

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

HOW TO BE A TRUE SERVANT OF GOD.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 20TH, 1864, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”—Lev. xxv. 56.

THIS is a kind of summing up of the year of jubilee. We see that that was the most conspicuous and the most interesting year of all the seasons—noted seasons—of the Jewish dispensation; and that this year of jubilee, with all its details, meets and realizes its ultimate meaning in Christ Jesus the Lord; for Jesus Christ himself is that acceptable year of the Lord. Hence you find, in the 61st of Isaiah, the Saviour makes it a part of his mission to declare the acceptable year of the Lord. Here you will perceive, again, the difference between literal and mystic times. With the Jews, this year of jubilee was simply twelve months, one year; but in its mystical meaning, when applied to the Saviour, it means the whole of the days of Christ's humiliation; for his whole life was that mystical year acceptable unto the Lord. It is a form of speech wherein the space is mentioned, but the thing contained in that space is meant—namely, Christ Jesus; and he, Jesus Christ, in his life was acceptable unto God, in his death acceptable unto God. And God asks nothing else; there is not anything can be accepted in any way but by Jesus Christ. If we are acceptable, it must be by faith in Jesus Christ; and if we serve God acceptably, offering up spiritual sacrifices, it must be by what the Lord Jesus Christ hath done: “Made us,” saith the apostle, “accepted in the beloved.” Now, then, under this consideration—and it is safe ground to go upon—that we can serve God only by Jesus Christ, I shall this morning, in setting forth the way of serving God acceptably by the Saviour, our forerunner in this matter; for it is a vitally important matter whether we serve God acceptably, or whether our service is to be regarded as the worst of our sins; for the Lord either to say at the end, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant,” or to say at the end, “Who hath required this at your hands?” See, then, how important it is that we should please God, or be pleasing to God; and that can be only in the same way that Enoch was; he had this testimony that he pleased God; but he did that by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I notice, then, *the way of acceptable service unto God*; and Jesus Christ is that way. Let us allow some few more of the details of the jubilee to
VOL. VI.—No. 311.

instruct us in this matter. You observe that the year of jubilee was to commence on the tenth day of the seventh month. Let us take the ten days there to represent the ten commandments of the law, and let us take the tenth day to represent the end of the law; and then we are by that simple circumstance led into a very beautiful truth. For, in the first place, all of us are by nature under the law; but then, as a man literally dead under the law, and taken into custody, would be altogether unconscious of it, just so spiritually: we are by nature spiritually dead, and unconscious of being in the grasp of God's holy, righteous, almighty, and eternal law. But let life be given to the literally dead man—let him wake up and find himself in a gloomy cell—he would then begin to ask how he came there; and I am sure he would not be happy there; he would see nothing but death before him, and his language soon would be, "Who shall bring me out of this dungeon? Who shall preserve my life from going down into the pit, and that I perish not?" Just so with a sinner; when life is ministered to the soul, he begins to learn, in the Lord's own time, that he is thus, as a sinner, by the fall of man, and by his own deeds as well, under the grasp of God's holy and eternal law. By-and-bye this beautiful scripture appears, that Jesus Christ is the end of the law for righteousness—unto whom? Why, "to him that believeth." That believeth what? Why, that believeth that he is so in the hands of the law that nothing can bring him out from the condemnation of that law but the obedient life of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that his own works can have no hand in it, for "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of the whole;" "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." He is led to see that the purpose of Christ's life was to bring out every one from the law into peace with God—every one that believeth in Christ's righteousness—every one that believeth that Christ is the end of the law. Although there are many of the people of God delivered from the law, yet they do not clearly understand that deliverance; you cannot persuade them that now that they are no longer under the law they are not under sin; you cannot persuade them that now they are not under the law, sin hath no dominion over them; you cannot persuade them this, some of them. They are not yet enlightened enough to see the blessedness of their own standing by the righteousness of Jesus Christ; they feel that sin has dominion over their feelings, and that sin has dominion so as to bring their souls into captivity, and to make them sigh, and groan, and form clouds between them and the Lord. And therefore, while they have this experience, they say, I cannot some way understand how it is I am not under sin, while I feel so much of it. Why, it is by faith in Christ's righteousness; your standing by faith frees you from condemnation; as saith the apostle, "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," and that have this new, spiritual existence, and walk with God by faith, which is what the apostle calls walking after the spirit; walking with God by faith in Christ. This is one thing meant, I think, by the jubilee. So that if you would serve God acceptably, it must be by the righteousness of his dear Son; you must come before him as David did; "I will go in the strength of the Lord God;" for there is the

strength of his mercy, and of his promise; "I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." And then mark, another step in this service of God is, that this jubilee was in the seventh month. Here this seventh month evidently denotes completeness. And as their sacred year commenced in the spring, the month Abib, this seventh month would be about the time when the harvest and the vintage were all gathered in; and this is to represent completeness. So that there is in Christ a completeness of provision; there is in Christ a completeness of everything we can need for time and for eternity; there is no deficiency there; the bread is in our Father's house, the grace is in Christ, the promise is in Christ; God in Christ reconciling us unto himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us, having imputed them unto him. The seventh month, therefore, points to the completeness of his death—"Ye are complete in him."

