

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE RAINBOW-TOKEN OF THE COVENANT.

A Sermon

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

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations."—Gen. ix. 12.

OUR text refers literally to a covenant of providence, and by which the Lord has, as you are all witnesses, faithfully abode unto this day. But from what is said in the fifty-fourth of Isaiah, it is clear that this covenant of providence has a spiritual meaning—that it will bear spiritualising; and so it will be our object this morning to look at it spiritually. And in so doing, I notice, first, *the nature of the covenant*; I will then, secondly, notice—*the token of the covenant, the rainbow*; I will, thirdly, notice—*the relation of this covenant*; and then, fourthly and lastly, *the perpetuity of this covenant*.

First, then, here is a COVENANT, which I shall take spiritually. And the word covenant conveys generally two ideas; the first is that of the testamentary will of God. This is one of the ideas intended; so that the Lord makes a will, that is the idea, and then he seals or confirms, or renders that covenant unalterable. I do not know anything that can be a better token of that which renders the will unalterable than that which the Lord hath given, which I shall presently have a word or two upon, after just reminding you how beautifully the apostle Paul speaks when looking at the will of God—willing for us his dear Son—and willing for us eternal life—and willing to make known abundantly to the heirs of promise, the immutability of his counsel; yea, "In whom," saith the apostle, we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him that worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." The apostle thus looking at the good will of God, looks at the way in which that will is sealed, and rendered in the very nature of things unalterable. He shews that Jesus Christ is one with the Father in this good will as the testator; and then the apostle argues—"There must where there is a testament, in order for that testament or will to be rendered unalterable; for all the time a man is living he can alter his will, but when a man is dead he cannot alter his will; and if the will be legal when a man liveth, it retains its force after his death, and after the death of the testator." So the apostle gives us this beautiful

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view of the confirmation and the sealing of the testamentary will of God ; and its confirmation or sealing that the Lord Jesus Christ underwent death. Christopher Ness, and many others of the old divines, have dwelt nicely upon this idea ; that had the sealing of the will of God been by depositable things, things that could have been withdrawn, then there might have been reason to believe that the Lord intended some day to withdraw the confirmation, and put an end to his will. But as that which confirms the will and renders it indissoluble is not possible to be withdrawn, because the sufferings of Christ cannot be recalled ; he has laid down his life, and that is a kind of thing that cannot be withdrawn ; he has atoned for sin, and that is a thing in the very nature of it that cannot be undone ; he has rendered to the law a life of obedience, and that is in the very nature of it a thing that cannot be withdrawn ; the thing is done. This is the Lord's way of assuring us of the certainty of his love and his mercy—in a word, of the certainty of all that is included in this covenant ; for the covenant of providence is a figure of the covenant of grace. The Lord in the covenant of providence undertakes to sustain the world by the provisions of that covenant ; that while the earth remaineth “ seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” Here is the certainty of the continuation of the world until the time the Lord hath appointed. You will observe that in this covenant of providence, relative to seed time and harvest ; there is no *if*, no *but*, no *may be* ; there is no conditionality, it stands in a positive form, and this makes it appear the more strikingly a figure of that covenant that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. Now then, you will readily perceive from these few remarks that God's new covenant means his testamentary will ; and secondly, means agreement, that it is the order of things into which he will bring all his people ; they must be conformed to this testamentary will, and they must know it. A man that does not know this testamentary will, is a lost man ; the man that lives and dies unacquainted with it, lives and dies a lost man ; because the man who knows Jesus Christ truly knows God's testamentary will : and this is fulfilled in that promise, “ That the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant.”

Now you observe that the covenant of providence does not stand apart from sacrifice, for when Noah came from the ark he built an altar unto the Lord, and offered of every clean beast. You see he knew there must be a faultless sacrifice, a spotless sacrifice ; and the Lord smelled a sweet savour, as the margin renders it—a savour of rest. First, that he smells a sweet savour, so our God is satisfied, shall I say delighted, for it is his own blessed word—“ Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth ;” that God is delighted with the sacrificial perfection of his dear Son and then he smells a savour of rest ; justice asks no more, the law asks no more, holiness asks no more, and the sinner can need no more, for in this sacrificial covenant, he hath perfected by his one sacrifice, all them that are sanctified. Now, God's new covenant is a matter apart from legislation altogether, apart from the Edenic or Jewish covenant altogether, it stands by itself, there is nothing like it anywhere. As Jesus Christ had no predecessor, nor successor, nor rival, nor equal, there is not another person like him, so there is not another covenant like that of which he is the surety. Here then, we have a covenant ordered in all things and sure. If we are brought to see that by the law of God we stand condemned, and brought to feel that we are so corrupted and enfeebled by sin we can do nothing that law will accept, and then led to see that God has a good will, and that the Lord Jesus Christ hath confirmed that good will, and that he hath put away sin, so that now the Lord doth not behold iniquity in Jacob nor see perverseness in Israel ; there is no enchantment against Jacob, there is no divi-

