

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE WAY OF TRUTH.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 22ND, 1860, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." John vi. 43, 44.

JESUS had in the preceding verses spoken of himself as that bread of life, that bread of God, which came down from heaven; and this was that which the people could not understand; they did not like his declaring himself to be the bread of life; and his saying that he was from God was something they equally disliked. And we have in our text the Saviour's answer to these murmurers; "Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." I will therefore this morning, as far as the Lord shall enable me, notice first, *the living bread*; for this is the character in which the Saviour here appears; and then secondly, *the solemn counsel*; "Murmur not among yourselves;" and then thirdly, *the essential attraction*; "no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

I. First THE LIVING BREAD. Four reasons I will assign why the Saviour is called the living bread, the bread which came down from heaven; taking of course the bread as expressive of all that supply and all those mercies which we need in every sense, whatever our necessities may be. First then, sin brought in a famine. Originally man stood in a garden of plenty, in a land of plenty; there was no want. But when sin came in, and we became severed from God, there was then nothing before us but eternal famine; there is nothing in hell but famine, and there is nothing on earth but spiritual famine. Sin, therefore, has brought us into this state of destitution. And how poor for an immortal soul is a mere temporal hope. The man who has hope only in this life, what a poor dying hope that is; what a fleeting shadow; the man who has hope only in what providence can bring him, what a poor hope that is. What a passing nothing is this life in comparison of the one great necessity, the bread of everlasting life. But the Lord Jesus Christ hath put an end to the famine by putting an end to sin; he hath put an end to sin. Oh, I do more and more rejoice in this, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the end of sin; that it was at Calvary's cross settled, that it was closed, that it received its death blow, that it lost its power, that

it became virtually dead; the end of sin. And a poor sinner, when he realises the Lord Jesus Christ as the end of sin, is then brought out of the land of famine into the land of plenty. And it is on this ground, and in this spiritual sense, taken purely in the spiritual sense, there will be no difficulty in understanding the words, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken," never forgetting that we are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; "nor his seed begging bread." Because Christ is the end of sin, hereby he becomes the bread of life; by him there is the promise of everlasting supply; by him stands the declaration that ye shall eat, by precious faith, and shall eat in plenty; and shall praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you; and my people shall never be ashamed. And can there be anything more wonderful than the Lord Jesus Christ laying down his infinitely precious life to put an end to your sin, and to bring you out of utter destitution into divine, into heavenly, and eternal plenty? Truly the Lord hath here dealt wondrously with us. Now no man can come unto the Lord Jesus Christ as the end of sin, thereby the end of famine; no man can come unto the Lord Jesus Christ as that eternal life, for he is the bread of eternal life, except the Father that hath sent him draw him. This then is one reason why Jesus Christ is called the bread of life. But I linger one moment upon it, because it is a truth we cannot dwell too much upon; namely, that while sin has brought in destitution—awful destitution, the Lord Jesus Christ has put an end thereto. And you may depend upon it if you get to-day to the end of your guilt, and to the end of your doubts and fears, and to the end of your sins, and to the end of your troubles, it can be only by the Lord Jesus Christ being revealed to you, and your being favoured to receive him as the end of sin, and in receiving him as the end of sin, here you have everlasting life. Famine can never enter his kingdom; there are no beggars spiritually in his kingdom; no wanderers and vagrants there; because in their Father's house they have enough and to spare. David never saw a spiritual man spiritually wandering about this world to beg bread; because every spiritual man has ever been taught that Jesus Christ is the bread of eternal life; every spiritual man has ever been taught the great truth testified in the Old as well as the New Testament, "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thine house, even thine holy temple." Go to beg bread; why should I? Is there any want of mercy in God? Is there any want of grace in God? Is there any want of love in God? Is there any want of goodness in God? Is there any want of anything that I can need in God? And was there a prophet that ever lived, was there an apostle that ever lived; has there been a minister that has ever lived, that has been able to outpreach the Almighty; to set him forth greater than he really is; to make more of his mercy than it really is; to make more of Christ than he really is? Why, my hearers, I make no hesitation in saying that the greatest preacher that ever lived, the greatest mere man preacher of course I mean that ever lived, so far from outpreaching the mercy of God, so far from outpreaching what Christ has done, and so far from outpreaching the blessed God, and his love, and his goodness, they have all fallen infinitely short. There was a great man, a very great man, and he was made a great man by great grace, I mean the apostle Paul, he put himself among the number of them that knew but in part; he says, "We know only in part." When I read the deep things, especially in Romans and in Hebrews, the deep things in which his very soul was wrapt, and in which his soul swam as in Ezekiel's river, the deep things of eternity which he rolls before us there; and yet that great man, with all the greatness of the grace he had, and the abundance of the revelations granted unto him, and the great experience he had, and the great gifts bestowed upon him to set forth these great mysteries, he says, "We know but in part;" we

