

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

MERCY AND JUDGMENT.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 30TH, 1859, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“ He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in him. Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.” Psalm lxi. 6—9.

I NOTICE here, first, *the substitution*; the substituting of dry land for the sea; second, *the transition*; “They went through the flood on foot;” third, *the exultation*; “There did we rejoice in him;” fourth, and lastly, *the preservation*; “Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.”

I. I notice then, first, THE SUBSTITUTION; “He turned the sea into dry land,” substituting the dry land for the sea. This the Lord did literally; but at the same time it evidently has a mystical, a spiritual meaning; and it is that spiritual meaning that I shall in the first part of my subject this morning try to make clear. And there is in the spiritual sense of the word a five-fold sense in which the Lord turneth the sea into dry land. I take in the first place the sins of the people. What are the sins of the people but as a sea? When all the sins of the people are brought together, they form a kind of dead sea; and they are in their united form deep enough, and strong enough, and mighty enough and boisterous enough to carry us away into everlasting perdition. There is no man that has ever yet seen what his sins are in the sight of God; there is no man yet, whose heart the Lord has opened up to him, that has felt that David has gone too far when he says, “Mine iniquities are gone over my head.” Even here in this sense the words may be applied, “Deep calleth unto deep;” for there is a cursed depth in all our sins that one sin as it were calleth unto another. “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy billows go over me;” may be applied here to sin. Who then is that Person that rolled those sins back, that has taken this sea away? Oh, it is the wonderful Person of the Lord Jesus Christ; he came into these deep waters, and he hath rolled them away, and they are

gone for ever. Again, we are reminded of that precious word that we have been reading in the 3rd of Galatians this morning, faith, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is a poor sinner, conscious of what he is. He says, if my sins encompass me, if my sins lay hold of me, I know what my direful, my dreadful destiny must be. Where then is the remedy? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" believing in him because, as we have said, he is the end of sin, he hath rolled sin away. And let us remember that this is the very purpose, or to speak in the plural, these are the very purposes for which Christ appeared in our world; namely, to put away sin; and that we, being convinced of sin, may believe in him, and that in believing in him we may have eternal life, we may have the everlasting God in the omnipotency of his eternal power, united with the eternity of his love, on our side; so that we shall never want a friend; his love will always remain the same; we shall never need to look elsewhere for help; "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Do we then thus highly appreciate Jesus? Is our religion so far a reality as to enable us to feel, I am a sinner, he the Saviour; I am lost, he saves; I am sunken, he raises me up; I am driven afar off, he brings me nigh; I am hopeless, he gives me hope; my life in a sense is gone but he substitutes his life for mine, and so I shall live and not die, and shall for ever declare not my own works, for they are are not worth declaring, but I shall declare the works of the Lord? Secondly, he substitutes dry land for sea also in meeting the wrath of God. The wrath of God is a mighty ocean, a powerful ocean; as the poet says,

"Floods of fury roll before him;
Who can meet an angry God!"

Oh, the wrath of God! we cannot describe what it is; we see some symptoms of it in the judgments that have taken place in the world; and we shall see another great expression of it in the conflagration of the universe; yet all these come very, very short of what the wrath of God really is. Ah then, am I brought where the soul is brought to, as expressed in the 12th of Isaiah; "Thou wast angry with me?" and another says, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me;" and another saith, "Thine arrows stick fast in me, that there is no soundness in my flesh." Here then is an apprehension of wrath. What is the way of escape from this wrath? "He that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth upon him;" the wrath came upon him by the fall; and then that wrath is augmented by the personal sins of that same person; and if he die in that state, the wrath of God must abide on him; but "He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life;" that is, he who receives the Son of God, believing on him as that wondrous, that Almighty Person who with his own omnipotent arm hath lifted us from under the curse, hath rolled the curse back, being made a curse for us. If brought so far, then we