nation against Israel." Here the Lord his God is with him, here every thing is square. I do pray both for myself and for you, and for the people of God at large, that we may enter more into that beautiful scripture in the sixth of Hebrews—"Wherein God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise, the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation." My hearer, it is a consolation that sin cannot break down, that Satan cannot break, that neither tribulation nor death can break down; it is a consolation that eternity cannot outlive. We may well afford to give up everything for the excellence of a God in covenant—a God in Christ. Here the Lord appears with all good will without one particle of ill will. He means our good in all that he does, in all that he takes from us, and hence that sweeping declaration, which is enough to wound the very devil to death, where it is said that "All things work together for good, to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose." Well then, says the devil, if I afflict Job, even so it will work for good, and if I get a gallows fifty cubits high for Mordecai, it will work for good, and if I get the worthies into the furnace, it will work for good, and if I get another into the lion's den, it will work for good, and if I get the Jews to crucify this Jesus, it will work for good, and if I follow up the apostles with persecution, I shall drive them into the Gentile world, and spread the fire of their gospel all the wider.

Well now, my hearer, what think you of God's good will or covenant? As I have said, all that are saved, must be brought into this covenant. You can no more be saved without being brought into this covenant, than Noah and them with him could be saved without being brought into the ark, because that ark was God's will; you could be no more saved without being brought into this covenant, than the Israelites could be saved from the angel of death—without that which God willed, namely the Paschal Lamb; and the creatures in Peter's vision could not have been drawn up into heaven, if they had leaped out of the vessel in which they were. There never was an age in which the Lord left his people unacquainted with this new covenant, for if you know not the new covenant, your knowledge of Christ is not right—the two go together.

II. I notice in the next place, THE TOKEN OF THIS COVENANT. Now, the rainbow was to be the token of this covenant. What is the spiritual meaning of this rainbow? We cannot be at a loss, I think, as to the meaning of the rainbow. We must not attempt to spiritualise the rainbow without him who is a quickening Spirit, without him who is spiritual, without him in whom are all spiritual treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And what is this rainbow, but Jesus Christ? Only the question is, in what respect is he the rainbow? He is called a Gate, and we never feel at a loss to know the respect in which he is called a Gate, as the gate of the gospel. He is called a Door, and we never feel at a loss to recognise in him the door of hope, the door of life, the door of faith, the door of salvation. He is called a Tree, and we are never at a loss to recognise the respect in which he is as "an apple tree among the trees of the wood." And so as the token of peace, as the pledge of peace, as the way of peace, he is the Rainbow. Now, literally, there are four things essential to a rainbow. A rainbow cannot be seen without four things. There must be a cloud, there must be falling rain, there must be the presence of the sun, and there must be clearness from obscurity. And what shall we say to the cloud then? If a cloud be one thing essential, what is this cloud? You know the clouds give us the rain, the genial shower, "the former and the latter rain." I go to the thirty-second of Deuteronomy, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon

the grass. Then I get the fact that the gospel is the cloud—"I do set my bow in the cloud:" I am sure Christ is set in the gospel, and he is the beauty thereof. And that same thirty-second of Deuteronomy that shews us the gospel is to come as the rain, shews us the kind of gospel. It tells us that our God is a rock, that his work is perfect. And how many times has the gospel been to us as refreshing rain. This is one thing essential to the rainbow. So then, if the rainbow be a token of peace, then I say no gospel, no peace—you get no rainbow without the gospel, and so the gospel, as you are aware, is again and again called the gospel of peace; yea, it was the very anthem of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will towards men."

