Editor's note: This was taken from the Mount Zion Primitive Baptist Church, Indiana Website at http://www.mountzionpbc.org/books/Predestination%20Articles.htm it is under the heading of Wells James 1839. I have made very minor corrections only to this document, fixing some spelling and formatting issues. I have also converted it to Word and HTML format. The Mount Zion Primitive Baptist Church site is excellent. It has a wealth of valuable material, please take time to visit this site!

VESSELS OF MERCY,

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT

A SERMON
PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 13TH, 1859,

BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"Vessels of mercy." Romans ix. 23.

THEY appear under a three-fold representation in the word of God as vessels. First, IN THEIR WEAKNESS. We are poor weak creatures; earthen vessels, mere sun-dried vessels, not even burnt with fire to be very strong, but as brittle as anything can well be. To this we are compared; we are poor weak creatures. This is what the Lord brings those to feel whom he intends to save; that they are weak and worthless, and in a sense worse than worthless. And when brought to feel this weakness and worthlessness, you may then read the 2nd. Psalm, and see yourself among those who are in our text called "Vessels of mercy." You find in that Psalm a people enraged at Jesus Christ; taking counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed; but you see that notwithstanding the counsel they took against him, the Lord set his King on Zion; "The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." You will begin to say, well, here is the Lord, and his anointed; his anointed will mean the Messiah; the Messiah who was sent to finish transgression, and make an end of sin, and make reconciliation for iniquity; that is just what I want; the Lord bring me to receive him, and then I shall receive all that I want. Now the people were enraged against him; whereas you can say that so far from this being the case with you, he is the

object in this character as the Anointed, in which he has thus finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, he is the object of your desire. And so you have in that Psalm, and further on the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the apostle gives us to understand that Christ's resurrection is the assurance of the carrying out of all the mercies of the everlasting covenant; for we find the apostle applying those words in the 55th of Isaiah, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David;" Paul in the 13th of Acts, says that refers to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the Lord said to Christ in that Psalm, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance." All by nature are heathen, alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us; and now we are given to Christ, he has our desire, he has our approbation, he has our confidence, he has our affection, he has our souls, he has our bodies; we feel that of all hands we can be in no hands so good as the hands of the Lord. Jesus Christ. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Then mark, it goes on to say, "Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." This does not mean those that were given to Christ; no; you must distinguish there; "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession; and the others, that I do not give thee, that will stand opposed to those I do give thee, others I leave as vessels of wrath, and vessels of dishonor, they will go on to oppose thee; but "Thou shalt rule them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potters vessel." This is to give us confidence in Christ; and you will find that this breaking the enemy to shivers as a potter's vessel is one of the privileges of the believer; for so you will find in the 2nd of Revelation, "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end;" mark that, my works; faith in Christ's righteousness and faith in Christ's death, these are Christ's works; he that overcometh that which stands opposed to Christ's name, and honor, and character, 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; meaning that he that is one with Christ can no more be broken to pieces than Christ can; they can be no more conquered than Christ can be conquered; they can no more be brought to naught than Christ can be brought to naught; you may grind them to powder as to the body, but all that will do will be to send their souls home; that is all; so that not one ever has been, ever can be, or ever will be destroyed. And hence, there are commands given in that Psalm which have been in all ages obeyed, and are sure to be obeyed. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth," or earthly judges, or judges of earthly things; and when the Lord gives that command, brings it into the soul, the sinner is wise. What is it to be wise? Why, to be wise is to know Jesus Christ; to be truly wise is to be wise with that wisdom that is sent from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, wise unto eternal salvation. Those who are vessels of mercy, then, are brought to feel what poor, weak, and worthless things they are; the consequence is that they become, from a sight and sense of their weakness and worthlessness, reconciled to God's way of saving the sinner. Hence, the apostle says, that "He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure;" the treasure there means this knowledge; first this knowledge of our weakness and of our worthlessness, and which makes that saying in our estimation so faithful and so worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Now, "We have this treasure," this knowledge, this faith, this gospel, "In earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." This then is one of the representation of the vessels of mercy, that they are brought thus to acknowledge that they are, as sinners considered, but broken vessels, they are poor brittle things, uncertain in everything that

