he has labored to turn the first of Ephesians into something different from what it is, and thus to change the character of the Christian times, and to rob them of the certainty of salvation, of the certainty of acceptance with God, of eternal election, of all the blessings with which we are blessed in Christ Jesus, of divine predestination, of the certainty of that eternal inheritance; incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away! The adversary thought to do so, and that is all he could do; he could not do it; for, in spite of Satan and all his agents, there always has been, is, and will be, "a remnant," -according to duty-faith? Might as well say according to the devil. According to free-will? Might as well say according to Satan; and so, of any other false system. "A remnant according to the election of grace." And if the election be of grace, then it is no more of works, for it cannot be both; it must be either absolute, or else conditional; and if it be conditional it is not of grace; and if it be unconditional, it is not of works. So, it is of grace, "that the purpose of God might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth." You know that thousands in our day are thinking to change these times. Ah, they say, election time will not last much longer. It may not with you, but it will with us; election time with us will remain to eternity; divine predestination time will remain with us to eternity; acceptance time will remain with us to eternity; free grace time will remain with us to eternity. Christ has established the times. The adversary has tried to change the times; but, bless the Lord, he never has, not with the people of God, though he has with others. Why, you can understand this, can you not? I could say a very great deal here; but I have said enough to throw the door open, and that is sufficient. So, you have good times in Christ, if you have but poor times in the world, and very dull and cloudy times in your circumstances. You have good times in Christ. It is a time of love, a

time of peace. It is all good there from first to last. He must be an adversary, he must be an enemy indeed that would rob me of these good times, and substitute therefor the inventions, ceremonies, and doings of men. But again, he shall also think to change laws. I will mention only one law which the adversary by his agents, by all the human learning that men are capable of, silver and gold, civil and ecclesiastical power, racks and tortures, and everything that men could devise has tried to change; But you will say our text says "laws." Well, the one law I am about to name will include all the rest. What is the law that men have tried to change? Why, they have tried to change the law of faith; some into a law of works entirely, some into a law of works partly, just to say it is the natural man's duty to believe. And the man that believes with no better faith than that, he has not such good faith as the devil has, for the devil has faith enough to make him tremble; but this man has just enough to make him impudent, and set aside God's truth, and adopt a figment, "it is by faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." Set that aside, why, then you set the law of God aside, you set the law of liberty aside, and bring us into bondage; you set the law of certainty aside and bring us into uncertainty. How hard men have labored to set aside the law of faith! How hard many of the Old Testament saints had to struggle to hold fast that law! And how hard many in the New Testament age have had to struggle to hold fast this law! Some of you go to church, perhaps, sometimes; and when you are going through the commandments you say, _ "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law." Why, you don't know what you are saying, and never have you made such a fool of yourself again. That very law that you are praying you might keep damns you in every part of it. "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." And that very law, do what you may, be you ten times more holy and righteous than was Saul of Tarsus, that law would condemn you. Church of Englandism is mere human invention, a pure Satanic production, as unscriptural as Popery, and has no more existence in the Bible. "Incline our hearts to keep this law." You can go and trifle with your soul like that, trifle with yourself like that, and trifle with God like that. Saul of Tarsus could too; but when the law of God rolled into his soul, cut him up root and branch, there was no more than of "Incline my heart to keep this law." No; he then felt his need of a law-fulfiller; he felt his need then of one that could meet the law for him, and meet the curse for him, and meet Satan for him; and now, says the apostle, "I am dead unto the law, but alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Woe be to the Surrey Tabernacle in the day when Satan could gain such an ascendancy here as to change the law of faith in ever so small a degree into the law of works! You may call the minister what you like; I care but little; it is only what I expect. Whatever Adam called the creature, that was the name thereof; and whatever the last Adam, Jesus Christ, calls me that is my name; all the rest are nick-names. If we have a good name with him, a good conscience with him and we feel we serve him, then we can rejoice in being accounted worthy to suffer shame for his blessed name. Now where is the ambiguity here? Is there any age in the church in which the adversary has not tried to do these things, to turn gospel times into legal times, and to turn the law of faith, in whole or in part, into the law of works, and there by change gospel times and gospel laws? But he has not been able to do so. If the apostle Paul were preaching to you, he would be rougher to you than I am, if you were an adversary. I am too tender by half with the enemy; I do not mean with persons, but with the enemy that deludes persons. Yea, the apostle Paul would not stand very nice about persons, - "I would they were even cut off which trouble you." Ah, say some, that means cut off from the church. No; something more than that. As a minister said some time ago to a crafty Pharisee that gave a three penny piece to one, and a four penny piece to another of the poor and hoped by degrees to get their minds round -he quoted this text: Ah, said the old Pharisee, they can't cut me off because I am not a member of

the church. Ah, he said, it doesn't mean that; he means he would they were cut off by a stroke of judgment, as Ananias and Sapphira, were, rather than God's people should be led astray to accept the devil's lies and dishonor the God of their salvation by in any manner giving way, even for an hour. Yea, if an angel from heaven come to change these heavenly times, let him be accursed. The adversary has labored to change these heavenly times, to change this heavenly law of precious faith, including every privilege of the Christian into something to be done by the creature.

