

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A GREAT DELIVERANCE.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 18TH, 1860, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.” Psalm lxxxvi. 13.

It is often asserted, and it is also true if taken in the proper sense, that hell was not prepared for man; originally hell was not prepared for man, originally hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, that was the origin of hell, their sinning, and that lighted up the eternal wrath of God's eternal law. Hell was, therefore, for them prepared; as the Saviour gives us to understand; “Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared,” that is, originally prepared, “for the devil and his angels.” But then by the fall, man became one with Satan in crime; if Satan was a liar, man became a liar; if Satan was a murderer, man became a murderer; and how awfully was that demonstrated in the early part of the world, in the conduct of Cain towards Abel; becoming thus one with Satan in crime he must become one with Satan in punishment, one with Satan in destiny; and the whole human race must, but for the interposition of infinite and eternal mercy have sunk into hell but with the Lord there is mercy, with him there is redemption, that countless millions shall at the last be favoured each to say, “Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.”

In trying, then, this morning to speak to you upon these solemn words. I notice first, *the nature of hell*; and secondly, *the soul's deliverance therefrom*; and third and lastly, *the testimony which the saved soul bears*; “Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.”

I. It is a hell of unquenchable fire. This is a truth the Bible every where is decisive upon. That fire is the fire of God's eternal law; that law is called a fiery law; and that not one jot nor tittle of that law shall fail. And if the fire was such as to consume any one that went within the marked boundaries of Sinai; if the fire of the law in the mere ministration of the law itself was so terrible that Moses, though he knew the gospel, and knew he stood on mercy's ground, so terrible was the sight, said, “I exceedingly fear and quake;” what must be the fire of that law when it shall break forth to all eternity in that way that is described by the Saviour! It is therefore a fire, a hell of unquenchable fire. And it is unquenchable fire, too, in the most terrific form that we can imagine. There is perhaps no simile, within the whole range of the universe, that is more terrific than the one used, namely, fire and brimstone; and fire enraged and intensified by this brimstone; and this to go on to all eternity. And yet such, my hearer, is the position in which we stand in life's uncertain path; those of you that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, may before the

sun goes down this evening, or before it rises to morrow morning, be lifting up your eyes in hell, where the rich man was. So solemn, so awful, is the position in which a sinner stands that knows not God, and that obeys not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But it is also a hell of entire despair. Deuteronomy xxxii. "A fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains." I should take the mountains there to mean the kingdoms of the world; and the fire at their foundations will mean the judgments of God at the foundations of all human kingdoms, at the foundations of all human establishments; so that these things must all pass away, and come to nought by the judgment of God, which lies at their foundation, which lies at their root; yea, the earth and the works therein shall be burned up. It is therefore a hell of eternal despair; not the slightest hope whatever. We all know that in whatever trouble we are, let it be what it may, if there be but some hope, if it be but a little hope, that hope is wonderfully sustaining, wonderfully strengthening; it comforts us and helps us amazingly, whatever the trouble may be. But here, when mortal life is gone, when the kingdoms of this world are gone, when earth is gone, when all is gone, there is despair, black despair, trembling despair, despair for ever. It is a hell, then, of unquenchable fire; a hell of black and eternal despair. But it is also a hell of endless mischiefs. "I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them;" so that every thing shall go wrong. It appears, therefore from these words here, although Moses be there speaking of the penalties of that covenant; that as the ceremonial law was a shadow of good things to come, we can see from after things that the penalties he describes were a shadow of evil things to come; so that heaping mischiefs upon them seems like this, that when in hell if they take any position that would seem at all to mitigate, would seem at all to lessen, would seem at all to lighten their misery, it can only make it worse, if it can possibly be worse; so that everything shall go wrong; everything they think, and do, and say, shall go wrong; and if they appeal to Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool their tongue, that shall be a kind of mischief; Lazarus shall not be sent; but they shall be told that there is a great gulf between us and you, so that if you would come to us you cannot; and if we would go to you we cannot. "And I will spend mine arrows upon them;" the threatenings of God's eternal word will go on piercing them with wound after wound to all eternity. But again, it is a hell of burning, agonizing hunger and thirst. The hunger of the lost soul to eternity will be intense; the thirst of the lost soul will be intense. The Lord says, "They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat;" they shall hunger and thirst, and look upward, and curse God and curse themselves, and curse everything, to all eternity. As to death or annihilation, we find no such doctrine in the Bible; no, we may indulge in the delusion of the doctrine of a temporary hell; we may receive these theories of men; but all such theories are burnt to ashes, they are all blown to chaff and to dust by the solemn and eternal testimonies of the everlasting God. Again, it is also a hell of indescribable bitterness. The Lord says, "And with destruction." Bitterness of spirit now is very trying; when your spirit is made so bitter that all the friends you have, and all the advantages you have in the world, cannot produce sweet enough, consolation enough, to overcome that bitterness of spirit; that bitterness still remains. If that be the case now in some troubles to which some of you perhaps are not altogether strangers, what must it be there, where not a single drop of sweet, where not a word of sweet, where not the most distant hope or expectation can come? It is bitter destruction. Then it is also a hell of most terrific inflictions. "I will also send the teeth of beasts

upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust." This is figurative language; but then the reality is worse and stronger than the figure. Only think, there you are helpless, and the beasts as it were preying upon you, serpents coiling you in their folds, and poisoning you. Ah, my hearers when we look at this great matter, and look to the word of God, how insignificant does everything appear in comparison of the salvation of the soul. Again, it is a hell that must remain the same, because God's law remains the same. It is a hell that is very deep; it is bottomless. "Tophet is ordained of old; for the king it is prepared;" and that king is the devil; "he," the Lord, "hath made it deep and large," a bottomless pit; "and the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord," that vengeance which he breathes in his eternal law, "Like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." Is there one among you that can face this? What would you do? You, a poor autumnal leaf, you, a poor moth, you, a poor creature? We are all by nature fitted for this very destruction; for this very destruction; for this dreadful abode. Ah, my hearer, what a degrading sin must be that none but such a place as this is fit for sinners, and that sinners are fit for no place but this; what a degrading thing it must be. But again, the Old Testament saints were all acquainted with this truth. Suppose you that Abel, when he brought his more excellent sacrifice, and looked to Christ, suppose you that Abel did not penetrate into this; suppose you that Abel did not see that the declaration, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," that that meant an ultimate death, not merely a spiritual death, not merely a corporeal death, but that it meant a second death? And mark this; "Thou shalt die;" there is not a word said to qualify it; "Thou shalt die," that is all. Take it first spiritually: dead in sin, alienated from God through the ignorance that sin brought us into. Then take it literally; the body dies, but the word of God is clear upon the truth that the body is to be raised at the last great day; and the lost are to be cast into this lake of fire, burning with fire and brimstone. This is the second death. "Thou shalt die," is the language that will go on to all eternity; it never, never, never, can be reversed. Ah, my hearers, hell is not a temporary thing, not a temporary penalty, not a temporary punishment, it is everlasting; and well might the prophet ask the solemn question, "Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burning? Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?" And hence you read of eternal vengeance, and you read of their being tormented day and night for ever and ever. I perhaps need not say more upon this awful subject. I have often confessed, and I do confess now, that when I look at the penalty of sin, it shews to me that there is something in sin we have not altogether yet seen. But there stands God's testimony; there is the hell, there is the truth of it, there is the description of it; and we ourselves, if we are not born of God, are on our way to that awful place. "What," therefore, as the Saviour says, "shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

II. Now let us come, then, to the second, namely, THE DELIVERANCE. "Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." This is the language of every one taught of God. Every sinner when he is convinced of sin, and when he goes on, and learns what he is in his wicked heart, impenitent heart, deceitful heart, the infidelities of his heart—each Christian says, "Ah, if I had been lost, my hell would have been the lowest hell; surely I am the chiefest of sinners: surely I am more brutish than any man; surely I am as a beast before thee; surely, not only in my flesh dwelleth no good thing, but in my flesh dwelleth every evil thing. If I had been lost, my hell would have been the lowest hell, but as I have a hope of being saved,

