

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

AN EVERLASTING GOSPEL.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 20TH, 1861, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“Here is the patience of the saints.” Revelations xiv. 12.

If this book of the Revelation were merely historical, then we should find plenty of explanations given by learned men. A place has been found by the learned in their illustrations of this book for everything. Hence some have applied the symbols and figures to one age, some to another. Some hold that the book in all its historical details was fulfilled if not entirely in the Saviour's day soon after the establishment of the Christian dispensation: others hold that it then commenced its fulfilment, and is still fulfilling; so that historically we have plenty of explanations — and were the book merely historical, there perhaps would not be many difficulties; for although these men contradict each other, and very frequently also contradict themselves, yet they have evoked many useful explanations of this book. But then at the same time this book has a mystical and a spiritual meaning; and therefore while on the one hand we must not exclude from it all idea of history, on the other hand we must not make it merely historical nor merely spiritual—but look at its historical parts as constituting the body of the book, and its spirituality the soul. And perhaps there is nothing in the book of Revelation upon which men more err than they do on the dates—the time, for instance, of the commencement of the twelve hundred and sixty days, or the three days and a half, and in another place called time, and times, and half a time. Some place the commencement of the twelve hundred and sixty years in one age, some in another—and the consequence is that men get prophesying as to the time in which Popery is to fall, and the world be at an end. Now the truth of the matter is this, that we have nowhere in all the Bible any explanation of the time when these dates commenced, and, consequently, have no explanation of the time as to when they will terminate. And as to precisely what is meant by the twelve hundred and sixty years, that is nowhere in the Bible explained; what is meant by the three days and a half is nowhere explained; what is meant by the time, and times, and half a time, is nowhere explained; and even the seventy weeks spoken of between the Babylonish captivity and the coming of Christ, even that, men think themselves very wise there, but even that has no explanation; nor have the learned ever been able to make that seventy weeks—taking a day for a year, thereby making the seventy weeks mean four hundred and ninety years; yet even so they have not been able to make it fit; for from the time of the prophecy to the coming of Christ was five hundred and thirty-three years; what then becomes of your four hundred and ninety years? So that the English of it is that there is no explanation in the Bible of any of these mystic dates; and for my part I have not the slightest confidence in the explanations given by uninspired men.

There is no man under heaven knows when the twelve hundred and sixty years commenced; there is no man under heaven does know, or can know, when the three days and a half commenced, or when they will terminate; there is no man under heaven that does know or can know when the time, times, and half a time commenced, or when they will terminate. Vain are all human speculations; God hath sealed up that department to himself. We should like to pry into it; and we are not the first that would like to pry into these things; some of old said, 'wilt thou at this time;' we want to know the times; we think the time ought to be with us 'wilt thou at *this time* restore the kingdom to Israel?' 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.' All therefore that you can gather from these dates is simply this—that God has certain works which he will do; and that he has limited certain times, within which times they shall be done; but what those times are that are mystically given in the way I have stated, no man knoweth. Let us therefore confess our ignorance where we are ignorant; and let us attend to that which we can know and we can understand. Thus then, we cannot keep too close to the Bible—and always remember that if you have not the scriptures themselves to explain things that are difficult in connexion with some circumstance or circumstances which will confirm your explanation, you had better confess your ignorance, attend to what you can understand, and leave that alone which the Lord hath nowhere explained. It is a very good saying of some old divines, that where the Lord has never provided a key, we should never find a door; for if we do, we may kick at it, and knock at it, we never can unlock it if the Lord does not give us the key. I am fully aware what I am now saying is quite counter to many great writers, such as Meade, and Elliott, and Newton, and Keith, and many other great and learned men that have written upon this book; they would be almost angry with me for thus putting down their authority; but I am really brought to this point, that I feel there is nothing can be safely leant upon but the Word of God; and wherever I have not the light of inspired truth to guide me, I dare not step. Let us therefore, confess our ignorance where we must be ignorant.