know but in part. Here then, my hearers, Jesus has put an end to sin, hath put an end to famine; and consequently there can be no more famine, no more coming to beggary. He lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, if you like; he raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and setteth them with princes, that they may inherit a throne of glory, and enjoy royal dainties for ever.

Secondly, the Lord Jesus Christ is the bread of life because he hath put an end also to death. Death is that that completes our famine, when that enemy comes in, we have no comfort after that. The righteous hath hope in his death; but the unrighteous hath nothing but despair in death. But while death, therefore, is the concomitant of famine, Jesus Christ hath swallowed up death in victory. As I observed last Sunday morning; and I do rejoice that that sermon last Sunday morning has been exceedingly blest, not only to many of you while hearing it, but it has also been blest in the country in different places where it was read; and especially the part where I touched upon what I will just now repeat; that while the fall of man was in itself one of the direst calamities that could befall the human race, yet the great God took such advantage of that dire calamity as to turn that direful curse into a blessing; as saith the apostle, our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God. It is wonderful to see how the Lord knows how to turn the direst curse into a blessing. And now come to death. Is not death naturally an enemy? Is not death naturally a monster? Is not death that terrible leviathan, that piercing serpent, that roaring dragon from which we all shrink. What has the blessed God done with that death? Will you deny, any of you, will you deny the Lord the honour of having turned the terrible enemy, death, into a friend? Is it not said that to die is gain? Then I say, that while death is naturally a curse, the Lord has turned it into a blessing; that while it is naturally and in itself an enemy, God has turned it into a friend. Why should we deny our God the honour of having done this? I am sure, friends, that even persons that complain of my going too far ought to be very glad; for they are the very persons that need just such a gospel; and woe unto them if there be not such a gospel. No, bless the Lord; wherever I can see him taking advantage of the enemy, wherever I can see him overruling Satan's counsels; wherever I can see him turning hindrances into helps, and turning curses into blessings, I must say it does with me, if it does not with you, endear the eternal God, it enthrones him in my affections; it makes me serve him more willingly, love him more sincerely; it makes me happier; and my language is concerning such doctrines as these, "Lord, evermore give me this bread;" for there is none like it. Truly the manna in the wilderness was as nothing; that was very excellent; as temporal bread, but it was as nothing in comparison of this bread, which is unto everlasting life. Thus then, my hearer, if sin and death have ever become to thee that which is likened unto a famine,—and what is more terrible than a famine?—I am sure that it will be a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation in your soul, that Jesus Christ hath put an end to sin, thereby put an end to the famine; that he has put an end to death, thereby put an end to the famine.

Third, the Lord Jesus Christ is the bread of life also by the perfection of his mediatorial work. I wish to lay stress upon this. His is a perfection that differs from all other perfections. Adam was perfect of his kind; but he stood upon conditional ground, and he fell, and there was an end to the meat that was to sustain him. The Jews had a perfect dispensation of the kind, temporal kind, after the law of a carnal commandment, which law could make nothing perfect spiritually; they fell, famine set in upon their land, and they were starved out of it. But the Lord Jesus Christ is perfect