But secondly, I notice the tribulation of the people- "They shall be given into his hand." Ah, says Satan, I wish I could get them. Well, so you shall. There is Job; "all that he hath is in thy power." And Satan pretty soon made a market of it, too. Well, Satan, have you succeeded? Have you changed the times and the laws? How is it now? No Lord; he is a very business man, a very industrious, clever man, and he thinks to himself, I shall recover this. But just touch his person, touch his flesh, and see if he will not curse thee to thy face. Very well; I will give him into your hand for a time and times and the dividing of time; but just spare his life, that's all. Satan would not have spared that if he could have helped it. Thus, Job was given into the hands of the enemy for a time. So, some of you may get into the hands of a devil of a husband, or wife, or a child, or a parent; but you will not be there long. God has so placed you; be as quiet as you can; leave the matter with the Lord, and he will work deliverance. Old Jezebel will be thrown out of window, Haman may hang upon the gallows. The time is limited; the triumph of the Wicked is but for a moment. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." The saints of God, thousands and millions of them have been given into the enemy's hands for a time; and some of them did, I confess it, temporarily recant. Yes, they had still got a little bit of Pharisaism hoarded up somewhere, a little bit of creature goodness somewhere. Oh, I don't mind the rack; I don't mind the torture; I am too good a man to be moved. That is the very man that is sure to be moved. I deny thee! Why, Lord, I have too much zeal, too much love, for that. That James is not half so hot as I am; he might deny thee. That John, he has great love, but he is not half so fiery as I am. What, zealous as I am! -cut man's ear off and would cut his head off; I deny thee! Ah, but then, Peter, that is all what you are. Don't you see you are forgetting that your strength is perfect weakness? Suppose the temptation should come, and I should not be your strength just in that moment: what would you do then? The Lord knows what you would do; "Thou shalt deny me thrice." Why he did not believe the Lord. Deny thee! I won't deny thee. But he did, he did. Ah, let him therefore that thinketh he stands take heed lest he fall. But then Peter was not in the hands of the enemy long, and he never got there again. And so many of the martyrs in their re-cantation felt their state of mind to be more awful than flames, and racks, and tortures, and could not endure it. The bow that had got out of its place flew back again into its right position, and they died triumphant at the last. They are given into his hand. Therefore, but only for a little time. "And the dividing of time." What does that mean? Well, it means that when you are under these troubles you will have a little help in the middle of them; then a little more trial, and then a little more help. You shall undergo these various states of mind. Now, to do justice to this part of the subject I ought to run through the whole of the 11th chapter of the Book of Revelation; but I must not attempt that, because your time is all but gone now; or else that chapter would set forth the time and times, how the adversary is limited, and how the Lord's people at the last rise superior to it all. What a mercy that, if the adversary gain dominion in some measure, yet the sovereignty of God, the hand God, will protect his people!

"Not a single shaft can hit
Till the God of love see fit."

But I must, lastly, notice the opposite destiny of these two classes of people - the enemy and the friend. What will become of the man that knows nothing of these Christian times, that knows nothing of the law of faith, of the law of liberty? The next verse says that the living God shall take away his dominion. How short has been the dominion of persecutors! How short is the reign of the ungodly! He "shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end." Such will be their destiny. What shall we say, most of us that are here this morning? Oh, why are we brought spiritually into the days of Christ? For "in his days shall the righteous flourish." Why are we brought under the law of faith, and thereby into the law of love and life, and liberty, and righteousness? Why we are thus made to differ? And what have we that we have not received? And now notice the happy destiny of these people who are thus brought into the law of faith, and who are made willing to suffer for the truth's sake. "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most high." Well, say you that is not done yet. Yes, it is. Why, I hope none of the Surrey Tabernacle people are silly enough to suppose that the time is coming when Christ will have a kingdom on the earth, a great political kingdom and that we shall possess it with him. We must take the words spiritually, for they belong to spiritual things. The blessings are spiritual, the kingdom of God is spiritual, and the people ultimately are to be spiritual. When Jesus Christ was given the greatness of the kingdom was given; in having him you have everything. You must measure the greatness of the kingdom by the greatness of Jesus Christ. He fills infinity, he fills eternity; so that you have an infinite and an everlasting kingdom. "And the greatness of the kingdom."

"The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God." But those that are brought in, the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, the entire range of the gospel, is given to them.