

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

AN HANDFUL OF CORN.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 21ST, 1860, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS.

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains.” Psalm lxxii. 16.

HOWEVER enigmatical may be many parts of the word of the Lord, when those parts are put to the proper tests the obscurity very easily vanishes, and their many sided meanings appear, like apples of gold in pictures of silver; or as some prefer rendering those words, like apples of gold in net work. The main drift of the whole verse is to shew that under the Lord's management, for the words refer ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ; that under the management of the Saviour, however small the beginning may be, it shall go on well, and shall end well; that the Lord can begin with little, and then end in plenty. This is the main drift of the whole of this verse. I felt somewhat inclined to take the whole verse, but I found quite enough in this first part that I have read to you as a text to occupy all the time we have to spare. In these words you will find no less than a four-fold application, besides the form in which they stand, the form of certainty in which they stand. “There *shall* be an handful of corn;” there is no uncertainty about it. And we shall find then that these words will apply first to the *Lord Jesus Christ*; second, to *his disciples*; third, to *individual experience*; and fourth, to *the kind providence of God*.

I. First then, TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. “There shall be an handful of corn.” I must go back to the book of Leviticus to get an explanation of what is meant by the handful; and if we get at that meaning, it will help us to understand the beginning of our subject. You will recollect that when the Israeiites brought a meat offering, the priest was to take a handful of the flour, and that was to be burnt for a memorial; and the people were to be remembered by that memorial that was burnt, and that was consecrated thereby to God; and a blessing, by that handful consecrated to God, was to come upon all the rest. And then a little further on in that book you will find that when the sin offering was brought, there was a meat offering brought with the sin offering; and the priest likewise was to take a handful of this and burn it as a memorial before the Lord; so that the Lord would remember the people not by their sin but by the sin offering; and it is called a handful. I would not in such matters for a moment be fanciful; still one can hardly forbear making a remark or two here upon the word handful. I am sure these offerings, however simple, they were a type of the Lord Jesus Christ; they all pointed to him; he is the culminating centre where all the rays of the mysteries of the gospel meet; and where God and man shall meet; where righteousness and peace meet; all meeting in Christ Jesus. And the great object of all God's working, spiritually and providentially, is to gather together all things in Christ; he is to be the ultimate meeting place, the centre of association of God and man to

all eternity. Now this handful, does it not remind us of some very blessed truths? that when Jesus Christ came into the hand of the law, the law had its hand full; that he was a handful; that the law had no power to hold anything else but Jesus Christ; so that if you bring anything to it, it cannot hold it; its hand is already full; the law is perfectly satisfied. And by that handful of righteousness which Christ brought to the law, God will remember his people. Ah, my hearer, to be remembered by the Saviour's full righteousness, to be remembered by the fulness of his righteousness, how completely condemnation, and consequently death and famine, are taken away, and everlasting plenty comes in. Then again a little farther on in Leviticus there was the sin offering, and the handful burnt in connection with that. The handful is a figure of Christ's life, filling the hand of the law; that the law will never to all eternity put its hand out for any thing else; its hand is full, and full for ever. And so of the sin offering, there was to be a handful for a memorial connected with that sin offering; so, as Christ's obedient life was a handful, or all the righteousness that the law could hold, or ever will attempt to demand; so his atoning death, as a sin offering, was a handful; the law lays hold of that sacrifice, and it asks no other offering; it will never hold out its hand to you to demand of you one mite, one pain, one sorrow, or one grief; for none of the pains that we endure are penal pains; they are tribulatory sorrows, but they are not condemnation sorrows. And hence the death of the Lord Jesus Christ has turned even death itself into an advantage for us, but that must mean those that belong to the Lord; because death in itself is a curse, a part of the curse. How is it, then, that Jesus Christ hath turned it into a blessing? because he hath taken the sting away; and has so ordered matters that while our natural comforts must end with death, our natural sorrows and spiritual sorrows too will end with death, and our fulness of joy commence. And if we speak of the law as having two hands, we shall find a handful for each hand. If we put the life of Christ into one hand of the law, and the death of Christ into the other hand, I am sure the hands of the law are full. And so, if we speak of justice as demanding, the hands of justice are full. There is something, I think, very expressive in the character of the handful; it was for a memorial. Why, my hearer, can you imagine anything more delightful to be acquainted with than that truth that the Lord remembers us by the righteousness of Christ? that is, if we are brought to know of and receive that righteousness that he gives us; not by the condemnation that is due to us, but by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that justifies us from all offences; that he remembers us not by the sin of which we have been and are the subjects, but he remembers us by that offering which was made for sin. And when the Lord passes away in one sense, though I can hardly call it passing away from the work of Christ, and looks to his people, he remembers us by the prayer of faith, remembers us by our faith, remembers us by what little we can do in the way of expressing sympathy with his people and love to his name, "Cornelius, thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God." It is not said, thy sins have come up; mark that; he might have said, Cornelius, notwithstanding all thy praying, and believing, and alms giving, thy sins are come up for a memorial before God. And how was it the Lord did not speak thus? For this simple reason, that Cornelius was a believer in Jesus Christ; he believed that Jesus Christ had met God's law, in the precept and penalty of it; he believed that Jesus Christ had met the demands of justice; here was the great secret; and all sin being ended; there was no sin left to remember Cornelius by; but now when he comes to remember him personally, he remembers him by the