shall see into the blessedness in some measure of that testimony, that there is no more curse, for the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it. And what do we want in this part? Why, simply faith, precious faith; I do not mean a dead faith, but a living faith; not a blind faith, I mean a faith that sees Jesus, and not blindly believes in him without knowing the reason why; I mean a faith that approves of Jesus, a faith that admires Jesus, for he is to be admired in all them that believe; I mean a faith that loves Jesus, that prays to Jesus; I mean a faith that is not wavering, but firm; that brings the soul to this decision, that he is the end of the curse; and that if we are blessed while we live, truly so, and blessed when we die, and blessed at that great, that tremendous day, and blessed through the countless ages of eternity, it can be only through Jesus Christ; as we have been reading this morning; "In him shall the nations of the earth be blessed." Here then the sea is turned into the dry land. Instead of having our sins to encompass us and carry us away, we are brought to stand upon the rock, upon the Rock of Ages; and instead of wading into the billows of God's fiery wrath, we are brought into the promised land, where there is the still small voice; where, as the last part of our text says, "He holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved." Oh, what a great substitution this is, this turning the sea thus into dry land. But third, he turns the sea also into dry land in relation to enemies: great numbers of enemies in combination are compared to waters. "The floods of the ungodly made me afraid." Hence, Sennacherib and his army rolled in upon the land of Judea, and reached to the very neck of the land; could not reach to the head, but reached to the neck, reached up to Jerusalem; rolled on like a mighty flood, boasting a creature power. See how simple the means adopted to roll it back. Hezekiah spread the letter before the Lord; Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord; Hezekiah prayed to the Lord; and spoke with assurance that the Lord would appear; and the people stayed themselves on the words of Hezekiah. And the prophet Isaiah was sent to confirm Hezekiah in that confidence which he had in the Lord. And what was the result? The Lord, without Hezekiah or any of the people so much as lifting a finger, or even attempting by any process of argument to shew to the Assyrians that they were running into their own destruction; they simply stood still; the Lord sent a blast upon the Assyrians, and turned these floods as it were into dry ground; so that there was nothing more to fear than there would be from ground where there is nothing that can by any possibility injure you. In this sense also he turneth the sea into a dry land. Fourth, tribulations. Many of the people of God all their days more or less have many tribulations. Those who are in humble circumstances are apt to think, because their poverty causes them a good deal of trouble, that if they were rich they would have no trouble. I do believe that rich people are not so enviable as is gen-

erally supposed; and that riches after all cannot minister so much happiness, peace, and tranquility as people who have not the riches generally suppose. And besides, the man who has riches is in dangers that the poor man is not exposed to. It was a wise prayer of Agur, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." And when the riches of the rich man make themselves wings, and fly away towards heaven, that is very bad; because they fly towards heaven to testify that the man has made a bad use of them. And therefore you may depend upon it, that in whatever position of life you may be, you must have waters to pass through, you must have tribulations. Tribulation will overtake you, tribulations at times will surround you; and if there be none external, there will be many internal; there will be waves of corruption, of blasphemies, of temptation, that will rise and overwhelm the soul; and these will be a trouble to you; and you will look around at the symptoms of a kind Providence towards you, and you will say, well, the Lord has been very kind to me in all these respects; but still these things cannot give me fellowship with God; these things cannot carry me through Jordan; these things cannot give me what I want; I want something beyond the regions of materiality; I want something that is eternal. Oh, when he is pleased to come and roll these tribulations back, subdue our iniquities, cast our sins into the depths of the sea, and turn our plagues as it were into pleasures, our troubles into triumphs; then indeed we can say in the words of our text, "He hath turned the sea into dry land." Again, he turneth the sea into dry land also in a dying hour. How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? Let me have the ark of the covenant there, the mercy seat there, the great High Priest there, the presence of the blessed God there, then I shall go through dry shod, and that is a Scripture phrase; he shall make me go over dry shod. Ah, that Jordan that engulfes so many thousands every day, carrying them down to everlasting perdition; when I come there, he will turn the flood into a dry land; the waters may stand on my right, very high, seem accumulating; the farther I go into the valley, the more frightful, the more appalling it may appear; but while I see the accumulating waters ready to overwhelm me, if I can for one moment lose sight of them, and remember that my High Priest stands at my right hand between me and those waters, and that they must first carry him away before I can be moved; then I can say with the Psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me." See, what his hope was in a dying hour; he does not bring forward a single work of his own; he could not trust himself in that hour with one work of his own; he made up his whole confidence, his whole comfort, in the blessed truth, "Thou art with me;" thou art with me in thy regal power, thy rod therefore is my defence; thou art with me in thy pastoral care; thy rod and thy staff therefore comfort me; here it is I shall dwell, and he could speak with assurance, I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever and for ever. Now, then, after these few remarks, search the world around, and see if you can find anything that can do these things for us but the Lord himself; and see if there be anything needful to be done for us so essential as this. Ah, if my sins are to continue to be mine, if I am to continue under the wrath of God; and if tribulations will continue like so many clouds to darken my sky till I am called to a darker scene still; alas, alas, what is this life to any one in comparison of that eternal life which is in Christ Jesus the Lord?