of his kind. What is he? He is God, the eternal God, God and man in one person. And as he is perfect of his kind, in his person; and as he is in his person eternal, essentially and necessarily eternal, and perfect in that, his work is just like unto him. "Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, Jehovah our Righteousness." Now that is that meat that endureth unto everlasting life. So that Christ is the bread of life not only by being the end of sin, not only by being the end of death, but also by the perfection of his work; it lasts for ever. Here what a mighty difference, which remark I ought to have made just now in the former part of my discourse; what a complete contrast there is between the dealings of the Lord and the doings of man. The Lord, I have shown, turns curses into blessings; but man turns blessings into curses. Adam turned his blessings into curses; the Israelites, by apostasy from God, turned their blessings into curses; and we now, if left to ourselves, should turn our blessings into curses. What a mercy that there are blessings, namely, the blessings that are in Christ Jesus, that cannot undergo that change by any conduct in the people; because the blessings are not left with the people. If the blessings of the new covenant were left with the people, we should turn them into curses; that is, if we possessed them in any conditional way. But they all rest with Christ; and being in him, he has turned curses into blessings; he never turned a blessing into a curse, and he never will. He is therefore perfect of his kind; and being necessarily eternal, this is the meat, his perfect work, or he in his perfect work is that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. It is a nice view to my mind of this living bread. "I am that living bread;" famine no more; sin is gone, and plenty brought in; death is gone, and life brought in; perfection is eternally established; and you shall die, you shall come short, you shall go begging for spiritual bread, when the Saviour's work ceases to be perfect, but not before.

Again, he is the bread of life also because of that reconciliation into which he brings our souls. Hence you are aware even to this day in the east eating and drinking together is a declaration of friendship, an expression of reconciliation. Just so now, the Lord Jesus Christ eateth with sinners, receiveth sinners, reconciles us; he reconciles us to God; he puts an end to the quarrel. Now, to make a reconciliation perfect, there must be an end to the complaint on both sides; because if one has anything against another, and you reconcile one, and that one says, Well, I am quite content to be friendly on that ground; and the other says, Well, I will think it over, I will leave it; and he leaves it and leaves it; and you cannot call that a real reconciliation. But it is not so with our God; the reconciliation is complete on both sides; I am sure, there is no doubt about the matter, that God the Father has, as clearly as words can do it, shown himself well pleased with the righteousness of his dear Son, loved his dear Son, because his Son laid down his life; that God the Father is perfectly satisfied, perfectly so; so that as far as he is concerned the quarrel is ended; the complaint, every complaint, is finished. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Now I want to know whether it is right on your side or not; whether we are as he is in this matter; whether we love his dear Son by that work which he hath achieved; for that is the perfect reconciliation, the non-imputation to us of sin, and the imputation to us of righteousness. I want to know whether you are reconciled to God in his way of saving you? What do you mean by that, say you? Why, giving us to Christ before the world was, before man was created. Are you reconciled to that? Do you love him in that? And there and then determining that you should come to everlasting life and glory; do you love him in that? Yea, as he could swear by no greater, he

sware by himself, and threw his whole being into your eternal welfare. I want to know whether you are reconciled to this, whether you love this? If so, then I am sure you will understand the meaning of the Saviour where he says, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in unto him," and declare friendship with him, "and sup with him, and he with me." I will accept your prayers, your sighs, your groans; and thus I will sup with you, and I will bring in the sweet promises of my word, and delight you, and feast you, and charm you, and cheer your heart with the wine of the kingdom; and thus you shall sup with me. Here, then, friendship takes place; the quarrel is ended; so that the Lord has nothing against you, and you have nothing against him. And now I want to know how two can better walk together than those two that are agreed in everything? I am aware, friends, that we very often stumble at many of the Lord's dealings with us; but in all these essential things he reconciles us, and he will walk with us, and we shall walk with him to all eternity. How can two better walk together than two that are so entirely of one mind? People complain of us because we do not preach with them, and unite with them, and co-operate with them, as they call it; but then if we do, we must keep what we believe to be God's truth in the back ground; for they, with all their charity, will take good care that they will not keep any one part of their system back; no, we are to make the sacrifice, not them. Therefore the best way is to stand aloof, and walk with God's word, with them that do walk with God. I myself, as the fable goes, like lean liberty better than I do fat bondage. Let me have my freedom, and however poor a creature I may seem, still let me be free to enjoy fellowship with God, to enjoy the truth as it is in Jesus; having no unkind feeling to any mortal under heaven; at the same time daring not, as in the sight of God, to sacrifice one particle of truth, for that would indicate a want of reconciliation to God; if my reconciliation be real, I shall desire to walk in that peace that passeth all understanding; and endeavour, by prayer and supplication, and all that Christian conduct which grace can enable me to follow, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Jesus Christ, then, is the bread of life. Do we want to find, then, the end of sin and famine? Christ is the way. Do we want to find the end of death? Christ is the way. Do we want to find that which is in itself eternally perfect? Christ is the way. Do we want to find that wherein the Lord has nothing against us, and wherein we come into reconciliation with him? Christ is the way. Christ is the meeting place; he is the centre; all meet there, all assemble there, all is settled there.