work of the Holy Spirit in his heart; for it was the spirit of grace and supplication in Cornelius' heart by which the Lord remembered him; it was those prayers for mercy and those alms deeds out of love to God and love to the brethren by which the Lord remembered him. Having said so much, let me then notice the idea I just now suggested; namely, that the Lord began with small beginnings, and he went on to plenty. So, my hearer, if we have begun with Jesus Christ; and we have never really begun until he becomes our Alpha; if he be our beginning; if we have found out that it is by him we begin to live, and by him we begin to see, and by him we begin to be reconciled to God, and by him we begin to have access to God, and by him we begin to march on towards the vantage ground of eternal victory; if we have thus begun rightly, and are kept in the spirit, I am sure we shall clearly understand the matter before us as we go along. Let me then upon the subject of this small beginning just run for a few moments a contrast. Take in the first place, Adam; he had a good beginning; he had God with him; he had Eden to range in; and in the centre of that Eden he had one of the most beautiful gardens that this earth could ever possess; and he had in that garden a tree whose fruit would have kept him alive to this day and to all eternity; and he had in that garden a tree that if Adam fell down and bruised himself, or Eve, if they bruised themselves in any way, which they might have done before the fall, just a leaf from that tree would have made them well in a moment; so that they were in a state of plenty. But what did man do with this possession? Sinned it away, and brought himself to poverty. Ah, the enemy came in, and he envied man, and the enemy brought in his falsehoods, Adam sinned away that which he had. Ah, says Satan, now I have done it; I have got the human race now; I have got them all now; I have conquered them all; I have swept away their all, I have destroyed it all; I am the god of them all; I am the ruler of them all; I have thrown them all into the endless lake of eternal wrath; I have brought them all into death; I shall bring them all into hell; I have got them all. Oh, how he could exult. But stop, Satan; there is a seed somewhere that thou hast not touched by this fall of man; there is a handful of corn hidden somewhere that thou hast not been able to get at; and that handful of corn, Satan, shall appear by and bye in Bethlehem's manger; and thou shalt be surprised when thou seest that seed, and say, Why, I thought I had got them all; why, here is one that I never could touch; here is one I could never defile; here is one I have not conquered. What has that one come to do? Why, he has come to conquer thee Satan; he has come to destroy thee; to destroy thy works; to destroy the works of the devil; he has come in spite of all thou hast done, of all thou art doing, and in spite of all thou canst do. This seed is coming to pluck a number that no man can number out of thine hand and out of thy power; and to justify them from all their sins, and wash them from all their sins, to raise them up, to make them sons and heirs of God, to make them kings and priests to God, to bring them into eternal plenty; so that instead of their lifting up their eyes in hell, destitute of one drop of water, they shall range over the plains of heaven, and rejoice in the blessed truth to endless day, that "they shall hunger no more, they shall thirst no more; the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." See then the contrast between the first Adam and the second; that as the first Adam sinned everything away, the second Adam sinned nothing away; for he did no sin; the first Adam lost everything; the second Adam lost nothing; the first Adam involved himself and his posterity in ruin; the second Adam wrought deliverance for

