

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

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## GOOD WILL.

### A Sermon

PREACHED AT NORTHAMPTON, AT THE OPENING OF THE NEW BAPTIST CHAPEL,  
ABINGDON STREET, ON TUESDAY MORNING, APRIL 24TH, 1860, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS.

[CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, the following discourses were delivered on an important occasion—the opening of a New Meeting House for the worship of God. The publication will not only serve as a memorial of that event, but place it in the power of numbers to read, what it was not their privilege to hear. The author's name is well known, for his love to and decision for pure, vital and discriminating truth. That the power of the Eternal Spirit rested upon speaker and hearers, when these sermons were preached, was evident, and that the blessing of the Lord may attend their appearance in print, is the hearty desire of one who gladly owns his approbation of, and delight in, the truths embodied therein.—W. LEACH, Minister of the gospel, Northampton.]

‘Good will toward men.’—Luke xi. 14.

WHOLESAME and excellent is the advice given by the apostle when he says, ‘Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; and that is a mind of good will toward men. And wherever the good will, or the laws of the good will of God are written in the heart—and the Lord hath promised to put the laws of his good will into the hearts of sinners, and to write them there;—wherever that is it will produce in that man a good will towards God, a good will towards his truth, a good will towards his ways and his service; and a good will towards those that love the Lord Jesus Christ; and a good will towards men in general. There is therefore no excellency of will, of purpose, of object, that can equal that good will, purpose, and object which the gospel gives, and presents, and hence we are assured that ‘Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it;’ but if it be built, if we are working from a motive of love to his truth, he who has given the motive and the feeling, and the willingness to make all those sacrifices that we can make to forward that great cause by which sinners are brought to know the Lord—he will fulfil his own words, ‘Them that honour me I will honour;’ then we shall not labour in vain, but shall bless the Lord that his beauty is upon us, and that the work of our hands he will establish—yea, the work of our hands he will establish it. I thought, therefore, the words of our text were very suitable to commence with this morning; ‘Good will towards men.’ That is the feeling in which I am come, and the feeling in which I hope you are come; and I am sure it is

VOL. II.—No. 77 & 78.

the feeling in which your minister lives, and in which he will live. The best of all ambition is first personally ourselves to covet the best gifts, and covet them earnestly, and be ambitious to seek fellowship with God; and then to seek the good of others by that good wherewith we ourselves are favoured and blessed.

I will try and make clear *what we are to understand by this good will towards men*. You are aware that the will of God is spoken of in the Scriptures in a great variety of forms; and it is important that we should understand what is the especial and proper meaning of the language of our text; and in order to make it clear I will just here distinguish between God's will of command and will of decree originally; and then his will of command and will of decree in another dispensation.

Under both these circumstances the will of God differs essentially from that which is meant by the language of our text. For instance, when the Lord created man, and placed him in the garden of Eden, God's will of command was, that Adam should not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; that was God's will of command, and so far as Adam abstained from eating of that tree he was doing God's command.

And at the same time, while it was God's will of command that Adam should not eat of the tree, it was God's will of decree, that if he did not eat, he should continue to retain what he had by creation; it was God's will of decree that if he did eat of the fruit he should die. So you perceive, that whether Adam should, or should not eat of the fruit, God's counsel would stand. Adam sinned, he violated God's will of command, he sinned against God—it was his own voluntary act against God; God had no hand in influencing Adam to sin whatever. God suffered the fall, but Satan himself was the working agent; and Adam and Eve willingly submitted to the Adversary. Thus, then, God's will of command was, they were not to eat. God's will of decree was, that if they did eat, they should die; and thus God's counsel stood good. But that is not the will spoken of in our text.

Again, the Lord raised up the Israelites as a nation; and in the covenant which he made with them, in the plains of Moab; he there gave them certain commands. And the first and essential command, of course, of all, is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy soul, and thy neighbour as thyself.' This I am aware, is included in the language of our text, but still, the Lord at the same time, placed them in a conditional position: it was merely rational, merely temporal; it was a dispensation after the law of carnal commandment. So that God's command was, that they were to love him and worship him, and not only so, but at the same time, his will of decree was, that if they did so, they should have all that temporal plenty, at which they arrived in the days of Solomon. His will of decree also was, that if they did apostatise from him, if they went after other gods, they should perish from off the land. Now they did go after other gods, and they did perish from off the land. Here then, you will see that the will

of God in Eden, and the will of God in relation to the Jews, although they sinned, yet the counsel of God stood.