The Son of God himself, though the event was then only forty years distant, yet the Son of God himself knew not the day or the hour of Jerusalem's destruction; and yet alas, uninspired men would aspire to know even the day of the universal dissolution of the world. If therefore it was not revealed to the Son of God, an event, and a conspicuous event, which was to take place only forty years after, if the day and the hour were not revealed to him, I think, it is not likely that we shall stand above him in this matter. We have enough revealed that we can understand, a great deal more than we attend to, and a great deal more than we practice, and I am quite sure, as the old minister said of his own sermon, which he had preached over twenty times; 'Dear me, sir, why don't you go on to another subject;' 'I will not,' he said, 'until the people have learnt to practice this.' And so, my hearers, when we have practised all that is revealed, we shall then be prepared for some fresh revelation; but until then, I think we shall find enough to sustain us, and to keep us where more or less the Lord in his mercy will keep us.

Now our text I shall not for a moment handle as referring to any particular historical age of the church; it applies to the churches in all ages. I am fully aware that the words are generally applied to the age of great persecution, the age of great suffering; here then is the patience of the saints in enduring this suffering. Of course the words would so apply; here are they that keep the commandments of God in contrast to the traditions of men; here are they that have the faith of Jesus Christ; this is true of the saints of God in all ages of the world. I think if we look at the book, then, in its proper light, we shall see the truth of the apostle's words, where he says that 'all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable;' mark the apostle puts it in the present tense, 'and is profitable.'

' Now our subject this morning divides itself in a very simple form, though most likely the one word 'saints' will occupy all the time I have to speak. The words of the text present themselves in a twofold form, here is first, *consecration to God*, indicated by the character of the people—they are *saints*; and then, secondly, *here is their endurance*—' here is the patience of the saints.'

' I. First then, here is CONSECRATION TO GOD. And in noticing this consecration to God, indicated by saintship, I notice, firstly, *the gospel of consecration*: secondly, *the personal experience of this consecration*: thirdly, *a threefold contrast in which these persons stand out from all others*.

Firstly, I notice *the gospel of this consecration*. Hence in the sixth verse of this chapter John says, 'I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,' Now mark, in the first place, then, the gospel by which these persons are consecrated is there said to be an everlasting gospel. You cannot lay too much stress upon that, because even that is intended as a contrast to the gospels of men. What numbers; we have nothing to do but look into Milner's, or Mosheim's, or Sabine's 'History of the Church' to see what vast numbers of gospels have been invented by men; systems have risen and fallen, come and gone. But the glorious gospel of the blessed God is that which endureth for ever: it is an everlasting gospel. Would that I could speak to you upon this part of the gospel in a way that I could wish to speak. Is there not something exceedingly sweet in these two words, 'everlasting gospel.' And you may with perfect consistency with the original read it, 'everlasting good tidings.' The love of God will always be the love of God; election will always be election; atoning blood will through all ages and cycles of eternity maintain its perfection; justification by the righteousness of Christ, will be justification for ever; the indwelling of the blessed God, the saints being born of an incorruptible seed; that liveth and abideth for ever; his covenant standeth fast for ever; his covenant of consecration, having covenantly consecrated his people to himself, his covenant standeth fast for ever. And now mark what stands in connection with this stability of the covenant: 'Holy and reverend is his name.' So, my hearer, the man that is brought into the covenant of consecration is brought into the savour, the fragrance, the solemnity, and I may say the delightfulness of that that 'holy and reverend is his name.' Oh how we can there rejoice in holiness, in purity; how we can there rejoice in immortality, rejoice in that which is like God himself, from everlasting to everlasting. But this gospel, then, being everlasting by which they are consecrated, denotes of course, the everlasting acts of the Most High. Hence, my hearer, what is the doctrine of election? Why, the doctrine of election was an act of consecration; it is actually called in the Epistle of Jude 'sanctification;' the Holy Ghost gives it a very different name from that which men give it; men give very bad names to it; but the word of God says, 'sanctified of God the Father; preserved in Christ Jesus.' So that election was just taking you from the rest of mankind: election was an act that took you away from your sins, that took you away from the curse of the law, from all responsibility to that law; that took you away from Satan, from the wrath that your sins had entailed; that took you away from hell and death, took you away from destruction. That is election. And that same act also imputed all these destructions of yours to God's own Son; imputed all these original, heart, lip, and life sins of yours to his dear Son; and imputed his wondrous work to you. Now this is election, eternal election. There is a remnant according to the election of grace: and if it be of grace, it is no more of works. Thus then the gospel by which the saints of the Most High, or by which his people are consecrated to him is an everlasting gospel; it is eternal election in Christ Jesus the Lord. Can you un-