" 'Tis finished,' said his dying breath,
And shook the gates of hell."

And then you observe, again, that this year of jubilee was to be at the end of seven times seven years. And what doth this seven times seven years represent, but the super-eminent perfection of Christ; that it is a kind of perfection set forth by seven times seven, to denote the height of that perfection. And there is no perfection like that perfection that is by Christ Jesus; there is no perfection like that perfection that is brought about by him. Here it is, by this brightest of all perfection, this Holy of holies, this Lord of lords, this King of kings, this song of songs, this perfection of perfections,—here it is God hath shined the perfection of beauty out of Zion. So then, if we would serve God acceptably, we must understand these things, stand out for them, and hereby glorify God for the great things that he hath done. There is no perfection, I say, to equal this seven times, as it were, seven times seven—the sevenfold perfection. "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold, as the light of seven days, when the Lord maketh up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." It is the highest kind of perfection: it is a perfection an archangel can never attain unto, for never will the angelic host, as a body, be called "Jehovah our righteousness," as the church is called. "This is the name wherewith she shall be called: Jehovah our righteousness." Now, then, to serve God acceptably is to lay hold of these things, to understand these things. You will not know how to serve the Lord else, if you do not know this righteousness of Jesus Christ. By your services, instead of glorifying God for his righteousness, you will set that righteousness aside; instead of glorifying God for that completeness that is in Christ, you will in some measure ignorantly set that completeness aside; instead of glorifying God for this seven times sevenfold perfection, the highest of all perfection, why, you will in a measure set it aside; you will almost wonder what in the world you are going to heaven for; not certainly to join in the song of those that sing of what atoning blood hath done, and of what salvation hath done, of what Christ's righteousness hath done, and what Christ's arm hath done, and what the grace of God has done. And yet it is in this way, and in this way only, that God is glorified. As Dr. Goodwin well observes, "The Lord was determined by his people to be glorified to the uttermost; and, therefore, that he may be glorified to the uttermost, he blesses them to the uttermost;" even to the uttermost bounds of the everlasting hills the blessing shall come upon them abundantly, beyond all they can either ask or think while they are in this vale of tears. Now, then, if thou wouldst serve God, and pray to him, and stand out for him, and be acceptable unto him, it must be in this way. But again, in this jubilee the people were to live during that year upon the spontaneous production of the land.

What a beautiful figure is that! How spontaneous are the promises, how free are the promises, how free is his mercy, how free is his grace, how free is his loving-kindness! "I will love them freely." How freely was the Saviour given; how freely he lived, and how freely he died; how freely he rose; how freely he reappeared to his disciples; how freely the Holy Spirit came! Free grace, therefore, shall be the theme of every heaven-born soul. The spontaneous growth. And so, I am sure, to-day, if we get a little succour, a little support, or a little help from the word of the Lord, it must be in the order David prayed for when he said, "Uphold me with thy free spirit." He felt it must all be free, or there could be no hope for him. Again, in this chapter, if a brother got into decay, and waxed poor, those who were rich were to supply him with food, and lend him money, but not upon usury; and the object of this kind treatment was, that the so decayed brother "may" still "live with thee," that he may not go away to other gods, and bear testimony and say, My own God, that I so loved, could not sustain me, and so I must go away. Now the Jews did not always treat their brethren thus; the Jews had to take the conditions of that covenant, and they failed, and down went both the advantages of that covenant and themselves. Now let us take the Lord Jesus Christ here; he takes the conditions of the new covenant, and all his brethren have fallen into decay; they are all in a state, shall I say, of dilapidation; they are all in a state of ruin. "I will raise up," saith Jesus, "the tabernacle of David, and I will raise up its ruins, and make up the breaches thereof." So, if we apply this to Christian experience,—Here is a Christian, he is very happy, very comfortable, gets along very nicely; by-and-bye these comforts leave him, his joys leave him, he gets into decay, he gets into despair, he is very poor, he is very wretched, very miserable, and mourns when he thinks of the days that are past, when in the Lord's light he could walk through darkness. Now, then, how will Jesus Christ deal with such an one? Why, he will come in at the proper time and supply his needs, and he will not lend him money upon usury; we shall presently show what is meant by not lending money upon usury. So the Jews had to take the conditions of that covenant. Now when we spiritualize those conditions, and take them into the new covenant, then we must view the Lord Jesus Christ as taking the conditions of the new covenant, and that what the Jews were to do literally Jesus Christ doth spiritually; so that whatever decay his brethren fall into, which they do in a great variety of senses, all of us; we may be spiritually rich to-day, and miserably poor to-morrow; we may be to-day rejoicing in the riches of the grace of God, and to-morrow fall among thieves, and be stripped, as it were, and left half dead. And then what doth Jesus do? Why, he comes and pours in oil and wine; he does not reproach, he treats us kindly, that we might live with him. And then, again, "if a poor brother be sold unto thee, thou shalt not rule over him with rigour." Now, bless the Lord, we are sold to Jesus Christ, in one sense, for he bought us, bought us with a price; and I am sure he doth not rule us with rigour, and he never will. He himself saith, "I am meek and lowly in heart;" and the more we know of his government the more we shall be attached to his service, the more we shall love him, because he understands all our weaknesses, and knows how to account for them all; he will not rule over us with rigour. And then, again, if a Jew should be sold to a stranger, one of his brethren might redeem him; but whether he was redeemed or not, when the year of jubilee came he was to go from being under this stranger. Well, say you, how do you explain this? Very easily. I was sold to two strangers. I was sold to one, and I got out of that; and then I was sold to another, and I got out of that, and I don't think I shall be sold again. How did you get out? "Why, I got out of both of them by the year of jubilee. First, I was sold to free will, and they ruled over me with rigour; only they did it in a very