The good will spoken of in our text, means the *testamentary will of God*. The same if a man make a will, and will his property absolutely to certain ends and objects, we call that, that man's will. And so the apostle takes it up under this idea, Christ being the testator: he was the testator, and also may say, in a sense, the executor of that will: and I will bring forward the Word of God to shew that I am right, and what is meant therein. It stands thus:—  
 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt: which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord, but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know him, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord.' There is an instance in that Scripture I am quoting now, out of the many instances in the Scriptures, where we lose the force of the sentence, through having the word 'Lord,' instead of the word 'Jehovah.' Let us take it this way. 'They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, saying, know ye Jehovah.' That word 'Jehovah,' was a distinctive name, by which the Lord was distinguished from all other gods. Hence, in that day you might say to one man—do you know Chemosh? Oh yes. Do you know Dagon? Oh yes. Do you know Ashtaroth? Oh yes. And, do you know Baal? Oh yes, I know Baal. And you would find these gods almost universally known. But, if the question be, do you know Jehovah? No, saith Pharaoh, I know not Jehovah, and so very few would know Jehovah. It means the Lord especially in his absolute eternity. And here the Lord says, 'The days shall come when they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, saying, know ye Jehovah, but they shall all know Jehovah, from the least unto the greatest.' Now, who are these *all*? Who are the persons that shall know Jehovah? Mark the language! "The days come that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.' Now, who are the house of Israel? 'They that be of faith are the children of Abraham, the children of Isaac, and the children of Israel, and therefore, the *all*, that shall know the Lord, will mean that *all* spoken of by the Saviour in the sixth of John, when he saith, '*All* that the Father hath given me shall come unto me.' So, to speak plainly, then, there is a people out of the human race that was given to Christ before the foundation of the world.' And the Lord says concerning these, 'They shall all'—all those who were given to Christ—'they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest.' This is a part of God's testamentary will. Just so now, you take the man of

little faith, and say to him—Do you know Jehovah? Do you know the Lord is eternal in his love, in his choice, that the people that he hath chosen in Christ, are chosen very differently from the Israelites: they were chosen conditionally, and after a time, they were consequently rejected: but, they that were chosen in Christ, are chosen eternally. And do you know that the Lord Jesus Christ is 'the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever?' And, do you know, that he that hath begun the good work, will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ? Yes! saith the little one, I know all that. Then you know Jehovah. And we say, can you read your title clear? No, no, no, I am afraid I cannot. Do you know that Jesus died for you? I am afraid he did not—there is where my difficulty is. Has the Holy Spirit begun a work of grace in your heart? Ah, that is what I am afraid about. That is a little one. But, if you say to him, will any other gospel do for you? No! no! no! If I perish, I must perish only there: I am a sinner, a poor lost sinner, and nothing will do for me, but God in the eternity of his mercy, in and by Christ Jesus. Then, if you go to the man who can call the Lord his, it is the same God: so the little one and the great one may get on very well together, for they both love the same God, and the same gospel; only, the one can cry, 'Abba Father,' and the other is afraid so to do. Let us now go a little farther. What will the Lord do with the sins of these people he has given to Christ, for they are all sinners? He says, 'Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more'—they are blotted out, there is no more remembrance of them—there is no more offering for sin, because no more offering is needed, for Christ hath put away sin, finished transgression, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness.

But let us look at the certainty of it. 'Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon, and of the stars, for a light by night; if these ordinances depart from before me, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.' So that, just so sure as the sun arises and goeth down, independent of man; just so sure as the stars and the mighty orbs of the universe run their rounds, and perform with majestic silence and accuracy all the revolutions that their Creator hath appointed them; and that, independent of man, just so sure are truths of the everlasting gospel; and 'If heaven above can be measured, saith the Lord, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done.' The apostle sums up this good will thus, 'Whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.' Ah, say some, here you are again with your doctrine of predestination; I see you are a great predestinarian I suppose you believe that the Lord decreed everything. No, friends, I believe no such doctrine. I do not believe he decreed sin; he suffered it to come to pass, he foreknew it, he foresaw it, but that is very different from decreeing it. I believe that predestination is simply this,—that all the evil that ever existed, God sovereignly suffered it, but I do not believe he ever decreed anything but what is good; I believe all that is good God decreed, and I believe all that is bad is of the Devil, all sin came from the Devil, and every thing that is good is of God. That is the kind of predestinarian I am; I am not a fatalist; I do not hold the counsel of God in that way that destroys the voluntary agency of man, that destroys the responsibility of man, the accountability of man. To hold predestination in that way would be to charge sin upon God; yea, it would be to make him the source of sin, the author of sin, and would place man in such a position as to destroy all accountability, and turn God's law itself into an absurdity. Of course I am not a free-willer. I do not believe in free will; but I do believe in voluntary agency. Our sins are our own. But