derstand that? What is meant by being chosen in Christ? It means chosen into oneness with him, constituted joint heir with him; that his heirship must fail before your's can fail; and his heirship could fail only by some personal sin of his; and he was put to a most tremendous test while he was in this world; or rather to tremendous tests, both in his life and in his death; and yet he came off at last without sin, and thus maintained his heirship. Adam lost his right and heirship by sin, but Christ did no sin. And, therefore, election making the people one with him, he being accountable for their sins, and doing no sin, this matter stands eternally good. And this must be received into your soul, this testimony. You will never be rightly consecrated to God unless you are brought to reject free will, duty faith, and all these *isms*. Ah, say you, but some good men have held these doctrines: but then salvation is of grace; and if they held errors during their life they have not taken their errors to heaven with them. The reception of this great truth of eternal election, then, is one thing essential to true consecration to God. You know that the Lord has given us in his holy word a considerable number of instances to illustrate this very point. For instance, what sort of a consecration would the literal consecration of the Levites to God have been if it had not originated in God's choice? But God chose the Levites; and he choosing them, there is the ground of their consecration to God. If he had not chosen them, it would have been arrogance and insult to the Most High God, and delusive to themselves, to put themselves into that position which his choice alone could put them into.

Do I speak, again, of persons or individuals? Take Moses; suppose Moses had assumed to be the deliverer from Egypt, would he have achieved what he did? Where is the ground of his success? God chose him; he was the man that God chose. Do the apostles assemble, and are they determined to make a minister for God, and do they adopt the plan of casting lots, without consulting the Most High whether they are to do so or not; and does the lot fall upon Matthias? Yes; but what becomes of Matthias? Matthias no doubt was a good man, yet he was not God's chosen minister; you hear no more of Matthias. And yet one must be chosen, as the 109th Psalm shews, and the scriptures cannot be broken, that one must be chosen to take the place of Judas; and so these disciples, like the rest of us, they thought they would be very kind to the Lord, lest the Lord should forget to fulfil his own word, lest the Lord should let his own affairs get out of order, they came in and chose one for him; but the Lord would not have him after they had chosen him; and by-and-bye there is a ravening wolf determined to destroy all the lambs and sheep of Christ: God says, That is my man; and he stops him as he is going to Damascus, and he brought him down, and then raised him up, and constituted him a minister unto the Gentiles. But if Saul of Tarsus could have done as some people in our day do! what is that, say you? Why, they can be converted when they like, be unconverted when they like; they can date their conversion to a high doctrine minister, then to a low doctrine minister, then to a Wesleyan; I have met with some that have been converted fifty times, pretty well, though I am persuaded that such have not been truly converted at all: suppose Saul of Tarsus could have altered his mind, and said, Now I will be a Christian, a preacher, and assume the apostolic character, would he have been what he was? would he have been consecrated to God and owned of God as he was? We know that such could not have been the case. Thus then, my hearer, the more you search the scriptures, the more you will see the importance of this great matter of eternal consecration; that it is an everlasting gospel, beginning with eternal election.

Again, are there to be men with the Saviour? How is he to acquire those men? He went up into a mountain, and called to him whom he would; and they came unto him. And what does he afterwards say? 'Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and

bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.' Thus then the devil's angels may preach an uncertain gospel; Satan's ministers, assuming to be ministers of righteousness, may preach an uncertain gospel, come with an uncertain sound; but God's angels, God's messengers, God's ministers, they are sure to come with the everlasting gospel, because they are taught to know that nothing but the everlasting gospel can reach their case: it is a firm basis to rest upon.