II. Now, after these few remarks, I come to THE SOLEMN COUNSEL. "Murmur not among yourselves," said the Lord to these carnal people. Now if these people that followed him had been situated spiritually as they were literally, then we should not have been informed in the 66th verse of this chapter that many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. I say, if they had been placed spiritually as they were temporally. First, they were in a desert place; if they had known what that had been spiritually, they would have known that Christ was in that desert place the remedy. Then they were also weary; if they had known what that was spiritually, they would have known that Christ was the weary sinner's rest. And they were also hungry; if they had known what that was spiritually, they would not have murmured at Christ's being the bread of life, but have gladly fed thereon, and blessed God therefor. But, alas, their discipleship was after the flesh, and not after the Spirit; and therefore their discipleship was like the flesh, a very fallible sort of thing, and they went back, and walked no more with him. I think, friends, there are two things implied in this solemn counsel, "Murmur not among yourselves;" and I think the

two things are these: first, that the Saviour's invitations to sinners are not indiscriminate; that he never gave an indiscriminate invitation. "Murmur not among yourselves." I do not ask you to come; I do not ask you to live upon me. I think that is the first thing; I will try and make that clear, and then I will tell you what the other is. The Saviour's invitations, then, to sinners are not irrespective of either character or profession. These people were exhorted by the Saviour, as I told you some time ago, for two reasons; first, they professed to be his disciples; so on the ground of that profession, he said to these same people, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." That invitation is not indiscriminate; it is a discriminative invitation, founded upon *their profession*; it was not an exhortation to men in general, but it was an exhortation to those persons who in the 66th verse of this chapter are called disciples; they made a profession; and it must be understood in the same way as the words of John, when he says, "If any man saith he abideth in him;" mark that, if he saith; that is, make a profession; "he ought also to walk as he walked." Well, you say, you are my disciples. Yes, we are thy disciples. Very well, then you must prove the reality of your discipleship by labouring not for that meat which your fathers did eat in the wilderness, and are dead; nor for the meat of which you have just partaken, which is only temporal; but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. On the ground of the profession they made, he exhorted them. Then the next reason of his exhorting them was to put them to the test; and when he put them to the test of that which was spiritual, their carnality came to light, and they went back and walked no more with him. Therefore the exhortation is not indiscriminate. Again, when the Saviour, I say, invites sinners, he always points out in the invitation who the persons are to be invited. Go back to the 5th chapter of this very book; Jesus on that great day of the feast said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Now, mark that; "If any man thirst." Would the Saviour ask a dead sinner to perform the actions of spiritual life? The dear Saviour never committed such an absurdity, and never would; he never preached such a doctrine. If there were a living soul he himself made a living soul of him, and characterised him by certain features; then by those features called him. "If any man thirst." Is not that peculiar; is not that discriminating? Go back to the 11th of Matthew; "Come unto me, all ye that labour;" but then what is the kind of labour? You must look at that; because he points out a certain kind of remedy; and therefore the kind of labour is this; here is a sinner feels that he is a sinner, and he is determined to be as holy as God's law is holy; but notwithstanding all his toiling there is nothing but concupiscence within him in the flesh; he is made to feel that he is carnal, sold under sin. He labours, and he becomes weary, and is heavy laden; he does not know what to do. Now to such the Saviour says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" I am the end of the law for righteousness, I have done all that you are toiling and labouring to do; take my yoke upon you, my yoke of faith, and be united with me; and you shall find rest unto your soul. The yoke you are taking upon you is heavy, you will never be able to master it; but my yoke is easy; only believe; precious faith will bring you everything that you can need; and my burden is light; whatsoever burden I lay upon you I will give you strength to bear it. Then again in the 21st of Revelation, the Saviour represents himself in his perfection thus; "I am Alpha and Omega;" the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; the Saviour himself explains it; the Beginning and the End. Who began salvation? Christ. Who ended it? Christ. Now on the ground of what I have done—mark that he lays his mediatorial perfection as the basis of his authority; to him.