II. I notice, now THE TRANSITION. "They walked through the flood on

foot." This denotes in the first place the completeness: of the Lord's work on dry ground, dry shod; it denotes the completeness of the Lord's work. I have not the slightest doubt in my own mind but that the passage through the Red Sea corresponded with the dignity of the scene; and the sides, right and left, were crystal, as you know the heart of the sea was congealed like unto clear glass; and then the light of the cloud shining right and left, how it must have concentrated the rays of that cloud upon the path on which they were walking. I have no doubt that the path was perfectly smooth, and as dry as a beautiful walk in a splendid park on a fine summer's day; not a drop of water left; as comfortable as could be; in order to make it a type of the glorious gospel path of faith, where there is not a drop of wrath left, not a depression to make us stumble; where in a word there is not a fault, everything as smooth as the pavement of heaven, where the city is said to be paved with pure gold. So that they went through the flood on foot; it denotes, I say, the completeness of the work; that is the first idea. Why any mother with her babe in her arms, and of course there were many such, would not feel the least fear whatever; for there was not water enough, I was going to say to drown a fly, yea, there was none at all; they went over dry shod. And so complete is the dear Saviour's work that there is not a particle of wrath left; it is gone, and gone for ever. Oh, my hearers, it is complete. All the hindrances we have are in self, and in the world, and in circumstances; but there is no hindrance in Christ, there are no impediments in Christ. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world; in me ye shall have peace." Secondly, it denotes also their experimental acquaintance with it; they *walked*. There is nothing will make one better acquainted with the road than walking in it. "This is the way, walk ye in it;" this is the shining way that leads up to Jerusalem. Here is the Lord shining upon his own path; mark that; the Lord will shine upon his own path. Why, say you, he did not shine upon the Egyptians, though they were walking in that path. Ah, but I imagine the path was very different to them to what it was to the Israelites. When the Israelites passed over, and left them behind, it then became a path of judgment. This is only a type, you see, we must take types for what they are; but I say that the Lord's own truth is His path; and that path and order of things by which he hath come after us, and brings us out of the house of Egyptian bondage, and brings us across the desert to himself, is a path that he has always shone upon; as the cloud shone upon the path that he made, concentrated all its rays there, so all the rays of the Gospel concentrate in Christ; it is by precious faith in him we are saved. Here then is the completeness of the work, and the familiarity of the people with it; they knew this path; they *walked* in it. When a man rides over the road a few times, he does not know much about it, but let him come by the truth experimentally, have some good weary journeys, he will know what the truth is, and he will continue in that path. And whatever may overtake him, there is something to sustain him; if he fall among thieves, the good Samaritan shall come and bind up his wounds; if he fall asleep under a juniper tree, an angel shall come and feed him, and upon the strength of that food he shall go forty days and forty nights, until he come to the mount of the Lord. Then it will also mean strength; the Lord strengthened them; there was not one feeble person among them; wonderful what the Lord can do. And they shall go on from strength to strength; what a mysterious thing; naturally a man at the end of his journey is worn out;