Then mark the mediator of this election, of this choice. Is there not as clear as A, B, C, eternity in the mediatorial character of Christ? Is not his righteousness said to be an everlasting righteousness? Is it not said of his sacrifice that he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified? Is it not said of his priesthood that he is a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec; that he is a priest not after the law of carnal commandment of uncertainty, but after the power of an endless life? Is it not said of him as a king, that he shall reign for ever? Is it not said of him as the Son of God, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever?' Is it not said, 'of his kingdom there shall be no end?' Is it not said of those for whom he died, 'They shall return, and come to Zion, and everlasting joy shall be unto them; sorrow and sighing shall flee away?' Thus then the saints of the Most High God are consecrated by eternal election, consecrated to God by mediation, consecrated to God by regeneration; consecrated to God by the renewings from time to time of the Holy Ghost; consecrated to God by his watching over them, reviving his work in them, and refreshing them, and keeping them alive; and will be consecrated to God in perfection at the resurrection day, when every spot and every wrinkle shall for ever depart from them, and they shall then appear at the right hand of the Saviour in his likeness, in his kingdom, in the presence of God, in his glory, to go no more out for ever. The everlasting gospel. But coming back again to my definition just now; *everlasting* good tidings; mark that; do you not see a striking contrast here, between everlasting good tidings and the tidings that are good to day and may be bad to-morrow? For instance, the Lord chose the Israelites; but presently the tidings came, The Lord hath rejected thee; ye are not my people; I will not have mercy upon you. To-day the blessings come; the harvest is flourishing; everything in our favour; we shall have an abundant harvest, an abundant vintage; to-morrow the tidings come that the locust, the canker worm, and the caterpillar, have eaten them all up, and universal famine must take place. Thus you see the contrast. Shall eternal election in Christ be ever altered? never. Shall the harvest that Christ hath brought in—for he is the corn of wheat that fell into the ground, that has risen, and borne a harvest of yea and amen promises—can the caterpillar, the locust, and the canker worm, reach those promises to eat them up? no, no. Here then in contrast to that which was temporal, fallible, and conditional, is an everlasting gospel. And if you are brought to know what you are as sinners, you will never find firm anchorage till you are brought to cast your hope upon this mediator of the everlasting covenant, where we have an everlasting gospel.

But I must say a word or two about the angels—I mean the messengers of the churches, the ministers. In the first part of this book you are aware ministers are called angels; the seven angels of the seven churches; the term is applied to ministers. Now this angel is said to be in the midst of heaven: that is, between heaven and earth; that is, between God and man. That is just where Jesus Christ is—he is between heaven and earth. Why, say you, he is far above all heavens. I know he is, but still in the sense I am now speaking, we have a metonymical form of speech here, the container put for the contained; heaven and earth mentioned, but God and man intended. So Jesus Christ is between God and man; 'there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.' Then these angels, representing the ministers of God, are represented as standing in the same position; that is because