pertains to them as creatures, perfectly uncertain. What is more uncertain than our mortal life, a poor sinner, brought to feel what he is as a sinner, brought to feel what a poor, worthless, helpless thing he is, he is hereby fitted to be what our text designates the people of God, vessels of mercy; such an one feels perfectly sure that if ever saved it must be from first to last by the mercy of God. They are weak, then, and worthless. Can you set your seal to that? The second representation given of them is this, that in the temple there were vessels of brass and of iron. I take these vessels of brass and of iron to represent the same people. No doubt these vessels consecrated to God in the temple had a spiritual meaning; therefore I take these vessels of brass and iron to represent the same people. The earthen vessels represent them in their weakness and worthlessness; and the vessels of brass and of iron represent them in their strength. And so, while in the body, and in self considered, they are poor, weak, and worthless things; yet in another respect, namely, in their faith, and in the Lord, how strong are they! Just as strong as the everlasting God; because he is their strength; here they are one with Jesus Christ, strong in the perfection of Jesus Christ. Oh, what is so strengthening? Only think that through all our experiences, through all our lives, there we stand perfect by Jesus Christ; free from fault, pleasing in the sight of the blessed God. We cannot be too strong in our confidence in this perfect work of Jesus Christ. Secondly, in the counsels of God the Father; there they stand, strong in those counsels; they know those counsels cannot be overturned, they know that his purposes cannot be disannulled they know that his hand cannot be turned back; they know that he will carry out all the purposes of his love; and though we do not understand for the present a great many of his dealings with us, he sees the end; and when the end shall come, then his wisdom, as well as his grace, and other perfections of his nature and counsels of his will, will shine forth in bringing about that truth which is a kind of truism among us, that "all is well that ends well;" and the Lord will take care that the whole of his people shall end well; they shall end well by faith in the perfection of the Savior’s work, they shall end well by the stability of the Father's counsels; they shall end well by the mighty power of the Holy Ghost in working them out of all false confidences, sweeping away all refuges of lies, and bringing them to walk in God, to live in God, to live in Christ, where, their life is, where their holiness, where their righteousness is, where their salvation is, where their all in all is; for God shall be their all in all. Therefore they are strong here. In and of themselves, and after the flesh they are poor earthen vessels; but here, in Christ Jesus, they are strong; the blessed God himself must fail before they can fatally fail. Oh, it is a delightful truth that our faults and failures make way for the coming in of Him who has no fault, and who never failed, and never can fail. I think that the Christian, who loves holiness, which every real Christian does, loves righteousness, and loves fellowship with the blessed God; when he feels what a poor creature he is, what a heart he has; how sometimes, I was going to say the very vapor of hell rises in the heart, that seems to poison every sacred thought, and sacred feeling, and hallowed affection of the soul, and makes us like walking pestilences, wretched and miserable; oh, unto such the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed precious; unto such God in his immutability is indeed glorious; unto such the eternal Spirit in his omnipotence is indeed blessed. Oh, says such a one, what should I do but for the living God! What should I do but for the everlasting God! What should I do but for Jesus Christ! What should I do but for the great truth that underneath are the everlasting arms! He will not leave me to struggle with the enemy, nor to conquer the enemy, but he will thrust out the enemy for us. Thus these vessels are poor weak things; but in another sense they are strong. Then the third representation of these vessels is that of silver and gold; and this is to represent the preciousness of them. They are precious. See the difference, the vast difference, between the original material and the ultimate perfection of that material. What is a sinner? A worthless, noisome piece of clay. See him by what Jesus Christ makes him; see him stand at the last before

