

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

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THE GLORY OF LEBANON.

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A Sermon

PREACHED BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

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“The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon.”—Psalm lxxii. 16.

“THEY that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God; and they shall grow as the cedar and as the palm tree.” Now, first, there is the valley. So the sinner; the very first thing the Lord does with him is to bring him down into a low valley; that as the Israelites were in bondage, and made sensible of that—as that was their low valley, so now, in order for us to be saved, we must be made sensible of the low valley we are in; we are in the valley of sin, in the valley of death; in the valley, in a word, of condemnation, a low valley. When the sinner is thus brought down into this valley, is thus plunged into this humiliation before God, then he is in the right road to become one of these tall cedars; in a word, he is in the right road to become like Christ; he is in the right road to be one with Christ; he is in the right road to be an inhabitant of that eternal glory set so clearly before us in the blessed book of God. Then, after being as the valley, the next thing is that they are as a garden. How expressive is that! So it is the Lord leads us along; after he has humbled us down, and made us sensible of what we are, then he fulfils that gracious promise that “their souls shall be as a watered garden, even as a garden whose waters fail not.” So that we are brought then into the infallible truths of the gospel; and when those refreshing truths of the gospel are brought into the soul, what a change it brings about! This, according to that description, is what we may call step, the second, from the valley into the garden. There is the sinner in a state of destitution, in a state of wretchedness, in a state of solitude; but now, brought nearer to the Lord, the blessed truths of the everlasting gospel make his soul as a watered garden. The next thing Balaam mentions is that of the lign aloe, which was a tree beautiful in its foliage, as we learn, and exceedingly fragrant. And so the sinner, the nearer he is brought along into fellowship with God, the more will he be like that, to use another simile, where David says, “I am like a green olive tree in the house of my God, because I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.” Now, as we are led along into close fellowship with the blessed God, we partake of the fragrance of the same; we savour of God’s love, and of God’s mercy, and of God’s counsels, and of God’s

truth, and of Christ's eternal perfection. This is that savour that is pleasing unto God. Hence, the apostles were always a sweet savour unto God, even in them that perished; for this simple reason, that the apostles had borne testimony of the truth; so that even concerning those who perished the apostles were faithful, and stated the truth; they were a sweet savour of Christ unto God in them that perished, and in them that were saved. Then comes the cedar; "as cedar trees beside the waters." So the believer; he is brought, as it were, from the valley; his soul becomes as a watered garden; he is then brought into the fragrance of Jesus Christ; and then he begins to grow up, he begins to become very high in the things of God; he begins to be firm, he begins to be fixed, he begins to look over everything; it is a blessed thing to grow up unto the Lord. Men may speak against high doctrine; but if the heart and soul are carried up to God, I am sure we cannot be too high. I am fully aware we may carry high doctrines in our heads without having them in our hearts; but if the great truths of the gospel raise us up into the counsels of God, and establish us there, we shall never want to come down again. Then you will find that this Lebanon is spoken of in contrast to bondage. Now, here in the Lord we are free; we are brought into the valley; and the Lord giveth grace unto the humble; they shall be eternally free from the law and its curse, and from all the powers of darkness; and their souls become as a watered garden, and they are brought into the fragrance of Christ, and they grow up, and become established in the truth as it is in Jesus. Then, again, this Lebanon is spoken of in the word of God in contrast, not only to bondage, but in contrast to solitude, to a wilderness and desert state. It is said, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall blossom, it shall blossom abundantly, blossom as the rose, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; and they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God." Now, of course, the glory of Lebanon here refers to the Lord Jesus Christ; and the glory of Lebanon would be not only the streams of pure water from Lebanon, but the abundant fruits yielded by Lebanon; and has direct reference to the Lord Jesus Christ; the glory of Lebanon being given to it will mean the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ being given to it. Here, then, they are brought out of solitude into sociality with the Lord Jesus Christ, and out of the wilderness into this paradisiacal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ; and out of the desert into this heavenly fellowship with him. And I need not remind you how that 35th of Isaiah comments upon and traces out the ultimate glory of being thus brought out of solitude, and out of the wilderness, and out of the desert, and being brought into this fellowship with God, where everlasting plenty must reign. But then, again, this Lebanon is spoken of also in contrast to degradation. This you find in the 14th of Hosea, where we are spoken of as degraded: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." The fall there meant their apostasy, as you learn from the same chapter, that they had taken up with other gods, and apostatized from the true God. Here is a call unto them to return from that. That