they stand with Christ. Such messengers are brought to Christ, brought to where he stands, brought to stand with him, to side with him in the dignity of his person, in the work he has done, in the relationships he bears—and there they stand with Christ as God's ambassadors, to negotiate the grand concerns of judgment and of mercy between the living God and dying men. They stand with Christ; they never get away from Christ. The minister that once goes away from him, and puts something else in the place of Christ, that man then ceases to be in the midst of heaven; he ceases to occupy that position that a true minister of the true gospel should occupy. Hence the Saviour said, 'Lo,' and that implies the other side, 'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Hence the Old Testament prophets all cleave close to Christ: the apostles all cleave close unto him; they abode by him. Hence the apostle's consolation was, when the Lord revealed to him the reason of the thorn in his flesh, it was that the abundance of the grace of God might appear more conspicuous; hence the apostle's consolation was, 'I will glory in these infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' So then in mid heaven. I am aware there is another idea—and that is this, that the minister is not in one sense to stand upon the earth; that is, he is not to take his stand upon earthly ground; he is not to stand upon acts of parliament; he is not to stand upon paper prayers; he is not to stand upon humanly devised creeds—he is not to take his stand there; but he is to stand on heavenly ground, on the promise of God, on the grace of God, on the power of God, on the Rock of Ages; this is where he is to take his stand—and this is where the people of God are to take their stand; they are to rise with wings as eagles, and to leave earthly ground, earthly authority, earthly traditions; taking their stand on that ground described by the apostle, when he thus speaketh, 'Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom we have access unto this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' You will thus see, how nicely the eternity of the gospel accords with the standing of the ministers of God, and the standing of the people of God. Look at the words again that I have just quoted—being justified, we have by Jesus Christ access to this grace; that is, this grace of justification, wherein we are complete in Christ; in which grace of justification, in which grace of completeness in Christ, for we are justified freely by his grace, in which grace we stand and rejoice: and well we might rejoice, having such ground to stand upon, having such a righteousness in which to appear, and having peace with God that passeth all understanding; that peace shall reign in our hearts, that peace shall go flowing on till it become like a river, and mighty as the waves of the sea; we may well rejoice in the sure hope of the glory of God; for where can any failure take place? Not in our standing place, for that is upon the grace of God; not in our justification, for that is by the righteousness of God—not in our destination, for that lies entirely with God—in whom we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated thereto according to the good pleasure of his will. So then all the saints stand upon heavenly ground. You may stand upon acts of parliament as long as you like; and we like political and social acts of parliament: but when you come to religion, the idea of a body, a mixed body of men legislating for Christ, legislating for my soul, for eternity! There is no essential difference between Church of Englandism and Popery; they are both human *isms*, and the one is as much from hell as the other. Again, this angel is said to *fly*. I wonder where he carried his sermon. There was a church parson the other day was reading his sermon, coming along on the railway, and the wind blew his sermon out of the window; whether he found it again or not, I do not know. Now where did that angel carry his sermon, his message? Where it was safe. The Saviour describes the place of the message; 'The good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things.' Now, the angel flying, denotes the liberty he enjoyed; his wings were not

tied, he was free, he was a free man, he expatiates and soars away right and left, backward and forward, downward as low as you like, to pick up the very dregs of sinners; let the sinner be on what dunghill he may, in what den of infamy he may, this angel can fly down to him with the tidings of the gospel, embrace him, and carry him up from the dunghill of infamy, set him on a throne of glory, wash him in a Saviour's blood, wrap him in a Saviour's righteousness, seat him as it were on the Saviour's throne, for they shall sit with me, says Christ, on my throne, and thus raised up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And when the minister has done that, off he flies again with the message wherever he is sent. And thus ministers cannot tell where they are sent to: the minister seeks his message from God in private; he comes to preach, but he cannot say whether he will have to go down into Egypt, and bear as on eagle's wings some poor oppressed sinner in bondage out of that Egypt, or whether in that sermon, he will be sent up into the hill country, and there expatiate in the glories of the Lord's presence, and amidst the good fruits of the land, and rejoice with those that do rejoice. He does not know: his business is to fly here and there, and anywhere; no ceremony about it. But then, this belongs not to the minister only, the promise is equally to the people—that 'they that wait upon the Lord, shall rise with wings as eagles.' And are there not times when we can fly away from our troubles, our sins, our guilt, our bondage, our fears, our worldly-mindedness, and seem to fly like doves to our windows, get in at the windows of truth, and there feel that we are safe, and rejoice in him who is our God for ever?