when we come, then, to the great matter of God's decrees in the gospel sense, that while sin has come in upon us like a flood to overwhelm us, God's great decree stands in opposition to that flood; and Christ, the great fulfiller of that decree, comes in, and by his mighty power rolls this ocean of sin back, with the majestic language, 'I am the Lord thy God.' Those waves, that have been too mighty for us, could not be too mighty for him, but he was too mighty for them, and thereby has made a way for the ransomed to pass over. So then this predestination was a holy decree to a holy end; predestinating us to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ; and is not his image the best image we can bear? Is not his spirit the best spirit we can have? Is not his likeness the best likeness in the whole range of existence? Is he not the very brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person? And to conformity to that Wonderful Person the blessed God has predestinated his people. Do not be alarmed, my hearers, some of you little ones, if you have heard people distort and speak wickedly of God's counsels. Read the Scriptures for yourselves; and be guided by no man, and you will there see that all God's decrees are holy, and that God's decrees are not with sin, but against sin, and not with Satan, but against Satan; for Jesus Christ came not to destroy the works of God, he came to destroy the works of the Devil. Then the apostle goes on to say that these very same persons whom God had thus in sovereignty, and in the face of all their sins and sinfulness, ordained to this conformity to his dear Son, he calls by his almighty grace, and after he has called them by his grace into the knowledge of what they are, and brought them to the footstool of his mercy; there they stand trembling condemned sinners before him, and they feel that the thunders of heaven are rolling over their heads, that the pit of hell is opening beneath their feet, that they are on the very precipice of eternal destruction—and then, when the sinner is brought here, the victorious work of the dear Almighty Redeemer comes in, justification comes in, condemnation goes out—freedom comes in, bondage goes out—hope comes in, despair goes out—and that man now stands upon the rock of eternal ages, he is justified, he has peace with God. He is a man, justified by faith, he sees the gates of righteousness are opened, and feels he has a right to go through them—he goes through them, and he becomes a citizen, no more a stranger and a foreigner—and before he goes into the gates he goes round the city, he says, I like the walls very much, Salvation. I like the bulwarks very much, the great truths of the gospel; I like the towers very much, they are the several names of the Lord, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower.' I should like to live in that free-grace city, I should like to take up my abode within those jasper walls. I should like to be there, where God and the Lamb are the temple therein and the light thereof. What is the kind of song the people in that city sing? He stands, he listens, he catches a little of the sound, and feels his soul vibrate to this chord, 'This God is our God!' ah, that will do: 'For ever and for ever, better and better still; 'And will be our guide even unto death.' On he goes into the city, and sings, I was going to say, loudest of them all.

Before I enter into some of the other details of the will, I will just take notice for a moment the character of this will. It is a *good* will. If you ask how good it is, I can answer it only in this way, that whatever God's love is, that is his will in goodness, for it is in reality the will of his love, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Remember that our God is infinite, he has an infinity, an omnipotency of power, and therefore while he hath loved with an everlasting love, he has loved with an omnipotency of power. We have no adequate idea, and never can have while on this side Jordan, of the intensity of the love of God, of the love of Christ, of the love of the eterna