his church; he became the surety, and worked himself honourably out of that suretyship position; by paying the mighty debt the people owed he has delivered the people. See the infinite contrast; the one had a great beginning, but made a miserable end of it; the other a very small beginning; the babe in Bethlehem. If Adam had been created an infant, and the devil had taken advantage of him in his infancy, one might have felt some pity for him; but he was created a man. But the Second Adam comes into the dangers of infancy; he is an infant, a little infant; and taken by his mother into Egypt; and he grows up as we all have done, by the laws of nature, and arrives at manhood; and yet through all the stages of his infancy, his youth, his adolescence, till he came into the perfection of manhood, not one advantage could Satan get over him under all these circumstances. This was a very small beginning. When the shepherds saw the babe in the manger of Bethlehem, who would have thought that such small beginnings could have produced such wondrous results, that angels should gaze and rejoice for ever, that saints unnumbered shall crown him Lord of all in a world of infinite pleasure and of infinite plenty? Here was the handful of corn; small beginnings, but glorious ends. So with you and I, my hearers; if we begin with Jesus Christ in however so small a way, however small our faith may be now; yet if such be the beginning, only if we go on with it; hence the Galatians when they had begun with him, and then thought it was needful to have something else to go on with, the apostle was filled with indignation, and declared their religion was all in vain if they did not go on by the same rule as that by which they had begun. Ah, as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him. The antediluvian world had a wonderful stamina, physical stamina, so that they could live their nine or ten hundred years, and perhaps more than that, some of them; for though the longevity of Methuselah is the highest of which we have an account, it does not follow there were none that lived longer than that. And they had a world of plenty all around them; but they sinned the whole of it away; they had the world in its infancy, when the curse peradventure had not made such progress as to blast the means of support to that extent which it has now done, and will go on doing; for man will never recover his earthly longevity in whole or in part; I am inclined to think it will be rather the other way; and that men will from generation to generation rather degenerate physically than improve; there may be partial improvements, but they will never recover their ancient longevity; they sinned it all away; they sinned the world away, sinned themselves into everlasting ruin. Thus did the antediluvians. But this handful of corn, this corn of wheat, as the Saviour calls himself in the 12th of John, this wonderful Person shall prolong his days; his longevity remains; yes, no corruption could ever enter into him; "thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Here is an apparently helpless infant pursued by all the terrors of all the Roman soldiers that Herod had at command; and yet these could not cut his life short; he prolonged his days; he lives, does live, shall live, and that for ever; and while he lives we cannot die. So then what a wondrous person is the Lord Jesus Christ. Is there any ambiguity in our text? Not the least. What a wonderful beginning had the Jews, the Israelites. What wonders God wrought in Egypt. There was a kind of three-fold beginning of their national establishment. What wonders God wrought in Egypt; what wonders he wrought in the desert; the manna, the rock, the defence, the protection, the guide, the care he took of them. It was a great beginning. What wonders he wrought by Joshua when they came to the promised land, when the very sun and moon stood still to give them victory. What a great beginning it

was. And yet their salvation from Egypt they sinned it away, and it ceased to be any use to them; the wonders God wrought in the wilderness, they sinned the advantages away, they ceased to be any more use to them; they sinned the land away, and it ceased to be any use to them. But here, in Christ Jesus, we have a salvation that can never be sinned away. See the contrast; sin sinned away their salvation; but here, in Christ Jesus, salvation puts sin away. In that case sin put their salvation away; in Christ Jesus salvation puts sin away. In that case sin put away the advantage of the manna and of the rock that followed them; but here Christ puts sin away, continues to be the bread of life in spite of sin; the water of life in spite of sin; the rock that follows us in spite of sin. There they sinned their land, and city, and temple away; but here, in Christ Jesus, is an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, and cannot be sinned away. There we have this handful of corn. Thus, then, it brings before us this one fact, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the exception to universal destruction on this earth; he is the only person that sin could not destroy, that sin could not defile; he is the only exception to universal famine; there is bread nowhere else; he is the only exception to universal drought; there is the well of salvation nowhere else; he is the only exception to universal darkness; there is light nowhere else; yea, he is the only exception to everything that is evil, for there is good nowhere else. Thus then while men have had great beginnings, they have sinned it all away; but here in salvation matters are small beginnings, and yet those small beginnings, like Ezekiel's river, that began first with a little spring, went on deeper and deeper, broader and broader, higher and higher, till it became a river that could not be passed over. But this handful of corn is said to be in the earth. Let us take the word of God as our guide in this part also. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." So what is there called a corn of wheat is here called a handful of corn; it is the same thing; the figure a little varied, but it is the same thing. And so here it is in the earth; so Jesus Christ died. "And except it die, it abideth alone;" what a significant expression that is. So if the Saviour had not died—he has graciously put the words upon record for our use—if the Saviour had not died, there he would have stood bound with all our sins to all eternity; there he would have stood bound with all the demands of law and justice to all eternity in solitude; must not come to his church, and the church cannot come to him; he abideth alone; and he must not go to God; he could not go to God; he must abide alone. Bless his holy name for giving us liberty to speak so freely, he sees our hearts, and minds, and souls, and knows at the same time we speak reverently; that our souls adore and love him. But will he abide alone? No, no; he dies; he dies; and awful as was the death he had to undergo, yet rather than be away from God and away from his church, rather than God should be away from us, and we away from God, rather than these direful calamities should continue to exist, he lays down his precious, precious life. Here is the handful of corn in the earth; still little in appearance. And so, when they had got this handful of corn into the earth,—ah, they looked upon the great stone rolled to the mouth of the sepulchre, and the Roman guard, and thought, Ah, we have stopped him now, that man, that Jesus of Nazareth, we have stopped him now; he is in the earth now. Oh blinded man; besotted man, demonized man, unhappy man, miserable man, thus to be led by Satan, blinded by Satan. Ah, man, there lieth in that tomb, there lieth in that sepulchre, the germ of boundless and eternal glory; there lieth that seed that shall be sown in all nations; for his name shall be preached in all nations. Thou little thinkest,