call they might hearken to, or that call they might resist; that call may be effectual, or that call may not be effectual; the Lord put them upon a conditional footing; and merely gave them the call; for the call was only a call to reformation, a call from rank idolatry, which natural reason, together with the light of the word, shows us is idolatry; merely a call from that to worship the one and true God. But then, while this is the literal meaning of the beginning of the 14th of Hosea; while this is the literal meaning and the old covenant meaning, we must now lose sight of that, and look at that chapter in the light of the new covenant; and then, if we look at that chapter as we may, I am sure, do—after giving it its full literal force, look at that chapter in the light of the new covenant, then we shall see that our fall by our iniquity will mean our fall in the first Adam. Iniquity, I do not say always, but very frequently, has reference to systems of error, by which men are led away from the truth, by which they are led away from God; and so in the first Adam we fell by error; it was not one gross act by which we fell, it was simply by error; by Satan bringing in his falsehoods; and here it is that we have fallen or apostatized from God. Now here, in the new covenant, this call is not resistible; this call is effectual; for when God speaks to a sinner, "Return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity," God carries the conviction into the conscience, and that sinner feels that he is a sinner, a fallen sinner; he feels that he has fallen into apostasy, or by apostasy, from God; he looks about, and he feels that he is without Christ, and that he is without God, that he is in a fallen state, not only in bondage and solitude, but that he is in a state of degradation; and he says, Such is my solitude; I come to reflect; I see where I am; I have but a few more days on earth, and how few they are I do not know; and what troubles I may have during those few days I do not know; what afflictions I may have I know not, for everything is very uncertain in this world; we are exposed in ten thousand ways to ten thousand calamities; we have perhaps health and ease to-day, and to-morrow we may have sickness and trouble; our circumstances may be somewhat straight to-day, like the circumstances of Job; and like his they may all at once turn dark and gloomy, and we may have to-morrow to sit down in universal destitution; we may have a great many friends to-day, but they may all be gone to-morrow. And the sinner begins thus to reflect; he begins to apply his heart unto wisdom; he begins to reflect, Is this all that my precious soul has? Is this what I have been all my lifetime looking after? I have a never-dying soul; and yet I have been that fool, that blind, that besotted, that stupid, as to pass by that which alone can satisfy the necessities of my immortal soul, just for the enjoyments of this poor dying state. The sinner takes a little further look, and he says, Just beyond this uncertain scene of things there is the burning lake, the direful doom, the wrath of God; there is a vast eternity from whence there is no return when I am once there. And the sinner, thus convinced of what he is, feels his degradation. Now, the Lord says unto such, "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity; return unto the Lord thy God. Take with you