The next thing I have said essential is that of falling rain. I will not enter philosophically here into the decomposition, the refraction and reflection of the solar rays, by which the beautiful image of the rainbow is presented to the eye, because the pulpit is not the place for philosophy, but for something of infinitely more importance; still I do not think I am going beyond the bounds when I thus speak. Now, then, there must be also the falling rain—for unless the drops are falling, there is no refraction, there is no decomposition of the solar rays; in a word, there is no rainbow formed. Now the Christian can understand this part uncommonly well. When is it you can say you have peace with God? You cannot imagine an object—the most lovely flower in all the range of nature's garden does not appear more serene, more quiet, more pleasing, more tranquil than the rainbow. Why the most nervous creature possible, that I know of, was never afraid of the rainbow. Who ever heard of a rainbow doing any harm? Who ever heard of a rainbow frightening anybody? Why it is one of the most beautiful, tranquil displays of nature. And I am sure Jesus Christ speaks of himself as meek and lowly in heart, and I am sure he is so too. Is it not said of him, under this tranquil idea, that he shall not break the bruised reed, and the smoking flax shall he not quench? Now we have said there must be falling rain. When is it you can see Jesus Christ as your peace? Ah! when the rain falls, when the gospel softens the heart, shall I say, clears your visual power, when the soul is refreshed, you say, Ah! now the Lord makes my peace as a river. There is the gospel in which the bow is set, here is the falling shower, falling upon my soul, softening my heart. I cannot always see the rainbow, but here it is, I can see it now, for Jesus is my peace, that being justified by faith. I have peace with God. Now the Lord sets his bow in the cloud, and the Lord says, when he brings a cloud over the earth, the bow shall be seen. So it is when the Lord refreshes our souls, we can see Jesus as our peace. And the Lord says he will look upon the bow and remember the everlasting covenant between God and man. Now, my hearer, look at this, when the Lord has a shower of blessings for thy soul, he does not look upon thee to see whether thou dost deserve it or not, to see whether thou art good enough or not, but he looks upon Christ. I will look upon the bow. I will look upon my dear Son, upon the peace that he hath made, and by looking upon him, I will remember the everlasting covenant between God and man, and down shall go showers of blessings. There must, then, be the cloud of the gospel, and there must be the falling shower; when the shower does not fall, the rays are not decomposed, are not refracted. I do not say reflected, because refraction and reflection are two different things; but the rays are neither refracted nor reflected, when there are no falling showers. So you sometimes hear a sermon, and say I saw nothing; I wanted to see him who is my peace, I wanted to know that God is on my side, that there is no more wrath nor curse, but could see nothing. But when the refreshing shower comes, then you can see that all is well. The third thing is, there must be the presence of the sun, or else

where is the rainbow to come from? And if God shine upon anything, it is upon the gospel, and if God display his glories any where, it is in Christ Jesus; there is the presence of God in Christ Jesus. And said the Saviour, "Ye that have seen me hath seen the Father." Ah! take away God's approbation of Christ, take away those sweet testimonies connected with the death and resurrection of Christ, as typified by baptism: thus said the Father when Christ came up out of the water: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Here is the peace, here is the presence of God. And on the mount of transfiguration, there is a kind of miniature representation of the blessedness awaiting us: "This is my beloved Son;" he is my beloved Son in his humiliation, denoted when the heavens were opened to him after he came out of the water; he is my beloved Son in his exaltation. As he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: so God is the same towards him. So then, if thou wilt enjoy the presence of God, it must be in and by Christ Jesus. There is the Lord's full and unqualified approbation; approved in Christ, accepted in him. Then, fourthly; the sun must not be obscured, must be free. When I have been enjoying the rainbow, up came a sort of an intruder, some free-will cloud, or duty-faith cloud came right before the face of the sun; can't see the rainbow now. So if the cloud come between the sun and the rainbow, it hides the rainbow. What a mercy, that while this does take place in nature, that if we take the clouds that come between the sun and the rainbow, and so obscure the rainbow, and hide the sun, to mean our^s sins, what a mercy, that while our sins once were between Christ and God, that is where they were; for our sins were laid on him: our sins between us and God, but God took our sins away from us, and put them between himself; and his dear Son, and his dear Son put those sins away, and now not one cloud can ever rise between God and Christ: all is light there. And hence, the sweet association, that while God Almighty giveth them light, it is added beautifully, "the Lamb is the light thereof." And therefore, while the natural rainbow appears now and then, this mystic, spiritual rainbow, appears always the same. There is the cloud of the gospel; the descending shower, and no obscurity; no cloud can rise now between God and Christ; he has risen a morning without clouds, so that there is no obscurity there. And just as there is no obscurity between God and Christ, so, my hearer, the time will come, and now virtually it is true; that by and bye practically and openly there will be no cloud between us and our God. "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning?" It may be a cloudy morning; just beginning to pray—to seek God: it is a morning of regeneration; it is a cloudy morning. "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon?" You get a little more into the light of eternity, and by and bye become clear as the sun, and then terrible to your foes as an army with banners. There is nothing will make a sinner terrible to the devil, and nothing will give him such victory, as to be brought into this clear sunshine, where eternal sunshine settles on his head; no cloud between. "I, saith the Lord, have blotted out thy transgressions as a thick cloud, and thy sins as a cloud. And now you can see your way, return unto me for I have redeemed thee." The way is clear now, even a morning without clouds." Here, then, is that clear state of things which our God hath established. Thus, then, I am come this morning with good tidings. There is nothing encourages me to come to the house of God so much as that. I often think—what am I going for this morning? Why, to take good tidings. And I thought this morning, I have to go and tell the people of the best covenant that ever can be—the best Mediator that ever was, having confirmed a better covenant, establishing it upon better promises, to better purposes than ever existed; and I am going to tell them of the token