I can say with the Psalmist, 'Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.' I will try to describe to you, with all the solemnity and care I can, praying that if it be the Lord's will, the word may reach every one of you; that we may this morning feel that we have heard that which we can sincerely pray may abide by us, to our profit and advantage, and to the glory of our God: I will try and describe then what this deliverance is. First, a conviction, a solemn feeling and conviction of what I have stated must take hold of your mind, or else you will never pray in reality. Hence, saith the Psalmist, "The pains of hell," which some have said mean the fears of hell. I have no objection to that little alteration, no doubt that may be perhaps rendered in that way, "The pains of hell gat hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow." What trouble? Soul trouble. What sorrow? Godly sorrow. "I found trouble and sorrow." I found out my sins, and my sins became my trouble, my sins became my sorrow. "The pains of hell gat hold upon me, the sorrows of death compassed me." I saw hell was waiting for me, to meet me at my coming; I felt that God could righteously send me there; I became a poor, moping, miserable thing, I wished I had never existed. But what, if you know anything of this conviction in your soul, what will you do when you have that conviction? Why, that same spirit that has thus led you into this solemn conviction, this spirit of illumination, will be to you not only a spirit of conviction, but also a spirit of prayer. Hence, says the Psalmist, and he says it very significantly, in this same 116th Psalm, "Then called I upon the name of the Lord," as though he should say, Apart from that there may be a great deal of prayer saying, a great deal of chattering, a great deal of formality, and a great deal of pretension; but when brought into this state, "Then called I upon the name of the Lord." And his prayer was very short, but very significant, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." He knew that his soul could be delivered only by that ransom which God had found. And then, when you have this conviction, this consciousness, and this spirit of prayer, there is mercy on the way for you; and the moment will come when you will be favoured, if not with the same words, at least with the same thing in substance, "Deliver him," that praying man, that trembling man, that fearing man, "Deliver him from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's." Thou shalt spring up out of thine old Adam state into thy new Adam state, out of a law state into a Gospel state, out of thy sinnership state into a saintship state, to that eternal youth that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. Then thou shalt see God's face with joy, and bear the blessed testimony, that he hath delivered thy soul from hell. And where this deliverance is at all realized, it wonderfully endears the Lord. "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications." But have you ever thus prayed? I put the question to every one of you, young and old, whether you have ever thus prayed? whether you have ever thus felt that there is a hell waiting for you, that your sin has demerited that hell, and that unless you are born of God and saved by Jesus Christ, to that hell you must come, and that very soon? Have you ever thus prayed, have you ever thus called upon him? have you ever thus said, "O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul"? I will come a little lower than that. Have you been led to see what I have now been saying, and has it been a great grief to you that you have not felt them so much as you could wish, but that somehow or another the hardness of your heart, the coldness and indifference of your mind, has prevailed over everything else; and while you see these things, and see there is something to be trembled at, yet, for the life of you, you cannot tremble; and though there is something in Christ Jesus to be rejoiced in, yet you cannot rejoice; and thus you do in a sense

tremble because you cannot tremble; and can you, and have you ever prayed this prayer, if you cannot pray the other, can you pray with Mr. Hart,

"Lord, convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus' blood?"

Well, say you, I can pray that prayer, but then that is only a hymn; if you could give me something from the Bible I should like it better; try me by the Bible, not by what men say, though they be good men. Very well, I will bring a testimony from God's word. Can you pray this prayer, which I think will be suitable to you, namely, "Consider and hear me, O Lord, my God, lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death?" Now, here is a poor sleepy sinner, in all that pertains to eternal things, so that those very things that seem the most worthy of your anxious attention, seem to get the least of your attention; and you are that poor sleepy thing, that what little religion you have, you seem as though it had all gone to sleep, and that you must be lost at the last. Can you pray that prayer, "Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death"? If so, thou art on the road to salvation; if so, thou art on the way to the kingdom of God; if so, a work of grace is begun in thine heart; if so, thy league with death is broken, thy covenant with hell is disannulled, and thou art on the way to the bond of that new covenant, that shall bring thee into the everlasting blessedness, into which the Saviour himself hath entered. Real prayer this is, religion is a solemn, weighty, living reality. "I love the Lord." You will love the Lord in proportion as you realise this mercy; "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications." And then mark another thing; it will bring you to decision; you will cease to be unstable, if you have been unstable before; you will cease to be double-minded, if you have been double-minded before; you will cease to halt between two opinions, if you have been halting between two opinions before. Mark the decision of the Psalmist: "Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live." I desire no other Lord. I know, Lord, I must soon part with everything else; but, Lord, give me that by which I shall call upon thee as long as I live. I do not desire, Lord, to call upon thee to-day, and to leave thee to-morrow; I do not desire, Lord, to call upon thee a few days for some little earthly convenience or advantage, and then go away my own way; no, Lord, I desire to call upon thee as long as I live; for I cannot be better employed than calling upon thee, Lord, for I need thy mercy daily; and as I need thy mercy daily, I shall have daily cause to praise thee, so that when I have not to call upon thee in humble prayer, I may call upon thee in lofty praise; and so thou art my father's God, and I will praise thee; thou art my God, and I will exalt thee. "I love the Lord." And then there will also be a recognition of the harmony of the perfections of God in this matter. 116th Psalm, "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous," saith David, after the Lord thus appeared to him. Compare that with the words in the 3rd of the Romans, "God is just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous." Well, but, David, I can see how he can be gracious; but how, if he hath delivered your soul from hell, can he be righteous? Ah, by his dear Son. The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; so divine is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that God is as righteous as he is gracious in the salvation of the soul. And then mark the other clause, "Yea, our God is merciful." So after being gracious and righteous in redeeming us by his dear Son, our God is merciful. Compare that with one of the items of the new covenant, wherein it is written, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." And this spirit of grace and supplication will give you also to see the kind of character that the Lord