words;" if you do not know what words to take, as though the Lord should say, I will give you words; "take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Lord, deal with us graciously. Lord, if thou dost save me, I know it must be by grace; if thou hast recorded my name in the Lamb's book of life, I am sure thy grace must have put it there; and if Jesus Christ laid down his infinitely precious life for a worthless sinner like me, I know it must be according to the Scriptures, which say, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich." So receive us graciously, and we will renounce all false confidences; "Asshur shall not save us;" that Assyrian kingdom that we have been dependent upon shall not save us; "we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods;" we will not have confidence in carnal, or fleshly, or earthly powers; "for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." And the Lord goes on to say, "I will heal their backsliding." You know some people in our day, and they have done so for years, they draw a line of distinction between backsliding and apostasy. But what difference is there between going back and going back? what difference is there between running back and running back? what difference is there between gliding off and gliding off? I do not know; for they mean one and the same thing. The backsliding here, therefore, meant the apostasy of Israel; and spiritually, when applied to the new-covenant people of God, it will mean their apostasy from God. "I will heal their apostasy." I often admire the way in which the Vulgate renders that very clause; instead of saying, "I will heal their backsliding," the Vulgate (the Latin) renders it, *Curabo aversionem eorum*, "I will heal their aversion;" they have been averse to me, but I will put an end to that aversion, and they shall be reconciled to me, and shall have peace with me, and shall find that in me that they can find nowhere else; for "I will be as the dew unto Israel;" when God dries up all other consolations, then the soul becomes prepared for his promise. "I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Here the sinner begins to take root in God's truth, and know it; he is just beginning to distinguish the people whom God hath blessed from the people whom God hath not blessed. And perhaps there never was an age in the whole history of Christendom in which a better discernment upon that point was required than at the present day. There are ministers that I must confess I know not where to rank them; I do not feel as though I could say they are not good men; and in the sight of God, if I were drawing my last breath, I cannot say they are good; I am obliged to leave them. And there are congregations, too, that, as far as their mental and moral religion goes, I respect; but as for anything vital, as to anything by which my soul could profit, if they were to tear me to pieces, I could not lend my ear to any of those systems; if they are good men, I am too blind to see it; if such congregations are the congregations of the saints, I am too blind to see it. Now "they that dwell under his shadow"—under the shadow of God; the man

that is made sensible of his degradation as an apostate sinner, that is brought into the grace of God and the mercy of God—"they that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." And just so it is, if we meet with a poor sinner, and he savours of Christ—for Christ, as I have already hinted, is spoken of as Lebanon;—if we meet with a poor sinner, and he is not yet so fast established in the truth as some, yet if we can find him savour rightly of Christ, we can receive him. Their smell shall be as Lebanon. And so the Lord goes on to describe the prosperity that such shall have. In a word, then, this Lebanon is intended to set before us a state of prosperity, a state of blessedness, a state of fruitfulness, a state of happiness, of everything that is desirable, everything that God can give, everything the soul can enjoy; in contrast to Egyptian bondage, to wilderness solitude, and to that degradation we are in before God by the fall of man. "The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon."

I will now notice the next part of our subject, *the fruits*; the diffusion of this handful of corn; the blessings of the gospel; what those blessings shall do. Let us notice, then, one instance in which the disciples appear,—in which they appear as a little handful. They were but a handful, and I may say, a little handful,—small in number,—yet how wondrously, on that occasion, were the blessings of the gospel diffused! for my object is to show not only how the blessings of the gospel were diffused, but to show after what manner they did it. There is something in that 2nd chapter of the Acts very instructive. It is a remarkable thing that when this handful of corn was moved by the heavenly wind, when there came suddenly a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind, here these trees were moved; here this heavenly fruit, this handful of corn, began to be diffused; here the Lord began to minister life; and here he began to ingather sinners, to show the travail of the Saviour's soul. It is a remarkable thing that the apostle Peter seemed very careful in his dealings with the Jews, in preaching to them, to take hold of them by something they did know, in order to hold them fast by something they did know, while he told them something they did not know. I have often thought there is something very expressive and very instructive to ministers here; that they should try to take hold of their hearers by something they do know, in order to hold them fast by that which they do know, and give themselves a kind of opportunity to tell them something they do not know. And I think this will apply to all classes of men, because all men know something. If we come to the natural man, he does know something; even the Hottentot knows something. He knows that he exists; and he has a kind of notion, obscure, it is true, of right and wrong. We must therefore lay hold of the man by what he does know, in order to set before him what he does not know. And you will find this is the law all through the Acts of the Apostles; but I will confine myself to the instances in that chapter. When the Holy Ghost descended, and the people had all sorts of opinions as to the cause of these people speaking so many languages at once, Peter then stood up, and he took hold of the prophet Joel, and he said, "This

