

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE GOOD-GROUND HEARER.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 5TH, 1863, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."—Matthew xiii. 23.

In the 24th verse of the 4th chapter of Mark, we are exhorted to take heed *what* we hear, and what we receive, and what we approve as the gospel; for it is he that goeth forth and weepeth, and beareth precious seed, and that precious seed is God's pure truth. Then we shall surely come again rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us. And in the 18th verse of the 8th of Luke we are exhorted there to take heed *how* we hear. So it is not only to take heed *what* we hear, but to take heed *how* we hear; to be assured that we hear not merely as the wayside hearer, nor as the thorny-ground hearer, nor as the stony-ground hearer, but that we hear as the good-ground hearer; that we so receive the word as to become doers of the word, abiding by the word, and the word being unto us sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, surpassing all other things in value; seeing there is not anything that can be compared unto the word of the Lord our God. Then, also, we are exhorted in substance, and indeed in reality, to take heed not only *what* we hear, and *how* we hear, but also *whom* we hear: "Take heed and beware of false prophets, that come unto you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." They inwardly hate the real sheep of Christ; they inwardly, though they may preach a great part of the truth, have a secret undercurrent of antipathy against it. The Saviour says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" Grapes and figs are the symbol of two things—of peace and of plenty. And that man that is brought into reconciliation experimentally to God, has found peace with God, realized the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, and justified in Jesus' righteousness, and brought into the land of the gospel, that man will preach the same peace to others that he himself hath found; he will preach the same plentiful mercy to others by which he himself is saved. And the man that doth not do this is a wolf in sheep's clothing; the man that would thus starve the people of God, and put them upon a sort of doing system, though they do not like always to acknowledge it; these are they that we are to avoid.

"Take heed and beware of false prophets." So we are to take heed as to what we hear, and as to how we hear, and as to whom we hear. And I am sure there is not anything more concerns us than these things. How rapidly, and with some of us it seems more rapidly than ever, doth time pass away! and we must very soon now appear before our Judge. And then to be prepared; to have received not falsehood, but the truth, and to have the Spirit of truth, and to be led by the Spirit of truth, and to have received it in life and in power, not in mere form, but in power, and to be enabled, from our own experience, to discover the false prophet, and avoid him; to discover the man of God, and be one with him as such; we shall then see that he is one with the truth as it is in Jesus.

There are, then, in our text three things that I may notice. First, *here is something to understand*. The good-ground hearer is one that understands the word he hears. Secondly, *here is a note of distinction*, the good ground: Third and lastly, *here is fruit in perfection*.

First, then, *here is something to understand*. The good-ground hearer is he that heareth the word and understandeth it; that is, he understands it from his own soul's experience; that is the kind of understanding he hath of it. Now in this parable the seed, or the word of God, is called "the word of the kingdom." In the 4th of Mark the word is there simply called "the word." In the 8th of Luke it is called "the word of God." Now we must put all these three together, and let us see whether we understand this all-important matter. It is, then, in connection with our text called this good seed, or the word is called "the word of the kingdom." That is declarative, and descriptive, and explanatory of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ means two things; it means a certain state of things, and it means his reign, his eternal government, after that state of things. Having lately dwelt upon this subject of Christ's kingdom, I will nevertheless say a few words more this morning upon it. Now, then, what are we to understand by the kingdom, or the word of the kingdom? The 45th Psalm will explain this to us. There the Lord Jesus Christ appears as receiving the sworn covenant by which he is to govern the people, by which he is to reign in this kingdom, by which the people are to be gathered out of all other kingdoms and to be brought into his kingdom, and by which his kingdom shall break in pieces, survive, surpass, and infinitely and eternally outlive all other kingdoms. Hence, the 45th Psalm, "Grace is poured into thy lips." I understand grace there to mean, according to the 2nd of Malachi, the covenant of grace; "My covenant of life and peace was with him." Now the Lord Jesus Christ received God's sworn covenant of grace, and God in that sworn covenant appointed the Saviour, as we see in the 110th Psalm and other scriptures, to be eternal perfection to his people by his priesthood, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Now this Jesus Christ received; this was the truth, the testimony, the gracious testimony, that Jesus Christ received; it was poured into his lips. And I am sure if he received it, we shall do perfectly right in doing the same. And that he was also appointed, as you see in the language of the angel, to reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there was to be no end. "Grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." Because Jesus Christ received this new covenant, and because he was thus willing to be the mediator of that covenant, because he shed his blood to seal that covenant, because he brought in his righteousness to confirm that covenant, because he became the surety of that covenant, responsible for all its items, and responsible for the presentation at the last of the people, on this ground he is blessed for ever. This being blessed for ever is the joy that was set before him, for which he endured the cross, despised the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God. If we, therefore, would have the blessings of the