preserves. "The Lord preserves the simple;" the simple there means the man that is brought into the simplicity of the Gospel. The word "simple" there must be understood as a contrast to duplicity. The Lord does not hear the crafty, he does not hear the deceitful and the hypocritical; but the simple, the single-hearted, the man that is simply seeking mercy. "The Lord preserveth the simple." "I was brought low;" ah, near to hell, as though he should say, I saw the lowest hell; it was my deserved but dread abode; "but he helped me." Very well, what will you do now, David? Why, I will now in confidence return to my rest; "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." God by creation was our resting-place; we were to rest in him; but by the fall we went from that rest; but by this ransom, by this spirit of grace and supplication, we return unto the same God in better relations, to rest in him in greater security, on higher grounds, to nobler purposes; and associated, shall I say, with deeper, with loftier, with broader, and with longer revelations of the infinite counsels of his will. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." And observe that this supplication, this realised mercy, was all a matter of faith, not of works; for David immediately saith, "I believed, therefore have I spoken." It was not a mere natural belief, as you see in the experience there described. And then David becomes reflective; he looks at the hell he had escaped; he looks at the mercy by which he had escaped; he looks at the evidences of his escape; ah, he says, now I can doubt no longer; "O Lord, truly I am thy servant;" I do love thee; I love the Lord. Then you are mine for ever, David. Even so let it be, Lord; let me be thine for ever. "I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid;" not the son of Abraham's handmaid; Hagar was Abraham's handmaid, but Sarah was God's handmaid; she was the free woman. "I am the son of thine handmaid;" the mystic covenant; these are the two covenants; the free man is Isaac; Lord, so am I, the child of promise, free, and free for ever; for "thou hast loosed my bonds." Thus, then, there must be this spirit of grace and supplication in the heart, in order that we may escape from the hell I have described. I do feel, when I look back and see the numbers the Lord has taken from us (even this winter), every one of them dying happy, I do feel the most earnest desire that if it be the Lord's will, every one of you may be Christians. I believe the greater part of you are, but not all. How I should rejoice before I go to see every one of you young people that I have known from your infancy, brought here by your parents, brought into the spirit of grace and supplication, brought into this fear of God, this love of God, this knowledge of God; as many of the young of Christian parents in this place have been brought before to the saving knowledge of the truth.

I now notice the reasons of the Lord thus dealing mercifully with us, and bringing us into a spirit of grace and supplication. First, his love. "God, who is rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved us, when we were dead in sin."

"He saw us ruined in the fall,
Yet loved us notwithstanding all."

And now your eyes are opened, you are called upon to bear this testimony, "Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." Reason the second is because of the ransom paid for you. Look back again for a moment at the hell of which we have spoken, and recollect that the Lord Jesus Christ rolled that hell together, with all its evils, and bare the whole of it for you in his own person. I sometimes reflect upon this, and wonder how he could have embodied it, how he could have spanned it. What a life of sorrow,