God; there he stands in all the strength of a Savior’s perfection; there he stands in all the purity of the Savior’s name and holiness; there he is now, no longer clay, but gold or silver, to represent their purity and their preciousness unto the Lord. Whatever Christ is to God the Father, that you that love his dear Son are; whatever Christ is to God the Father, as man considered, you are to God the Father; no difference; loved with the same love; whatever Christ is to the Holy Ghost, that the Holy Ghost holds you; whatever Christ is in himself, that he presents us before God. How shall we describe the difference then the disproportion between the original worthless material and the ultimate perfection to which it is brought? as much difference between the original material and its ultimate perfection as there is between sin and holiness, as there is between unrighteousness and righteousness, as there is between Satan and an angel, as there is between mortality and immortality, as there is between corruption and incorruption, as there is between weakness itself and the perfection of strength, as there is between time and eternity. Do not, my hearer, judge of the ultimate perfection of these people by the few feeble remarks I am making; but take, as far as you can, the Lord Jesus Christ himself as the pattern of their ultimate perfection. I believe the Old Testament saints, while some in our day pique themselves upon the notion that they know a great deal more about Christ, and about God, than the Old Testament saints did; and yet in reading the Old Testament scriptures you will find that there was a greater eagerness for God's presence than is now generally seen; and in reading the New Testament, you will find a great eagerness expressed in many scriptures to be with God. Christ himself always looked forward, and always set his resurrection and ascension in contrast to his sufferings, in order that he might ever keep his mind upon the joy that was set before him; and for the joy set before him he endured the cross. The apostle Paul looked forward to the time; yea, as though he would say, I am not ashamed to own it; "I press toward the mark, the prize of the high calling of God." And the apostle Peter, when looking into this matter, could not write without looking forward to the ultimate perfection to which they should come; and, therefore, he says, "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." Oh, what a spiritual state of mind must that be, that neither wealth, nor honor, nor wife, nor husband, nor parent, nor child, nor sister, nor brother, nor any worldly interest whatever, are able to tie the soul down, and keep it back from its dearest delights, its ultimate perfection and glory. "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." And though at that time the universe is to pass away before the burning majesty of the great Redeemer, yet it is on a new earth, and under new heavens, and ordered by a new covenant, wherein all things are new, that this perfection is to shine forth. Thus the scriptures give a three-fold view of the people of God as vessels; first, as earthen vessels; second, as strong in the Lord; and third, as precious in his sight; expressive of their ultimate perfection. But I do not think I should do right without just making a remark upon the other side of this matter. Take the man who lives and dies either unconcerned about his state, or a persecutor of the people of God, or a mere professor, having the name without the power. Every day of his life his sins grow stronger, and he grows weaker; every day brings him nearer to that time when every particle of strength must fly from him, and he must lie down in eternal weakness; the last particle of his hope gone; hopeless, helpless, friendless, banished from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Oh, then, my hearers, are we brought to know what poor, weak creatures we are? and made to feel the solemnity of these matters? and are we brought to have sweet confidence in the Lord? and do we see an attractiveness in the ultimate perfection to which the people are to come? If so, I think we can understand a little of the meaning of the apostle when he says, "He that delivered us from so great a death;" that is the first; "He doth deliver," that is the second. "He doth deliver;" it was not enough for him to deliver us mediatorially by his dear Son; but he comes and delivers us vitally, manifestively, continually, he doth deliver

us; "In whom we trust", there is our strength: "Trust ye in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength;" "In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." Oh, could you now wish to leave the house of God this morning in the possession of anything better that these three things? to go away this morning and say, Well, I think I can say that he hath delivered me from this great death; but knowing that I am a poor, weak creature, having no hope but in Jesus Christ, after the order of his mediation, if that be an evidence, then I think I may say, he hath delivered me from this great death; he doth deliver; and in whom I trust that he will yet deliver; no uncertainty about it. Oh, it is a sweet position; the Lord give us more of godliness, bring more of these eternal things into our souls.