I shall now hasten to describe the saintship. The experience of it is thus. Another angel came out, saying, (the same gospel in another form,) 'Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come, and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.' First, 'fear God.' What is that? a mere letter command? No! Here is a sinner through the pride of his heart will not seek God; through the wickedness of his heart does not fear God, cares not for his judgment; although every moment is carrying us on towards that great tribunal, and the words are recorded: 'Prepare to meet thy God,' yet the sinner cares nought for God: he does not dread that omnipotence that can crush him in a moment; he does not dread that omnipresence that is with him everywhere, recording every one of his sins; he does not dread that skilful government that shall entangle him in his own web, and send him away in his own wickedness into eternal damnation. There is no fear of God before their eyes. But when God sends the arrow into the conscience, then the man begins to see into eternity; ah, eternity; what an awful sound: I shall soon be in eternity; time cannot swallow up eternity, but eternity will swallow up time; I shall soon be there; my sins are gone before me; the law of God is there; the God of the law; magazines of wrath are there; hell is there; devils are there; damnation, awful sound, is there; and I must soon be there too. Oh, shall I die like this; shall I die thus unclean, unpardoned, unsanctified? His soul in secret sighs out, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' This man, not as yet knowing the plan of salvation, sets about reforming himself, and aims to do what conscience dictates to be done, and does everything he can; but still this terror remains. Then after the Lord has disciplined the soul down sufficiently under these convictions, then comes the next step in experience; 'give glory to him.' How does this sinner give glory to God? First, justification; he justifies God; he acknowledges the sentence of his condemnation to be just. If you are once brought to justify God in your condemnation, you will then be led, as the natural consequence, to justify him in the way in which he saves the soul. I do not know that I can set forth this experience better than by reminding you of what is recorded in Luke xxiii. One of the malefactors was still railing on Jesus, and saying

‘If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.’ God then and there began a work of grace in the heart of the other; and he feared God, feared his Maker, feared his Judge; and he answered and said to the other, ‘Dost thou not fear God: seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we, indeed, justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss.’ Is it not a remarkable thing, this divinely taught dying man, this saint of God, for so we may now call him; he is known better in this world by the name of the thief on the cross, but he is known better in heaven by the name of saint of God; is it not a remarkable thing that this dying man, while he thus spake to his fellow, did not say to him you can fear God if you like; you can believe in Christ if you like; you can escape the wrath to come if you like; you can do, it is your duty to do, as I do! Ah, did the dying thief so speak? It would have been according to the dictates of his nature if he had: but no; he said to him what we may say to every natural man, ‘Dost thou not fear God?’ and after saying what he might say with truth, he stopped, and left his fellow where you and I must leave them all, in the hands of the great God, who, after all your doing, will dispose of his creatures as he pleases. And while he thus spake consistently, the Holy Ghost unfolded to him who that person was; ‘and he said unto Jesus, Lord:’ just now it was ‘this man;’ but now it is, ‘Lord;’ ‘Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.’ ‘I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.’ Thus then the Lord’s people justify him in the order of salvation; must be saved entirely by his dear Son, must be saved entirely by his eternal mercy. Although good works will result from such salvation, yet they form no part of that salvation: must be brought to reject thy own works, the bad and the good, and thine hope must be only in the grace of God, in and by the eternal perfection of Christ. And his thus doing everything brings us into reconciliation with him, makes us love him; every truth of the gospel becomes a living truth in the affection, in the soul, endears the blessed God, and enables you to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And then after you are brought thus far in this consecration, you are to ‘worship God that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.’ The 121st Psalm will explain that to you, and I just refer to that, and then close; not close our sermons upon this text, but close our sermon this morning. ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my help.’ Why, David, the hills of Jerusalem? Yes, that is where the mercy seat is, where the sacrifice is, where the high priest is, where God’s mercy presence is. Well, but if you stop there, people will think your God is merely a local God, like their own gods, Dagon, and Chemosh, and Baal. Ah, but stop; ‘My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.’ First, here is an established order of things at Jerusalem; and, secondly, the same God that created the heaven and the earth is the author of this order of things. ‘He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber nor sleep.’ That is the God to serve; he will watch over you, not to find your faults out, but your necessities. ‘The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; (all fatal evil): he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even for evermore.’