is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." Oh, we know the prophet Joel. We have read the prophet Joel. Well, Peter, if you are going to talk to us about one of our prophets, we will listen to you. Well, so he quotes what the prophet has said concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit. "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,"—that is, shall testify of holy things,—“your young men shall see visions,”—that is, be favoured with divine revelations,—“and your old men shall dream dreams”—meaning the same thing in another form. “And on my servants and my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” Thus Peter took hold of them by what they did know, in order to tell them something they did not know. And he felt the necessity of going a little further with this heavenly art; shall I say this heavenly skill? shall I say this catching them, as it were, by guile, this casting the net on the right side of the ship? While his hook was well baited, he kept the hook out of sight. They knew the bait, but did not know the hook. Now it is a great thing when a man has the gift to catch poor sinners; only with this difference,—when men catch the fish of the river, it is to kill them; but when we catch sinners in the net of the gospel, or when we catch them with the hook of conviction, it is to make them alive, and to land them where they shall live for ever. Now Peter, after dealing with one point that they knew, went on to deal with another point that they knew. He says, “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth—” Well, what of him? Why, “a man approved of God among you by his miracles and wonders, and signs which God did by him.” Mark the heavenly skill. Did not say Christ did the things, but said that God did them by him,—“approved of God.” Now you know there was such a man as Jesus of Nazareth. Why, it is not many weeks ago you crucified him. Yes, we know that. And you know he wrought miracles. Yes, we know that. Well, I tell you that man was approved of God. Well, we shall be very awkwardly placed if we should disapprove of what God approves. “In the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.” You know he wrought miracles. Well, yes, we know that. Now I will tell you something you do not know, and that is, that he was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” You see that he kept close to the Lord. Peter was not a free-willer, nor a duty-faith man, or else he would not have occupied such high ground. He would have come down, and have made some appeal to their supposed fleshly power, or to their fleshly responsibility, or to some other fable, received and advocated by this deceiving world in which we live. He kept close to the Lord. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”—he knew what you were going to do, and let you do it. Well, that we did not know—“ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Well, that we do know; we have done that. Why, Peter, we are rather perplexed. You may depend upon it, they began to be perplexed. Why, here is the prophet Joel. Must not reject him; and here is the fulfilment too. Peter does not dishonour our prophet, the prophet Joel; he honours him. He says this is the fulfilment of what Joel has said. Cannot deny that; and he has told us of this Jesus of Nazareth that God approved him, and that God did the miracles. Well, the miracles certainly were all godly; none of his miracles were ungodly; none of his miracles were selfish. He did not perform one selfish miracle. Point out a selfish miracle he performed. Point out a miracle he performed for his own ease, for his own personal advantage, if you can. It was all for others. Well, they began to be shaken, they began to be moved, they began to fear; they could not get away. Peter had got hold of them. And then he tells them something they did not know,—“whom God hath raised up.” Now that we do not know. Well, now, we will hear no more of this; now we are quite far enough; give it up now. No, Peter had got hold of them.