but the Christain at the end of his journey is stronger than when he first set out; for they go from strength to strength, and from light to light, and from refreshing to refreshing, so that they shall be stronger at last than at first. This was the apostle's idea; "Though our outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day;" so that as we draw near to the last conflict the Lord will strengthen us to bear that encounter, and bring us triumphantly through. Let me sum up the whole of this part of my subject in the language of the word of God, that "Thou in thy mercy hast guided the people which thou hast redeemed in thy strength into thy holy habitation."

III. I notice in the next place, the EXULTATION—"There did we rejoice in him." There is a three-fold aspect, you will observe, in their rejoicing at the Red Sea. One was what the Lord had done; another was what he was then doing, or what he then was to them; and the other was, what he would yet be. Now you cannot with safety rejoice in prospect in material things; but you may in spiritual things. So they rejoiced there reflectively, or looking back upon what the Lord had done; they rejoiced in present circumstances; and they rejoiced in the future,—“There we rejoiced in him. Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.” Let us look for a moment at the solemnity of this matter. “Thou didst blow with thy wind; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.” What a solemn summary that is, “Thou didst blow with thy wind; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.” Here then we see exemplified that testimony given in a previous part of that solemn history, “That ye may know that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.” My hearer, if you are not an enemy of the Lord's people, bless God for it; if you are, tremble at it; if you are fighting against him, read the words, and if you have no will to read them, let me again repeat them. They were determined to injure the Israel of God, and if possible to destroy them; but God was looking on, and watching; and met them in a way they never dreamt of, nor thought of. Ah, thou mayest look round, and think thy standing secure, but thy destruction will come suddenly, in a way thou didst never dream of. “Thou didst blow with thy wind; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.” Here then “we rejoiced in him;” in the victory he wrought. God wrought victory, he triumphed gloriously! The Lord shall reign for ever and ever; he will bring them into the mountain, and plant them in the place that he hath made for them to dwell in, even in the sanctuary that he hath established. “There did we rejoice in him.”

IV. Lastly. “Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.” I notice this last point first temporally, and then spiritually. I do not know that we have ever had in all the history of this country, in one respect, a more solemn week than the past week has been.* When we look at the hundreds who last Sunday at this time were approaching their native shores, had gone and accumulated wealth, had contrived their plans by which they would return, sit down, and enjoy it, coming within sight of their native land, having everything almost in immediate possession, without the slightest fear, the slightest idea of anything occurring; how solemn when we look at it, the hundreds and hundreds that this last week have found a watery grave. I think these things should have, and I hope they will

* Wreck of the ship, *Royal Charter*, off the coast of Anglesea, and other wrecks round the English coasts, on Wednesday morning, October 26th, 1859, altogether lost upwards of five hundred lives.