Lord, it must be after this order, it must be at this same Mount Zion, where the Lord hath commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. After the Holy Spirit thus sets before us that state of things after which the Saviour reigns, namely, after the order of this eternal covenant,—and there is no other such government anywhere, for he stands distinguished in his government as well as in all the other relations he bears; for there is no such Shepherd elsewhere, there is no such Husband elsewhere, there is no such Brother elsewhere, there is no such Friend elsewhere, and there is no such King elsewhere; he of all kings is the only king that hath immortality; all other kings and kingdoms die, but this king remains. Now when the Lord has presented the matter thus far, he leads us on thus; where this same Person, in this order of things, is represented as riding forth in his majesty, because of truth, because of the truth of this covenant. God's love is a truthful love, and therefore the Saviour was not afraid to venture upon it; not at all afraid that that love during his work would lessen, alter, or be withdrawn from the original objects. They were loved before (as you see in the 17th of John) the foundation of the world. Therefore, that love being truthful, God's counsels being truthful, God's oath being truthful, and all his purposes truthful, the Saviour—hear me when I say it!—ventured his eternal all upon the truthfulness of God the Father. Yes, he knew God the Father would not fail him; he knew that God the Father would never forsake him; he knew that God the Father would entirely approve him; he knew that God the Father would be well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he knew that God the Father would openly testify of him, and much more will he testify of him when time shall be no more, and we are brought into full possession of the glory of the kingdom. And thus Christ ventured his all upon God. See how beautifully—though I dare not stop here to launch out upon it—the psalmist was led, personating the Saviour, to touch upon this, “I was cast upon thee from the womb.” From his very birth he was cast upon God. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but he had not where to lay his head. He was cast upon God. And if his life, his infant life, be in danger from Herod, God will take care of that infant life; and if his infant life be in danger from Archelaus, God will take care of that life; and in whatever way his life was in danger, God took care of him. Here, then, my hearer, it is that he went forth because of truth; he was satisfied of the truthfulness of the counsels, and love, and purposes of the blessed God, and ventured upon them; and they stood good, and they stand good to this day. I think that seems to be the perfection of the whole of salvation, namely, that with our dear covenant God there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Now how shall the people be brought to this? But again; not only because of truth, but because of meekness also. He shall ride forth because of meekness; that is, because of his own humiliation. His prosperity was to be founded upon his own humiliation. And then because of righteousness. He was meek and lowly in heart, and submitted to all he did submit to for our sakes. “And thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.” And now comes the understanding; “Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.” Is it not so? Hath not conviction of our state by nature brought us to submit to him, brought us to see that he is the Mediator of the new covenant, that this gracious covenant was poured into his lips, that he hath carried it out in his humiliation, and he is now carrying it out in his exaltation, and will carry it out in eternal glorification? And now, when the people are brought to submit to him, they are brought into this firm state of things; for “thy throne,” by which these people are governed, the throne of grace, the Old Testament calls it the mercy-seat, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever;” the same as saying, Thy mercy is for ever—thy mercy shall reign for ever—thy grace shall reign for ever. “The sceptre