Spirit. Why, our sins, that had lighted up hell, as Kent expresses it, of never abating despair, could not quench his love. His interest, his love, is so intense that when he would speak to us in some of those circumstances that though in themselves small, yet exercise us sometimes very sharply, he says, 'Not a sparrow can fall to the ground without your Heavenly Father's notice, and the very hairs of your head are all numbered.' What does this mean? That such is the infinity of his love that he thinks of you in all your cares, in all your anxieties, in all your feelings. There is not a sigh, I speak to those that know and love the truth, for the truth after all is the test as to whether we love God—there is not a sigh, there is not a cry, there is not a care, that he does not look upon with intense interest, he is more interested in your troubles than you yourself can be—he is more interested in your salvation, infinitely more so than you yourself can be—he is more concerned for you, and that every moment, than it is possible for you to be concerned about yourself. He will come to you just where you are in trouble, he will find out just where the sore is, just where the wound is, just where the difficulty is, and he will astonish you by his mercy—he will make you know what the meaning of that Scripture is, 'I will cause my goodness to pass before thee.' In all his dealings with us there is a good will—all the afflictions he lays upon us he sees a necessity for: we do not see it. There are a great many troubles and difficulties we have that we think we should be better without, but he sees the necessity for them, and when we get to the end, as the apostle observes, afterward they shall yield all that peaceable fruit of righteousness that shews that in all these things the Lord has been carrying out the will of his amazing and everlasting love.

Look at his good will in regeneration. Does it not appear there? When you were in a state of nature, what were you then? What was there in you as a reason why he should have mercy upon you? What saith the scripture upon this matter? 'You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and in sins.' 'God, who is rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and in sins.' What is that but good will, what is that but predestination, what is that but election, flowing out of his own counsel. Now, my hearer, if thou art taught of God, if thou art thus brought to know something of this truth, you will see that it was not you that sought him, but he that sought you; not that you loved him, but that he loved you; not that you had chosen him, but that he had chosen you; not that you desired him, but that he desired you. There must be conviction of sin deep enough to make you know that you are nothing but a sinner; and when there is conviction enough for that, and everything belonging to the sinner is thus as it were burnt to ashes; then you are prepared for the next part of God's good will, then you are prepared to receive his dear Son, to receive the tidings of his mercy, to join with the apostle in saying that 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' Hast thou then that conviction of sin that has driven thee to the perfection of the Saviour's work, and made you acknowledge before God that unless you are complete in him there is no other way in which you can be complete before God? 'That the prince of this world is judged?' that is, that Satan is finally defeated. Art thou convinced of this, that Satan is finally defeated, that the Saviour achieved the victory, that the warfare he entered into will not have to be entered into again: that he has conquered sin once, and for ever: that he has put the curse away once, and for ever: that he has conquered Satan once, and for ever: that he has swallowed up death in victory, once and for ever? If so, then thou art brought into the kingdom of God, and into God's good will: then thou art brought into the city of God; then thou hast a saving acquaintance with

his blessed name. Ever let us remember that the strength of a church consists not in its numbers, nor in the wealth of the people that may attend. Some of you may be very rich in this manufacturing town, and may be making money very fast, and our good brother may have by-and-bye a very rich people to preach to, very strong in the purse, very strong in the pocket—but that is not the church: the church does not consist in that, that has nothing at all to do with it; that is, not materially so: the strength of a church lies in the spirituality of its members; that is, the spirituality of the members of the congregation. If they possess the spirit of faith and the spirit of love, the spirit of sincerity, and the spirit of decision for God, they have God on their side—and that is a strong church, because they are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and all things are possible unto them that believe. A church will get on better with a great deal of spirituality, with very little silver and gold, than with a great deal of silver and gold, and yet not much real spirituality—and you may depend upon it the purer our churches are kept the better. You had better keep a child of God out seven years than let a hypocrite in—for as sure as you let one or two hypocrites in, they will bring a great many more in with them. ‘Oh, I hope you will receive Mrs So and So, for she is a friend of mine; and Mr So and So, he is a friend of mine; and there is a family So and So, most respectable, they are friends of mine.’ Now, my hearers, these are some of the snares and some of the means by which tares are sometimes thickly sown among the wheat; and the consequence is, the tares and the wheat are so entangled that you cannot get them apart, and so the minister gets into bondage, and things all go wrong. Therefore the Lord preserve you from this. They may say many unpleasant things about you, that you are very severe, and so on; but never mind that; there will be a good deal of respect in the back ground; well, they will say, they are pretty firm, and pretty decided: and they will in reality respect you more for your sterling honesty than for your accommodating hypocrisy.

Was it possible for God to have devised anything better for us than the gift of his dear Son? can we imagine anything so good for us? To make him our life—to give us a life as superior to the life we had in Adam as Christ himself is superior to Adam: to give us a holiness, a righteousness, a kingdom, and a standing, notwithstanding our being sinners, as superior to that which we lost as Christ is to Adam, and that we have in all that Christ is—eternity? If he be our life, it is eternal life: if he be our sanctification, he is a sanctification that never can be tarnished; if he be our justification, it is an everlasting justification: if he be our salvation, it is an everlasting salvation: if he be our joy, it is an everlasting joy: if he be our glory, it is an everlasting glory. The apostle might well call it an unspeakable gift.