of the covenant. And these are good news to me, and I don't see why they should not be to others. Now, if there is anything I glory in, it is what I am going to say now—namely, that the cloud is independent of man; the cloud in which the bow is set is independent of man. And the gospel in which Christ is revealed is independent of man. Lord, shall we go and ask the kings of the earth to support us? No, tarry in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high. I glory in the independence of the gospel, that our faith standeth not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. Hence, says the apostle, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth." Second, the shower is not dependent upon man. "It tarrieth," saith Micah, "not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." Yes, says free-will, it does, but free-grace says, It does not wait for man, nor tarry for the sons of men. If God has made my soul as the dry ground and as the thirsty land, at the appointed time for rain, down will come the shower into my soul, let me be where I may—I may be in my lawful avocation, I may be walking the streets, or hearing the word, yea, if I am fast asleep in the night, God can give me a good Gospel dream, and make me enjoy it when I wake as well as having enjoyed it while I was asleep. We have to wait for it, and to look for it, for the early and the latter rain. Ah! what a mercy is it, that the cloud of the Gospel lies with God to direct it where he pleases. One word relative to the goodness of God towards old England. The Gospel, like a cloud, has gone over many countries, but God commanded it to stop no where since the beginning of the Christian era as he has in England. He has caused the cloud to rest on England, and has sent down more showers of blessings to the salvation of sinners in England than in any other country under the sun. The Lord preserve old England! and may the cloud of the Gospel still shadow her, from the prince to the peasant, from the highest to the lowest, and may shower upon shower still descend from this heavenly cloud to the ingathering of poor dead sinners, to the refreshing of those who are seeking the face of the Most High. And the sun is essential too to the rainbow. And how independent the sun is of man. Our God is a sun and a shield, and he shines where, when, and how he pleaseth: and in all the kingdom of Christ there shall be nothing hid from the light thereof. The light of God's eternal truth, love, and salvation shall reach every part of Christ's dominions: where he has a poor sinner to save there he will command the light to shine into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Then, again, the clearness between the sun and the rainbow. All lies you see with the Lord.

I now come on to notice THE RELATION OF THIS COVENANT. My text says this covenant relates to those who were then there, and to every living creature—literally that is to be understood; but we must take it spiritually. And in so doing, if I take it spiritually, if I can find these living creatures with whom the covenant is made, and to whom the rainbow is a token of peace, an assurance that the curse is gone; if I can find them, and then find the rainbow with them, I think I shall not be far out. And then, the second idea is, that of seed time and harvest: the Lord governs the world by that covenant; so I should expect these living creatures are governed by this covenant, where the rainbow was; and if I can find that out, I will. And then the third thing, I should expect to find this rainbow in connection with the winding up of things. But where shall we find the living creatures and the rainbow together? Ezekiel; the prophet says, "I looked, and behold a whirlwind;" a figure of our sins that have whirled us away from God, and would have whirled us down to hell, if God had not held this mighty wind in his fist, had his way in this storm, and made the clouds connected there-

with the dust of his feet. "And a great cloud;" our sins are a great cloud; and a fire infolding itself, and that is God's wrath.