Satan, who sows that seed that lieth there will bear; he will rise, and having ripened all the promises and truths of the gospel into perfection, he shall send his servants with this precious seed, and they shall scatter this seed, east, west, north, and south; and although some fell on stony ground, some upon the wayside ground, yet there will be some good ground, there will be some broken hearts, there will be some convinced sinners; God shall make his own sensible of what they are, and they shall receive the truth as it is in Jesus. The next idea is that of concealment; upon the top of the mountains. So when Jesus rose from the dead he was concealed from all except his own. The world that had seen him saw him no more; the people that had pointed the finger of scorn at him could not behold him now to point at; those that had laughed him to scorn could not now see him to laugh him to scorn; those who had mocked him could not see him now to mock him; those who had crucified him could not now see him; he is elevated, he is exalted, he is above the ken of mortal vision; he is risen from the dead, and no man saw him but his own friends. Was it not so? Does not our text bear this idea very well? I believe that our text in its ultimate meaning refers to this very thing. And then it will also mean exaltation,—“And it shall come to pass in the last days;” and these are the last days; no successor to him, therefore no days after his days; “that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” Was he not exalted? Did he not ascend far above all the hills or kingdoms of this world? And has he not established his people above everything that is human? Is there a mountain on this globe—that is to say, a kingdom, for that is the intention, hills and mountains there mean kingdoms; and his kingdom is distinguished from all the rest, because it is above all the rest; is there a kingdom in this world upon which we are dependent for our salvation? We know there is not. The Lord has exalted his kingdom above everything that is human. And then mark again this is corn. “A handful of corn.” I like that question the Lord asks upon this subject very much. “What is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord?” Now all the things of this world are chaff in comparison of Christ Jesus? Pharisaism, false doctrines, they are all chaff, and shall fly away like chaff; but he is corn, the finest of corn, the best of corn, the finest of the wheat, that which is immortal.

II. The text may refer also to his disciples. They were a little handful. The Saviour says, “I send you forth.” Ah, Lord, send us forth; what, amidst the tyrants of the world? Yes, he says, “As lambs among wolves.” Your beginning is very small; and when your friends are with you in the upper-room, there are only a hundred and twenty of you altogether; and yet you are going to turn the world upside down; and the world confessed it too—they said, “These men turn the world upside down.” “Tarry in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.” A little handful of corn: a small beginning. The day of Pentecost comes; there are three thousand in the morning, two thousand more in the afternoon; that is five thousand in one day, brought to swell the numbers of these few. See how it goes on: it was a little handful of corn; they went with a kind of handful of Gospel; but it was an handful, as much as they could hold; no room for any thing else; their hands were full of God’s truth. You all know what glorious results followed. And they were in the earth too; they were but a handful, and they were in the earth. “I am no more in the world, but these are in

the world; keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me;" so that they were in the world. But while in one sense they were in the world, yet in another sense they were in the mountains—very high up. "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills!" They lived on the mount of God's eternal love; they ranged over the mountain of eternal election; they gloried in Calvary's mountain, its wondrous achievements; they gloried in what John Bunyan very aptly calls the Delectable Mountains; they could sing with an emphasis to which we are strangers,

"My soul anticipates the day,
To stretch her wings and soar away."