what a death of agony, did the dear Saviour endure for us. Well might the earth tremble, the rocks rend, the graves open. And perhaps that saying is true; I cannot say; I am not much of a believer in human traditions, but it is said that Dionysius, a philosopher, was in Egypt at the time, and beheld in the heavens, and saw and felt a mysterious convulsion in nature, that he exclaimed, "Surely the God of the universe is dying." And if that be true, the man was right; it was the death of an incarnate God. Depend upon it, if the Lord Jesus Christ had taken nothing with him to Calvary's cross but his human arm, there would have been no arm to have brought salvation; he took with him there his omnipotent arm; he travailed in the greatness of his strength. He hid the omnipotence of his power under the weakness of his manhood, and they thought because they crucified him they were stronger than he; but in that they made a mistake; he could have crushed them to atoms there and then in a moment; but how then would the Scriptures have been fulfilled? But there was an omnipotency by which he encompassed and annihilated hell. I will go as far as any man can go there in the doctrine of annihilation, that Christ annihilated hell, I mean for his people, he annihilated the curse and all their sin; but I dare not try to lull ungodly men further off to sleep by such a doctrine as a temporary hell; take the word of God, my hearer, and let that be your guide, and throw all human traditions to the winds, and think nothing of them; for it is by the word of God that we are at last to be judged. Third, the Lord thus brings a sinner into the spirit of grace and supplication because of a special purpose. Let us hear the apostle read this out in 2 Timothy, 1, "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose." There are five rules that the apostle brings in, after naming the purpose of God; you see how this purpose is regulated; "according to his own purpose and grace," there is grace to carry out the purpose; "which was given us," mark, not offered, but given to us; third, where was it given? In "Christ Jesus," not in self, for you to improve or cultivate, not in the first Adam, not in the Pope, not in the priest, nor even in an angel; "for unto the angels," much less to the Pope, "hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." Where then is this grace given? In Christ Jesus; God's co-equal: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; that is where the grace was given. And when was it given? "Before the world began"; bless the Lord for it. And it is now "made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath "abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." Now in the verses I have just quoted you see an epitome of the gospel; and what does he follow up this epitome with? "Whereunto I am appointed a preacher"; I think the word "preacher" there may be taken to mean "proclaimer"; that is one part of our business, simply to proclaim the great principles of the Gospel; "and an apostle," a sent one; there is my authority, sent from on high; I have my credentials from the throne of God, "and a teacher of the Gentiles"; that is, I can open up soul trouble, I can enter into the path, as is shewn in the 7th Romans especially, which the vulture's eye hath not seen, I can weep with them that weep, I can rejoice with them that rejoice, I can go down into the depths with them that are low, I can rise high with them that do rise, even to the third heaven, I can range wide with them that do range wide in the sweet freedom of the everlasting Gospel, I am a teacher of the Gentiles. And do you think, any of you that have read the epistles of Paul diligently, that you have learnt all that they are capable of teaching you? No, say you, that I have not. Well then, you confess that he is still a teacher, and we are all fond of a teaching ministry. This has been one of my prayers

for myself, that the longer I am spared the more I may be a teaching minister, not a mere proclaiming one, not merely proclaiming the principles of the Gospel, that is good, not merely the word attended now and then with a little power, to shew that I am sent of God ; but we want a ministry that will explain the mysteries of experience, and open up the several departments of God's word, so that a man shall find that he has had not only the sound but the sense of truth ; not only the letter, but also the life. There is something very significant in that ; and it is a remarkable thing that the apostle should put his apostolic character into such close connection with that glorious gospel which he there describes.

Lastly, *the testimony which the saved soul bears.* "Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." Here are various contrasts implied in these words. First, it is a contrast with false gods. "Thou hast delivered my soul." Just as you will now bear testimony to the Gospel in contrast to false gospels, you will look to free will, you will look to duty faithism, which is the chief *ism* of the present day, the golden calf, the god of the day ; and you will see that no man was ever brought yet, or ever can be brought to true conviction that looks to a self-contradictory gospel. You will contrast with that God's covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and you will bear the blessed testimony, "O Lord, thou has delivered my soul from the lowest hell." Secondly, it contrasts also with our earthly friends. We love our friends, and we do not like to make any enemies ; but our friends are not our saviours. Third, it contrasts with silver and gold. We are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold. Why, say you, who in the world ever thought they were ? Why thousands think so now. I believe there are thousands in the professing world that think more of the gold they give towards building their chapels, and for charitable purposes, than they think of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ ; and if you go to their chapels, and preach up this gold giving and charity, what a nice man ; what a pity they should charge him with preaching high doctrines ; I am sorry I ever heard a word against him. But go and set forth the real condition of the sinner, and bring in the infinite price paid for the redemption of that sinner, and treat everything else in comparison with redeeming blood with indifference, you will find the carnal mind what the word of God says it is, enmity against God, and you will have but few friends and plenty of enemies. As you go for a penny a mile in a third class Parliamentary train, I believe there are many now that think when they give 6d. to a poor creature think they are six miles nearer heaven by giving that 6d. ; that they are going to heaven by Parliamentary train. I believe that with all the wonderful profession in the day in which we live, there is a great deal of solemn trifling at the bottom of it ; that they are setting men down by thousands for Christians that are not Christians. And lastly, it contrasts with our own works. All my works, good and bad, put together could do nothing but bear testimony against me ; all my righteousness are as filthy rags ; and, therefore, not unto us, not unto us, but unto his name be all the glory.

Now ready. Part first.

SELECTIONS FROM THE SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT, FOR 1859.

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