have, some effect upon our minds. I have not this morning preached from the text I intended to preach from; somehow or another, the solemn circumstances of the week so worked upon my mind, that I felt I could not this morning preach without making some reference to them. If we think, and we cannot but think, poor things, what has become of them ultimately,—we have solemn thoughts about us when we think of their being in the midst of their brightest earthly hopes, and just within reach many of them of the cup of a living consolation,—a watery grave, perhaps followed by a fiery doom; perhaps now lifting up their eyes in hell; perhaps all of them; we cannot say. I know indeed that God can do at one time that in a moment which he may choose at another time to be longer about; he foresaw the catastrophe, he foresaw what would take place, and he would not prevent it; he could regenerate the soul of every one in the twinkling of an eye; and for aught I know, they are all now before the throne of God; but this we know not. We might have been a part of them,—might have been there. I am not now, mind you, drawing an analogy between these and Pharaoh's host; no, no. We feel, I hope, all of us, the solemnity of such circumstances occurring on the coasts of our favoured land, our Gospel land, the very Jerusalem of the world; the Lord's throne of the universe; for nowhere does the holy Gospel of the blessed God reign as it does in our beloved Isle; and may it long, yea, to the end of time, continue to do so. Now be it remembered, that we have all of us by the fall in Adam forfeited our lives; and if you ask wherein the justice of God lies in suffering such terrible disasters? my answer is simply this—that all by nature are under sin, under wrath; and it lies with the Great Judge of all to decide in what way that judgment shall be ministered. In ancient times, he chose the Israelites to minister judgment; he sometimes chooses a plague; in this case he has chosen the furious winds and the rolling billows. And we see, vast and wonderful,—and we bless the Lord for it as a God of providence,—vast and wonderful as our mechanical powers are, yet against that wind which God intended to be the destruction of the natural life, how feeble those powers were; they employed all the power of the machinery they had, and yet the sea played with it, as it were, laughed at it, sported with it; and it was as an infant, as a mere nothing. It shews how feeble are the greatest powers created by man when set in contrast, or brought into collision with, the simplest agents of nature in which is the hand of the great God. My hearers, these things, when we look at them are solemn. The justice of God lies in the fact that we have all forfeited our lives; he could justly sweep with the besom of destruction, the surface of the whole globe, were it his will to do so. Now I do hope that these things,—it is not wrong in me to say so,—the Lord making them sink down into our minds, may increase our interest in the things of God; and increase our anxiousness for others to hear the word as well as ourselves.

There is one point I have generally been silent upon, because we have not more room, if we had, I would even say to you from the pulpit, if you have a neighbour or a friend you can so far make free with, get them to come and hear the Word of God; ask them to come; the Lord may attend the word with power; and if not, you would still feel some degree of satisfaction in doing what you could to get a fellow creature within the hearing of God's eternal truth. Only imagine for one moment, that we were sure that those four, or five, or six, hundred precious souls that since we met here last Sunday, have been hurled into eternity,—if we could feel sure that every one was regenerated, every one united to Christ, every one an object of

God's eternal love and choice, how very immaterial the circumstance, as far as natural lives are concerned, would be; why we could almost smile at the storm that took them away; we could say, their sufferings were but momentary; they were all as in a moment ushered into the city that hath foundations, into the presence of angels innumerable, and of the spirits of just men made perfect. I am sure that all these things give emphasis to such scriptures as these, "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;" and that, "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord." Oh, my hearers, while the Lord holds our soul in life, and suffers not our feet to be moved temporally, yet there is another and a higher sense in which he does this; for as to our natural lives, when we lie down on our beds at night we do not know that we shall get up again; when we sit down to a meal, we do not know that we shall ever sit down to another; when we go out, we do not know if we shall ever see our home again; we are safe nowhere, any further than the Lord makes us safe. Oh, what poor, blind, deluded worms we were when in our state by nature, boasting as though we had our breath, and our destinies, and all the agents of nature, in our own hands. It is God, and God alone, that is the preserver of man. May such a circumstance, if it be the Lord's will, never occur again; may it solemnise our minds, make us rejoice with trembling, and make us praise him and fear him. Although one event may sometimes overtake both the wicked and the righteous temporally; Abab fell in battle, and so did Josiah; yet Ahab was an enemy to God, Josiah was a friend; they both fell in battle, both alike in external circumstances, but oh how different in eternal destiny! Jonathan and Saul both fell in battle; but their characters were very different. May the Lord help us to prize his preserving hand, his preserving mercy, his discriminating grace: and especially to prize the blessed truth that there is life in Christ where he holds us for ever; that we have a standing in Christ from which our feet can never be moved; that we have an inheritance in him the right of which can never be annihilated; so that though the earth itself be removed, carried into the midst of the sea, we have no real cause to fear; because here is a foundation that can never be moved, here is a life that can never die; a God that will never leave nor forsake us. Amen and Amen.