Now, brethren, just stop a moment longer. David. Ah, David! Well, if you are going to bring David, we will listen to you. "David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face; for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved." And as though he should say, You know that David did not always set the Lord before his face. He did not do that himself, no more than you have; nor has the best man that ever existed always set the Lord before his face,—not always. I know I do not; I know that I lose sight of the Lord times innumerable. But there was One that never did, "He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved; therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope; because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance." Now Peter did not wish to let them go; he knew he had got them fast now. "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David;" I may speak to you of the patriarch David; I know you will hear that; and if I can just hold you a few minutes in talking to you about something you do know, I will then presently tell you something more that you do not know. And he assured them that David spake not of himself; for so far from David seeing no corruption, he was dead and buried, and his sepulchre with us unto this day; and David saith in another place, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool." Well, we know that: we know that David was buried; we know that his sepulchre is with us unto this day; but what of that? Why, that is a proof David did not speak of himself, when he said, "Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Well now, of whom did he speak? Why, he spake of a person that I want to speak to you about. David was a prophet. Yes, we know he was. And he knew "that God had sworn unto him with an oath, that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit upon his throne. He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption." Now then, he tells them something they did not know again: he says, "This same Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ." And when they heard this, three thousand of them now were pricked in their hearts, and they were conquered. Now, here is the fruit of the handful of corn; here is the ingathering of sinners. You will see what a progressive work this conviction was; first, here was the fulfilment of what had been spoken of by Joel; secondly, here is an appeal to what they themselves knew concerning the Lord Jesus Christ; and thirdly, here is the testimony of Christ's resurrection; fourth, here is an elucidation of the 16th Psalm, showing it was impossible for David to speak this of himself; and then here is the final exaltation of the Saviour, as having received the promise of the Father, and as having shed forth that which they now saw and heard. These things, then, brought conviction into their minds, and I trust that we are one with them; I trust we know something of the work of the blessed Spirit in causing us to look on Him whom we have pierced; and that we know something of the mediatorial prevalency of the Saviour; that he was not left in hell, because there was no more hell to endure; that he saw no corruption, because he committed no sin; that he rose from the dead because he, as the great Surety by the blood of the everlasting covenant, had paid the mighty debt we owed; that he is at God's right hand on the ground of what he himself has done; and that the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ; and that, while we have been led to make the inquiry, the Lord has blessed us with the answer. "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Why, he says, "Repent"—that is, change from what you were—"and



be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you"—now I can see the promise is unto you. Now mark, the apostle Peter did not say at the first the promise was unto them; no, he must first see that they are born of God. He would not speak thus unto them: The promise is unto you, and it is your fault if you do not come and take it; if you do not receive it, you will be damned for not receiving it. Now that is just the language of the present day, a language which perhaps some of you see no harm in. Well, I am not your judge; and, as I have told you or hinted to you this morning, I have no unkind feeling towards those who advocate duty-faith and universal exhortation. I believe such doctrines to be from beneath, and the minister that is mixed up with such doctrines—I can no more profit by such a minister than I could eat of a food mixed with Baxterian sand, or fuller's earth, or earth and sand; therefore I am of necessity kept close to that order of things by which alone I feel, as a sinner, I can be saved. So here, then, the apostle Peter would not tell them the promise belonged unto them until he saw the Holy Spirit had quickened them, and they were blessed with the spirit of earnest prayer; then he said, "Now I know the promise is unto you, and to your children." Ah, say you, what do you say to that? This contradicts what you have just now said. Well, it might appear so, if you stopped there; but the apostle does not stop there; he says, "Even as many as the Lord our God shall call"—there is the explanation—"For whom he calleth, them he justifieth and glorifieth." And what was the result, when these people were gathered in? "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Now I challenge all of you to examine that sermon in the 2nd of Acts all through, and see if you can find a single indication of duty-faith there, of universal exhortation there, or universal invitation; and then, if you cannot find it—and you cannot—I will then ask you another question, Do you not think it was a fine opportunity? Here were thousands of people dead in trespasses and sins; here stands the apostle Peter, and instead of asking them to come, and inviting them to come, and begging of them to come, and standing up there like a showman, and telling them that it is the last night, the last chance, the last time—instead of talking such nonsense as this, instead of telling such repulsive lies as these, instead of thus degrading the Almighty, degrading the Saviour, degrading the work of the Spirit, and belying the promise—instead of this, the apostle took his stand upon the rock of eternal truth, and he knew that, as the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled independent of man, all the other parts would be fulfilled independent of man. See the fulfilment of them; the Saviour died sovereignly, rose sovereignly, ascended sovereignly, and the Holy Ghost descended sovereignly; he tarried not for man, nor waited for the sons of men. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," and the Lord gave them "favour with all the people." See the power of God over the hearts of men. Just a few weeks before this the people crucified Christ, and now these same people were favourable towards those that believed in him; just showing how the hearts of the people are in the hand of the Lord, that he can make our enemies be at peace with us; he can make them favour us, or he can let them somewhat loose upon us—it all lies with the Lord. But I add no more.