that is athirst I will give to drink of the water of life freely. To him that is athirst; the invitation is not general, it is to character. It is a mockery to immortal souls to ask them to do what God alone can fit a sinner to do. Again, "The Spirit and the Bride say come." Mark, the Holy Spirit is put first; it is not, the Bride and the Spirit say, come; that the church invites the sinner, and then the Holy Spirit is indebted to the church's kindness, and in compliance with the church's invitation takes up the sinner, and begins his work; that is not it; the Holy Spirit is put first. The Spirit saith effectually to a soul, "Come;" that is, from death to life; he quickens the soul, as the Saviour did the body of Lazarus; and when the church sees that, she says, There is a sinner to whom the Holy Ghost has spoken; there is a sinner convinced of sin, crying for mercy, wanting to see Jesus, conscious of his lost condition; then the church will say to such an one, Come; we will receive you; come with us, we will do you good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel. The Spirit first, and then the church, and the ministers last; he is to be the last to receive the people into the church; some ministers are the very first at that; they ought to be the last. "Let him that heareth say, Come;" him that heareth" means the friend of the Bridegroom, that stands between Christ and the church, and hears both sides; that friend of the Bridegroom the minister, hears what Christ says, tells it to the church; hears what the church says, tells it to Christ; and thus he carries messages by prayer from the church to Christ; and by testimony from Christ to the church. So the minister will join with the church, and say, Let that poor sinner come and be baptized, and come to the Lord's table; let him come forward, and tell us what God has done for his soul. "And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." So then, murmur not among yourselves." I am not asking you to come; no; I invite only those that the Holy Spirit hath quickened; and I invite them by the characteristics which they bear by the work of the blessed Spirit. None of you can deny that this is a most solemn and important matter. For me to take an invitation that does not belong to me—I shall have again to part with it if I do. For me to take a promise that does not belong to me—I shall not be able to keep it. For me to take a kingdom professionally that does not belong to me—I shall not be able to keep it. Well but, say you, is that right, to send people away? My opinion is that it is better, I say it solemnly, as in the sight of the Lord, it is better, much better, to send a man away by telling him the truth than to draw him by error into a false profession of the name of Christ; for though in the one case the man hardens himself, and his hatred perhaps is increased, yet he is not deceived, he is not deluded? the minister does not delude him; but if in the other case we do by error draw a man into a false profession, we are the deceivers of that precious soul; that man dancing as he thinks all the way to heaven, when he is utterly destitute of all those characteristics that distinguish the people of God, to whom the invitations, and promises, and provisions of the Gospel belong. The next point is that of the awful state they are in. "Murmur not among yourselves." No man can, I honestly tell you, not wrathfully, but affectionately, kindly, earnestly tell you, that no man can be a Christian when he pleases. You think you can settle the matter when you please; but I tell you, no; Your state is much worse than you are aware of, for you cannot come. You may come to me locally, but that is not coming spiritually; you may come externally, but that is not vitally; you may come circumstantially, but that is not savingly; no man can come. A great many reasons may be assigned for this. First men by nature are blind; they can see no beauty in the Saviour; they cannot see themselves as sinners; they cannot see Christ as the suited Saviour. Happy the man

whose eyes are opened ; he can come, he will come. Second, they are deaf ; cannot hear the Gospel as the good ground hearer heard it ; cannot hear it so as to understand it and know the value of it. But when you are brought to understand it, then you come to the Lord Jesus Christ. But in conclusion, if you are in doubt on this matter, take that solemn scripture as an explanation of this ; "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; they are foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them ; because they are spiritually discerned."

Thus, then, I think these two ideas are fairly implied : first, that the invitations of Christ are discriminating ; and, second, that man's state by nature is more awful than they are aware of. I ought to have added the third idea, which is that in order to come rightly to Christ we must know something of ourselves. May the Lord guide us into all truth, and increasingly assure us that Jesus is to us the bread of life ; that the invitations belong to us ; that we have the characteristics of the persons invited ; that the promises belong to us, for the promises are to character ; may the Lord increase us in those characters, and keep us near to himself.

I must leave the other part of the text till next Sunday morning ; namely, the essential attraction.

Now ready. Part 1 and 2,

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