I will now notice their character as described in our text, "Vessels of mercy." I will notice four reasons why they are vessels of mercy. First, because they are receivers of mercy. A vessel is to receive what is intended for its reception. They are receivers of mercy. The Apostle, in the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, after presenting, or in presenting, to us what the law of God is, as the ministration of death, and condemnation, he then in contrast gives us what the ministration of the gospel is; and then after that he sums it all up in the word, "mercy," as we shall see after I have just glanced at the contrast. He calls the gospel the ministration of life, in contrast to the death of the law; and you recollect that he says in one place, "We have the sentence of death in ourselves." Now it is a great thing to be taught what this sentence of death is; none but the Christian knows what that is. "We have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in the living God, that raiseth the dead." Now what is this sentence of death? If you do not possess it, you are not a Christian. That is speaking very strongly; if you have not that sentence of death, for there is no exception to that rule, you have no right to conclude you are a Christian. What is that sentence of death? The Apostle describes it in another place,—"The commandment came, sin revived, and I died." The meaning is this—a consciousness that the law puts a negative upon all your holiness, all your righteousness, all your wisdom, all your hope, all your doings; that you are altogether as an unclean thing; that the law of God puts a negative upon the whole of it, that he that offends in one point is guilty of the whole; so that you carry in you this sentence of death; and therefore you cannot trust in that for mercy which God hath put a negative upon. Hence the many descriptions in the Bible of this matter: "In my flesh dwelleth no good thing." Now, my hearer, dost thou carry that with thee? A consciousness that the law of God puts a negative upon all thy holiness, all thy righteousness; I mean, of course, self-holiness, self-righteous- ness, self-wisdom, self-strength; that the law puts a negative upon the whole of it; and that if you have life, you cannot have life where sin is, that is impossible, because where sin is there must be death; and if you have life, you must have it where there is no sin; and you will find that nowhere but in Jesus Christ; there is no sin in Jesus Christ; and so "He that believeth in him,—receiveth him,—"hath everlasting life." So you are conscious, then, that the law puts a negative upon all you have and are as a sinner; but the law never did and never will put a negative upon Christ; no, there is eternal life. Then again, the gospel is the "ministration of righteousness." Just look at the words, "the ministration of righteousness." Now, if the prodigal had had a robe of his own as good as his father could have found him, it would not have been needful that a robe should be ministered or given to him. And there was one that you read of, that did dream that his own robe would do; but you know what the result was,—"Take him, and bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness." That man had not the sentence of death in himself, or else he would not have come in his own robe, in his own righteousness. See the necessity of this sentence of death in ourselves, that we might receive Christ as our life, and Christ as our righteousness. And then again, so far from the law putting a

negative upon the Lord Jesus Christ, he magnifies the law. The Apostle seems amazingly interested in that idea of not making void the law through faith, and establishing, magnifying, and honoring the law through faith; he seems amazingly interested in that. Why? Because he knew that the eternal sorrow of the lost rises from the sentence of the law; and he knew that no soul could be saved contrary to the perfection of God's law; and he knew that the law is eternally honored, infinitely more honored in the work of Christ in our eternal salvation, than ever it can be in the condemnation of the lost. It is a great thing to understand these things somewhat in their distinctness, so that we may see where we are condemned and where we are justified; where and how it is death reigns, and where and how it is life reigns; how, in the contrast, we are delivered from the one into the knowledge and reception of the other. Then again, the Apostle reminds us that that at dispensation, or the glory of the law, was done away; he reminds us that this glory of the gospel remains; and then he sums up the whole matter, and very beautifully, he says, "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry," that while we were dead he ministered life to us; by this ministry we have life, and righteousness, and glory, and that that will remain forever; "Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy;" there it is; so that to receive the testimony of life in the love of it, to receive the testimony of righteousness, to receive the testimony of the superiority of the gospel, and to receive the testimony of the eternity of the gospel, is summed up by the Apostle under the idea of mercy, "As we have received mercy we faint not." And then he goes on to shew the effects of this very beautifully, —"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God;" as though he should say, if we were under a law of condemnation, and had no other law to govern us, then we might be excused for any shuffling, any turning, any twisting, in order to make ourselves comfortable and evade the terrors of that law; but that is not the case; we are under a law of mercy; and therefore we may come before God, and tell him just what and where we are, not telling a single lie; we may come before him, and enjoy all that he sees good we shall enjoy, and that lawfully, rightly, to all eternity; so that we may renounce all the hidden things of dishonesty; no scheming, no planning; the gospel can be honest; we are to confess our sins before him, one of the sweetest privileges we have; many, many times have I been unburdening my mind before the Lord, and his mercy has rolled in upon my soul; there is no occasion to come dishonestly before him, and say we are better than we are; no shrinking, no reluctance; all plain, all straightforward, all honest from first to last. "By manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Second, they are also retainers of mercy. It says in one place, "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should. let them slip;" as the margin teaches you rightly, the idea of the apostle is this, a vessel that leaks; and one leak, you know, will sink a ship. There is a man who has professed the truth for some time, a man or woman, sometimes one, sometimes the other; by and bye he begins to part with some corner of it, begins to leak; and depend upon it as soon as ever there is room for error, the devil has plenty to put in; he will fill your mind with it. I do not think there has been a sermon for the last twenty years that has put the professing world more to the test than our sermon on "Jacob and Esau;" it has so brought to light their arrogance and pride that they are almost ready to curse their Maker if he had, exercised such sovereignty as that sermon describes; God has no afterthought, whom he hates now he hates forever, from everlasting to everlasting. He might have loved the image that Esau wore by creation, had he personally worn it, but he never loved the creature that wore it; hates the image of our sinnership in which we are, but he never hates the creature that wore it; he hated the image of the devil in which you and I have appeared, but he