Out of this scene of things came the four living creatures, east, west, north, and south, in allusion figuratively to the square encampment of the Israelites. The four living creatures have come out of the whirlwind of sin, sin can no longer whirl them away from God; they are brought to the stronghold where the rains may descend, the floods rise, the winds blow, but can no more take them away from God. The whirlwind of sin took them away from God in the first Adam, but it cannot take them away from God in the second. Then there is the cloud; thy sins are also a cloud that obscured everything in the first Adam, so that eternal darkness is the portion of the lost. But here in Christ Jesus it is eternal life; they come out of this darkness into the light of the gospel. And there in that whirlwind and cloud was a fire infolding itself; so there was a fire infolding itself in our sins, the fire of God's wrath ready to break upon us; but we are brought out of the fire of his wrath, and brought to Christ Jesus, brought into his love and his mercy. Here then, living creatures are brought into quite another scene. Then the prophet goes on to shew the way in which these living creatures are governed; and then among other things, there was the likeness of a bow in the day of rain. Where is the whirlwind? Gone! Where is the cloud? Blotted out! Where is the fire? Quenched! And now in that first of Ezekiel there is the rainbow of peace, in contrast to the whirlwind that whirled us away from God, in contrast to sin, in contrast to wrath; and so the living creatures, the living spirit, the living priest, the living God, are one and all happy together; when one stood still the other stood still, they all went together. Bless the Lord for this, for without him we can do nothing; when he is pleased to put our wings down then we stand still. But when they did go, they went straight forward,—no turning, no twisting. But we have not done with the rainbow yet. We have said of seed-time and harvest that the Lord governs the world by this covenant; so the Lord governs his people by the covenant. 4th of Revelation—there John sees a door in heaven opened, and he is called up into heavenly things, and among other things he sees a rainbow round about the throne. There it is: there is the covenant, there is the peace. I think the poet somewhere says—

"Behold the boundless grace of God
In Christ, the Corner-stone,
Who is, to all, who seek his face,
The rainbow round the throne."

Ah! it is the throne of peace, of mercy, and of grace; it forms the triumphal arch under which the saints shall enter eternal glory,—expressive of the triumphs of the dear Redeemer: he has conquered all hostile powers, established eternal tranquillity, so that God himself there reigns in peace, the God of peace; Christ is the token of peace, his children are the children of peace, and their eternal destiny is peace. Now, if the Lord should mark iniquity, who can stand? But relative to his people, he will not mark iniquity; but he must mark something. What does he mark? He marks the perfect man—Christ; he beholds the upright man—Christ Jesus; and the end of Christ Jesus is peace; and if I am perfect, it must be by the perfection of Christ; if I am upright, it must be by the uprightness of Christ; and if my end is peace it must be by the peace which the Lord Jesus Christ has made. Would to God we had more visual power to see into these things, and would that I could present them to you in a way that would be more instructive and more encouraging to your hearts. Lastly, I shall expect to find this rainbow connected with the final winding up of all things. So I do; for I get the rainbow, the token of

peace, set in the cloud of the gospel—I get it as the rule of government to these living creatures—I get it as the characteristic of God's throne, and then I get it as characteristic of the message of the angel of the new covenant. “And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven clothed with a cloud; there is the gospel again you see. “And a rainbow was upon his head;” there it is again you see—peace. “And his face was as it were as the sun;” expressive of his infinite pleasure and delight in dispersing these good tidings abroad, and bringing poor, lost, forlorn sinners into that peace that passeth all understanding, and expressing the infinite delight with which he looks upon them. He lifted up his eyes upon his disciples, and with infinite pleasure said, “Blessed are ye poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.” “And his feet as pillars of fire,” to denote the purity, the majesty, and the luminousness of his steps. He steps with purity, never took a wrong step, never did, and never will. He steps in majesty, everything must give way before him; he steps with lumination; ah! his step from obscurity to luminosity in the days of his humiliation was a luminous step; his step from Pilate's hall to the cross was a luminous step: his step from death to his disciples was a luminous step! his step from earth to heaven was a luminous step; his step at the last great day from heaven to the air to gather his people in the twinkling of an eye will be a pure majestic step. “And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever that there should be time no longer,” that is Jewish time; and so “In the days of the seventh angel the mystery of God should be finished,” just as by the sound of the seven trumpets the walls of Jericho were thrown down, and the Israelites had virtual possession of the land; and so the time when the Jewish nation was destroyed, the kingdom of Christ, its great mystery, was then finished as to its being established. And then it also relates, of course, to the end of time literally, that the Lord will by and bye put an end to annual and diurnal time, or to literal time, and yet by this same person you see, so in the winding up of all things we have this rainbow, this peace, this government. I have yet more to say upon the perpetuity of this covenant; it is unto all generations.