of thy kingdom is a right sceptre;" a sceptre of righteousness. He reigns by right, first, of his mediatorial work; he reigns by right of the authority of God the Father. And he hath loved righteousness for his own people, and his love to righteousness is set down to them; he hath hated wickedness for his own people. Therefore, my hearer, you must not depend upon your love to God or your hatred to sin for your salvation; but you must depend upon Jesus Christ's perfect love to God for you, and his hatred to sin for you. That must be your confidence. For we ourselves never could have been brought to love God if Christ had not loved God for us, and become thereby the way by which we love God. We never could have hated sin, nor stood out for this economy of grace to all that stand opposed to it, if Christ had not walked that path first. Here it is, then, that he reigns for ever and ever, and maintains the freedom of his people. The apostle takes this up very beautifully, and contrasts the kingdom of Christ with the Jewish world. Hence, in the first of the Hebrews, "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." Then the apostle goes on to contrast, at least in my apprehension, the Jewish world, the Jewish heavens and earth, with the Christian heaven and earth, and distinguishes between the two. "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth;" that is, as I understand it there, the Jewish earth, Jewish land; "and the heavens—the Jewish heavens, for so I take it—"are the works of thine hands. They shall perish," which they did; "but thou remainest," which he does; "and they shall all wax old as doth a garment," which they did; "and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up;" and so the clothes, perhaps to signify this, in the sepulchre were folded up and laid by themselves, folded up and done with. And so these ceremonial heavens, they waxed old, and as a vesture they were changed and folded up. "But thou remainest;" thy kingdom remains, thy priesthood remains, thy royalty remains; "thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." Here, then, this good seed is the word of the kingdom, declarative of a covenant of grace; declarative of the Saviour's going forth because of the truth, the truthfulness of the counsels of God, and because of his own humiliation as the ground, and because of his own righteousness, and that these truths are arrows to convince the people of their state, bring them down to the Saviour's feet, and bring them in, as the apostle describes it, to a kingdom that cannot be moved. "Let us," then, seeing we have received this kingdom in the testimony of it, and by faith, and with the understanding, "let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and with godly fear." That is one thing, then, to be understood; it is the word of the kingdom, the new covenant; 45th Psalm, "Grace poured into his lips;" same grace that he pours into your lips; you have received the same grace, the same truths. And so the promise runs, "My spirit," saith God the Father to Christ, "that I have put upon thee, and my words that I put into thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, henceforth and for ever." These words are declarative of God's eternity in this covenant, which is our eternal theme. Now they on the good ground understand this. Such a word, after such an order, such a kingdom, such certainty, so precious to them, they keep it, as it is in Luke, "They on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Honest, and so you will be honest in this; you will honestly confess what a poor creature you are, as a sinner considered, and you will honestly confess that nothing but this order of things can give you any hope. "They which in an honest and good heart." A heart well disposed to Jesus Christ is a good heart; a believing heart is a good heart; a praying heart is a good heart; a God-fearing heart is a good heart; an earnest heart is a good heart; a heart that understands the truth and loves the truth is a

good heart. Such are the good ground. In the 4th of Mark this good seed is called simply "the word;" it does not say "the word of the kingdom," or "the word of God," but simply "the word." I think that this variety is not by chance, but placed there for our instruction. There are two reasons,—I never could find more than two; at least, all may be summed up in two,—there are two reasons why the Lord Jesus Christ is called the Word. The one is, because everything of a gospel kind is embodied in him: he is the etymological root of every doctrine of the gospel. There is no word of life, or light, or peace, or pardon of any kind, but is embodied in Christ. That is one reason why he is called the Word. Can you understand that? God speaks to us by his dear Son, by whom he made the ages of providence, by whom he made the ages of grace; not "by whom he made the worlds,"—should not read so; but "by whom he made the ages,"—that is, the ages of providence and the ages of grace. Take Christ away, there would be no sure seed-time or harvest; take Christ away, there would be no such thing as showing forth in eternal ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace. Jesus Christ, therefore, is called the Word, because he embodies everything. Do you understand that? Bless the Lord, you do—at least most of you; and those of you who do not, may the Lord make it a concern with you to understand it. For I tell you this, those of you who do not understand it, when you come to a dying hour, if your eyes should be at all opened then, if they are not opened now to see where you are, you would then confess that one word of mercy from the everlasting God to your departing soul would be better to you than ten thousand such worlds as this. The Lord help us to prize his precious, precious word; there is nothing like it. Oh, his promises! When he sends a promise to the soul, it can strengthen us against any mighty waves, bear us up under any burdens, direct us in any perplexity, make us bold as a lion, and lead us on from strength to strength, and we laugh at our mightiest foes, shake our head at that which, without the Lord, we should tremble at, and laugh to scorn the attempts of the old dragon and all his agents, all of which would make us shudder to our very centre if God be absent there. The second reason why Jesus Christ is called the Word is as you see in the 19th of Revelation. He is there set forth as going on conquering and to conquer; and I am sure it is by his word that he always hath gone forth conquering and to conquer. Just so now. If he convert a sinner, it is by his word; if he set a sinner free, it is by his word; if he maketh poor, it is by his word; if he exalt, it is by his word. And all this, as I have said, embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third. This good seed is called "the word of God." Thus, then, if you lay the three together, we have a beautiful representation of God's truth. It is the word of the kingdom, bringing us into this everlasting kingdom. It is the living word, by which the promises come, and by which the Lord achieveth all that shall be achieved. It is the word of God, and therefore infallible: "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and shall prosper in the thing whereto I send it." Here, then, is something to be understood. To understand this covenant of grace, Christ reigns in and after that; to understand Jesus Christ as the word, and by him all the good we can ever hope to have, comes; by him came grace and truth, and that this word is the word of God. The Saviour laid great stress upon this in his ministry,—
 "The words that I speak are not mine." It ought, and I trust does, carry a very solemn admonition to us. "The words that I speak are not mine, but the words of him that sent me." Why, if the Saviour would not invent a doctrine, and add it to God's word; if he would not bring in any invention, what shall we say to men that are eternally bringing inventions in? So, then, if we would walk in love, that love must be of the right order. Peter warmed himself by the devil's fire, and what did it