never hated us; no. So the others; he might have loved the image they wore by creation, but he never loved the creature; no, a poor little piece of clay; as though the potter had not power to make one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor, without being called to account by a poor worm like you. The professing world are dreadfully afraid that God should be all in all. These vessels of mercy, then, are retainers of mercy; they are not leaky vessels. God put the truth into the souls of the prophets, they retained it to the last; they were not leaky vessels; he put the truth into the souls of the apostles, they held it to the last, they were not leaky vessels; and he has put the truth into the souls of his people in all ages, and they are not leaky vessels; they retain the testimony of his mercy. What a number of leaky vessels we have in our day, what a number have run dry, and are running dry; their congregations gone almost to nothing. And as these vessels of mercy are receivers and retainers of mercy, so also they are servitors of' mercy; they serve mercy out to others. The reason why professors do not in their testimony deal out mercy to others is because they themselves are not vessels of mercy, are not partakers of it. Whenever the prophets were sent to preach a gospel sermon, they did preach a gospel sermon. Now, Peter, you are a vessel of mercy; feed my lambs, feed my sheep. "A good man out of the treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things." And being servitors of mercy, serving mercy out testimonially and practically to others, they are on this account called merciful; "Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy."

Then lastly, they are debtors to mercy. Thousands will say this; Catholics will say this; the free-wilier will say this; the duty faith Calvinist will say this; they will say they are debtors to mercy in general terms; but when we come to definition then we are as wide apart as the poles. Oh what a difference there is when we come to definitions which I will not occupy your time in entering into; suffice it to say that the people of God are consciously debtors to mercy, in a way that no other people are. What other people feel indebted to Christ in what he has done as they do? What other people feel indebted to God for that oath of mercy wherein he hath sworn he will not be wrath with them? What other people feel indebted to God for the certainty of his mercy, as God's people do? What other people feel indebted to God our Father for the variety and adaptation of his mercy as the people of God do? Oh my hearers, may the Holy Spirit so open up the abundant mercy of God the Father as to make us cleave to him more, live to him more; so open up to us the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ as to make us live to him more; open up to us the infallible, the never failing well spring of eternal mercy of the Holy Ghost; for "he shall be in you a well of living water, springing up to everlasting life." I am sure the more we are persuaded of this, the more we shall cleave unto the Lord our God, conscious of what and of where we are. Where not matters after this order, were it not of mercy from first to last, the man that is convinced of what he is could have no hope.

Look then at the difference between the vessels of wrath and the vessels of mercy; look at the suitability of this mercy. May the Lord increasingly assure us that we have received this mercy, that we have received it rightly, and then we shall retain it, and shall testimonially as it were give it out to others, as the Lord shall enable us; and we shall increasingly feel ourselves indebted not to anything but to the Lord our God himself for the infinity and eternity of his mercy.