Why, when they had got the instruments of torture ready for Paul,—ah, you high doctrine Paul; you abominable high doctrine fellow, that said, God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy; that said, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; thus sweeping away our pious doings to make room for your terrible doctrines; we will put an end to you now. Well, just as ready to die as you are to kill me; for I know one thing, if you do kill me it will be because my course is finished; I have fought the good fight, there is laid up for me a crown of glory. They were on the mountains. Why, when they were in filthy prisons, as filthy, for aught I know, and as foul, as the dungeons of Naples, what did they do? While their bodies were thus bound down, their souls were on the mountains; they prayed to God, and sang praises; the foundations of the old prison tottered, and the bands fell off, the doors flew open; the jailor was amazed; mercy steps in, the Saviour is exalted, a baptized church is there before daylight in the morning; and the devil frightened, and didn't know what in the world to do. Whatever is all this about? It is only a few poor men on the mountains, that is all; on the tops of the mountains, armed with heavenly power, and reaching down in the amplitude of that power to poor sinners upon the very precipice of damnation, and plucking them therefrom, turning them into living trees, and planting them in oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ. They were elevated; they were exalted; the apostle was once favoured to go to the very top; he was caught up to the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words, which if he could have uttered them it would not have been lawful to utter them in this ungodly world; they would be ridiculed here; but they are not in the other, they are enjoyed. Concealment, that is another idea in the apostles; they were concealed from the world as to the reality of their religion. This is what the apostle means when he says, "Unknown, yet well known." "An handful of corn" then. And as the handful of corn was consecrated to God for a memorial; so the disciples, they were but a handful, they were a consecrated handful, they were a regenerated handful. They were real corn, they were not chaff; there was one piece of chaff, that is Judas; but he was blown away. "The wicked shall be as the chaff, which shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous." They were a consecrated handful, then.

III. But, thirdly, individual experience. When the soul is converted to God, it comes and bears a little testimony; just a handful of experience; I have not much; I know what I am as a sinner; I know there is no hope but in that mercy that is by Jesus Christ. I have sought his favour; I have tried different systems, and they are all of no avail; and I am brought at last to confess that I have been deluded with chaff, and thought it was corn. "He that hath a dream, let him tell the dream;" and alas, I have found out that all these false doctrines are but human dreams; he that hath "my word let him speak my word faithfully." And when such an one finds a minister that understands his case, Ah, he says, this is the corn, this is that that will

sustain my soul, this is that which I have been, seeking for. So such an one has but little experience to begin with; but if he is brought to acknowledge that it is of the Lord, that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy; he has a handful of corn to begin with, and he shall go on and increase. When he gets up into the mountains, he shall find the garners full of all manner of store. Heaven is a reality; there you are to be sustained; there is no uncertainty about it. There was a handful of corn. So then Christ is certain; the testimony of the apostles is certain; the faith of the real Christian is certain.

IV. But, lastly, the words will apply to providence. Elijah came to a poor widow, and said, Bring me a little water. Yes, no objection to that; she was going off—Stop, bring me a morsel of bread. Bread! “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel.” Ah, it is a handful; that conveys the idea of consecration; you see that handful here was consecrated to God; I will prove it to you presently. A handful of meal in a barrel; and a little oil in a cruse; and I am gathering a few sticks to dress it for me and my son, that we may eat and die. Fear not; fear not! Why, what is this? “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.” Do you believe that? I do. Then if you do, go and make me a little cake first; a little one will do, just to test your faith. Well, I do believe it. Then you will act accordingly. And she made a cake, and brought it; and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days; and the barrel of meal wasted not, and the cruse of oil failed not, until the Lord sent rain upon the earth. See how the handful was consecrated to God for a memorial by her faith; she believed that God would turn that handful into a barrel full; she believed he could keep the cruse going; she set out well; she began with the God of the Hebrews; and she went on well, went on with the God of the Hebrews; until the Lord sent showers of blessing upon the earth. Now, says the devil, if I don't be too much for that woman; I'll give her entertaining that prophet; I'll give her believing in that prophet; I'll give her becoming one of these high doctrine people. I can see something in it. “There were many widows in Israel; but unto none of them was Elijah sent but unto the widow of Sarepta.” And so the devil crept in somehow or another, and afflicted her son; and her son was ill; and there was no breath in him. Oh dear, says Satan, there, didn't I tell you that if you had anything to do with those high doctrine people, something was sure to befall you. “O thou man of God.” You think he is a man of God, do you? Well, I call him so, but I have my doubts about him. Why, say some, how do you know she had doubts? I know she had by what she said at the last,—“O thou man of God; art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son.” And the prophet prayed to the Lord, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah said, See now, look at him. There was the little fellow looking up with his little rosy cheeks, and smiling, and looking quite pleased. See, says Elijah, see, thy son liveth. Ah, she says, “now I know that thou art a man of God;” though I doubted it just now; “and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.” May the Lord then let us more and more into these eternal mysteries.