lead him to? Why, to deny Christ. And you may warm yourself by the fire of human applause and human approbation, and what will it lead you to? Why, to deny the Lord Jesus Christ. I would rather stand out shivering in the cold, than stand by the wrong fire, or be warmed by the wrong fire. If I am warm in my own soul, and feel zealous, let me feel zealous in the right thing. If my soul burn with love, let it be the love of the truth; let it be the love of that Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; let it be the love of that God with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. All other is mawkish rubbish, boiled bread, empty stuff: I hate it.

I notice, then, next, *the note of distinction*; the good ground. Here is evil ground, and good ground. Now there was no fault in the seed. Why did not the seed grow in the wayside ground? The fault was not in the seed. Why did it not grow in the thorny ground? The fault was not in the seed. Why did it not grow in the stony ground? The fault was not in the seed. I am not going to blame the seed; I am not going to blame God's truth, not going to put the fault there. The fault lies in the badness of the ground. How came the ground bad? So naturally! "And the Lord looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand,"—understand his new covenant, understand his love, understand his counsels. Not one. They are all gone out of the way, they are all bad ground together. So then the reason that men do not receive the truth savingly is because, by the fall of Adam, they are dead, blind, deaf, and enmity against God. There was no sympathy between the wayside ground and the seed; so there is no sympathy between the carnal mind and God's pure, heavenly, yea and amen truth. There was no sympathy, or at least very little—there was a little—between the thorny ground and the seed. Just so now there are some professors; there is a little sympathy with the word, perhaps for the minister, perhaps for the place, for a time; but if this little sympathy he has with the word should put him to any very great inconvenience, away he goes; shows he is bad ground. And then the stony ground has a stronger sympathy. We have had some here; been delighted. I do not know that some have not taken a sitting; come, perhaps, for a month or two, and presently away they go. Happen to meet such: Why, I haven't seen you lately. No: I have been called another way. Ah, sure enough you have. Well, I seemed to like it very well for a time; but I got very dull, and I thought it was time enough for me to think about religion by-and-bye. So the devil has called you another way. So in some cases there is no sympathy, in other cases there may be some sympathy; but in none of these cases is there any real understanding. "All children of wrath by nature;" "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." And how comes it to pass that there is any good ground—how comes that? I speak of course now in the figurative sense. As the apostle says, all are under sin, and if there be any good ground in this spiritual sense, I will vouch for it the Lord himself has made it good. And so, in the 16th of Proverbs, 1st verse, we have a scripture like this, that "the preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord." So, "Thou wilt prepare their heart; thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." You were evil ground, we were evil ground, until the Lord was pleased to cause the ploughshare of conviction to enter into our very souls; and the Lord cast in all that discipline, all that exercise that prepared the soul. Then, being consciously guilty, we were prepared for pardon; being consciously under condemnation, we were prepared for justification; being consciously in a lost state, we were prepared for salvation; being consciously afar off, we were prepared to receive that testimony given by the apostle, "Ye were afar off, but now in Christ Jesus are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Thus, then, here is the word to be understood; and thus the good ground

are those that are thus distinguished by the Lord himself. Yes; their situation, as they stand in Christ, even while in a state of nature, is good; but of them it may be said the ground is barren. Saith the prophet, "Bring me a new cruse,"—we must have a new covenant—"put salt therein." Let the grace of God take possession of the man's heart, the enemy becomes a friend, the sinner becomes a saint, the man who is wandering out of the way of understanding becomes a personal, earnest seeker after the Lord for himself.