Again, look at God's good will also, in *glorification*. There is no uncertainty about it. Take two or three Scriptures that describe this glorification:—‘Fulness of joy in his presence; at his right-hand pleasures for evermore.’ ‘And there shall be no more death; no more pain.’ We have many pains of body, but they are as nothing compared with the pains of the mind; but then ‘there shall be no more pain, no more sorrow; neither shall they hunger nor thirst any more, but shall see his face, and shall reign for ever and ever.’

But, lastly, this good will of God also in keeping up his service in the world. Now we, hyper-Calvinists, are looked upon as men of a very bad spirit, and as having no good will to any one. I will tell you what my feeling is upon that, it is this—If it were the will of God, I should like to see every person in Northampton, and every other town, I should like to see every one of my fellow creatures all over the world brought to rejoice in the same Jesus Christ that I rejoice in, and brought to rejoice in electing grace, and in God's name,

and in God's kingdom, and in God's salvation. We wish people to be lost! We speak lightly of these things! I really think that the high doctrine people are the last in the world that ought to speak lightly of the damnation of the soul, because they themselves confess that such was their state by nature, that if Almighty Grace had not delivered them they must have been lost. Now those that say everybody can help themselves, that they have helped themselves, they may with some propriety speak lightly of it, they may say, 'It is your own fault if you do not go to heaven.' And I am equally sure that as we are the last people in the world that ought to speak lightly of the eternal condemnation of a sinner: so, on the other hand, we are the last people in the world that ought to speak lightly of salvation, of the Saviour, and of godliness—because we confess ourselves to be great, mighty, and immeasurable debtors to the boundless grace of God. We are obliged to speak roughly sometimes. If I have a rock to break in pieces, it is no use to strike it with a feather; and if I have something to set fire to that is very difficult to burn, that does not seem very combustible, I must use the unquenchable torch of God's truth, and burn the Pharisee out if I can: and it is very difficult to set fire to a Pharisee, and burn every rag off his back, and drive him out of his card houses and cobweb buildings that he may seek shelter where shelter only can be found. And if I have a boisterous, profane man to preach to, and God puts the hammer of truth into my hand, and I speak roughly, it is because I have some hard blows to let fall upon that man's hard heart in order by God's blessing to break it in pieces; and that man may be led to feel by-and-bye that God did honour that rough sermon that that minister preached. Therefore, my hearers, we mean good will. Why, the Devil deals pretty roughly with us, and therefore we must deal roughly with him: it is the Devil in man we have to encounter, and it is not you we want to hurt, but him, we want to down with him, and up with you, that's what we want to do: it is not ill will, but good will—good will to the souls of men, good will to our God, and to the honor of his name. And what is this chapel? Why, a standing expression, a practical declaration of your good will toward men, as a reflection of that hope you have in God's good will toward you. And what will your minister's preaching be? Why, good will toward men. What do you say to the Catholics? Why I should like to see the Lord open the eyes of all of them, and take them away from the Pope, and from everything human, and bring them to Jesus Christ. What do you say to the Puseyites? Say? Why I wish the Lord would bring them out of their nonsense, and bring them to his truth, and so I say of all. Some people think our creed does not allow us to preach to sinners. Why as I said to a farmer some time ago in the country, he told me after I had preached, 'Sir, you do not preach to sinners. I told him we should be puzzled to preach to any thing else in this world if we preach at all, and especially if all were like you.' 'Why,' he said, 'have you heard anything about me?' 'Yes, said I, 'I was reading about you this morning.' 'Why what in the world were you reading about me?' 'Why in the first chapter of Romans there is a black catalogue, and I am sure you are included in it, I'm sure you are.' And therefore if we preach to anything at all in this world, it must be to sinners. And it is no use to preach that to sinners that cannot save them. We know we have sinners to preach to, and we must preach not a gospel that cannot save, but a gospel that can save—not a Jesus Christ that cannot save, but a Jesus Christ that can save, and does save—not preach a grace that cannot save, but preach that grace that can save and does save. And thus, I contend that we high doctrine people do preach to sinners, and that we preach that gospel that alone can save the sinner.