But I hasten to the next part, and that is *the fruitfulness*. You see they all come thus to have understanding; they all bring fruit to perfection; the hundred-fold perfectly ripe, the sixty-fold perfectly ripe, and the thirty-fold all ripe. Why, say you, what will you do with the quantities? We will put them right presently; put them all square very comfortably. I must drop a word first upon the perfection, for the Saviour says of the other kind of hearers, they bring no fruit to perfection; that implies that these come to perfection. Now, there is a threefold perfection that every child of God must hold fast. What is that? The first is that typified by the men that came to David; they came with perfect heart, and such as could keep rank—were bold as lions, and swift as the roes upon the mountains. You are to be perfectly decided for God's truth; no wavering, no turning, no shuffling, no compromising, no surrender, no twisting, no craving for quarters. You have no need to crave for human quarters when your shelter is from on high, or is on high; your refuge is on high, your place of defence is the munitions of rocks. What? have the great God on your side, he being for you, and crave quarters of men in these things? Nay, nay, nay; the thorny-ground hearer never came into this decision, nor the stony-ground hearer, nor the wayside hearer; but the good-ground hearer does come into this decision. I never am at a loss upon this point, never. You may wake me up at any time in the night and ask me to preach a sermon upon decision, and at it that minute. Yes, when I have only one eye open, before I get the other eye open, preach half a sermon, almost. Bring any other gospel?—distinguish it in a moment. I believe that the Lord makes his people of quick understanding in these things. They came to David with perfect heart; stood right out decided for him; no wavering, none of that. The second perfection the child of God must hold fast is, let him have decision first, look well to that. Make your calling and election of God's truth sure, not make God's election of you sure, but make your election of his truth sure; you will stand out decided for it; God will take care of you; he will, you can testify of this, some of you; I can, and so can some of you. The second perfection the Christian has to hold fast is that perfection he has in Christ. Perfect in Christ; "ye are complete in him;" hold that fast; never give up this. The third perfection the Christian has to hold fast is that perfection into which he shall personally come at the resurrection; at the great rising day. Then we shall be perfect; then, when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. Now the Lord said to Abraham, Abraham, I am God Almighty. What, my God almighty? Yes. What, my Father almighty? Yes. What, he who hath sworn to bless me almighty? Yes. What, he who hath revealed to me a city which he hath founded almighty? Yes. What, he who hath appointed the great Melchizedek almighty? Yes. What shall I do then? "Walk before me;" don't pay attention to any one else, "and be thou perfect;" perfect in decision for me, perfect in the great Melchizedek I have revealed to you. For Abraham saw the day of Christ, and was glad, and well he might; enough to gladden any poor sinner who sees it. Perfect in prospect, for he looked for a city that hath foundations. Here, then, is fruit to perfection; here is evidential fruit to perfection; here is relative fruit to perfection; and here is prospective fruit to perfection. Here, then, are the prayers of the saints; their

prayers, their praises all savour of decision, all savour of the perfection that is in Christ, all savour of prospective perfection. And if we understood this matter a little more clearly, I think we should pray with more confidence than we do. We pray sometimes to our covenant God as though he did not love us, as though he was going to reject us after all; poor timid creatures we are. Not that I would say a word—I should be the last to say a single word—to encourage presumption; no, my hearer, I do not mean that. But the dear Saviour doth say, “When ye pray, believe that ye receive the things, and ye shall receive them.” Bless the Lord, then, for the faithfulness of our covenant God. But let us look at the variety. There is one man, he prays more than another does; he has the spirit of prayer in larger abundance, the spirit of knowledge in larger abundance, the spirit of joy in larger abundance. The apostle Paul was more highly favoured, he brought forth a hundred-fold; he was more favoured than the rest as regards quantity, but not as regards the quality. Then the sixty-fold, he does not go quite so far, and some thirty. The next is this: not only perfection, but superior to the law. Why, the man that brings forth a hundred-fold, he brings forth ten times the quantity that there are commandments in the law; ten times ten. And sixty, he rises six times above them all; and the other rises three times above them all; all beyond the law. Why, Adam could never love God as the Christian does; Adam could never praise God as the Christian does; Adam could never bring that revenue of glory to God that the Christian does. I mean before he fell. Angels cannot bring such fruit to God as Christians do. Why, the apostle might well say that the law is fulfilled in them; truly so, not *by* them, but *in* them; for truly they love God with all their hearts and souls, truly they have a holiness and a righteousness that magnify the law, truly they have a worth and worthiness in Christ that magnifies the law. Truly they have a standing, a glorious standing, wherein glories are revealed to them, and they bring in a revenue of praise, so that the law hath no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth. Well, now, these are the people that Satan hates, that the world hates. What is the language of the world concerning them? 4th of Micah, “Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled.” Let us call her very ugly names, and then, when we have done that, “let our eye look upon Zion.” Let us take away the reputation of this Jesus Christ; let us defile him first by reproach, and then let us look at him after we have thus defiled him; let us then look at him as if he were really what we represent him. Now that is the light in which the world looks upon real Christians now; both upon ministers and people. Now, then, those who thus hate the people of God, “they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsels, for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor;” but their enemies shall, as chaff, be burned up with unquenchable fire.

The Lord, then, keep us standing firm in decision for his blessed truth. “Them that honour me,” the Lord saith, “I will honour.”