kindly manner, you know, very kindly manner—all love, as the man said when he knocked his wife down—all kindness. But I found it hard service; ten thousand duties to do, and it was all self. I should go to hell if I did not do so-and-so, and I could go to heaven only by doing so-and-so. By-and-bye the year of jubilee began to appear; I began to see what Christ had done, and out I came from that; that was one step towards freedom. Then I got among duty-faith; that was the second stranger, and there was not, in some respects, much difference. I went every Sunday. Do, do, do, do, do,—nothing else; taskmaster, taskmaster, nothing else. I used to go home as ill-tempered, and try not to show it either; as fretful and as miserable, and I thought, What is the good of my going? And there, the dear man I have been hearing this morning—dear, holy creature; dear, holy creature—oh dear, I dare say he never had a wrong thought in his life; oh, I should like to live in the same house; I dare say he is never out of temper; I dare say he prays twenty times a day; I dare say he is at the Bible at four o'clock every morning, from four to eight; I dare say he is all religion, inside and out, dear, holy man. And here am I, a wretch of wretches, a sinner of sinners, as fretful as Jonah; what ever will become of me? Well, I was weak enough to think all this; I was right enough in my thoughts of myself, but I was very wrong in my thoughts of the holy man, for I saw it was all pretended holiness, that it was a cheat from first to last. And then I began to say, What is to be done? Why, Christ is all and in all. And then I got into the 54th chapter of Isaiah, and that brought me right out, and I have been out ever since, so that I do not think I shall be sold again. I think it would puzzle all the ingenuity of the devil himself ever again to get me into that bondage. No, the secret is out, "Complete in him;" the secret is out, "A covenant ordered in all things and sure;" the secret is out, he has revealed to me the immutability of his counsel, and all my sins were as so many grains of sand when brought into connection with the great and rolling tide of eternal mercy that swept away the whole, set my soul free; and now I find the Church of England does speak some truth when she says, "His service is perfect freedom;" and so I find it. Here is a God of love and mercy; here is a jubilee; here is a way in which I am to be sold no more; I will not serve another God, let men do what they may with me; no, "I have none in heaven but thee, and none upon the earth I desire beside thee." I am as contented with my God as a glorified spirit:—

"More happy, but not more content,"

as regards the God I serve,—

"Are glorified spirits in heaven."

I am not yet contented, nor you either, with the amount of realization you have; but as regards God himself, the order of his mercy, the sufficiency of his grace, the amplitude of his loving-kindness, the timeliness and suitability of his salvation,—we cannot be more satisfied when we are in heaven with the order in which the Lord has appeared in his mercy than we are now. But I have not done yet,—hardly begun, indeed. These things increase upon me every day. Just experience from day to day what a poor, old, withered, fallen, earthly, carnal, blasted, mildewed, helpless nature you have. Ah, you say, I might as well depend upon a piece of stubble, or an autumnal leaf, for salvation, as depend upon poor, blasted self. Ah, self, get thee behind me; thou savourest not of the things that be of God. Let there be room for Christ to come in; let the gospel come rolling in, in all its majesty of "I will," and "They shall;" there we can live, there we can fly, there we can swim, there we can glory, there we can rejoice in what we have in the Lord our God. "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Blessed is the man whose hope is in the Lord, and who hath for his hope the God of Jacob.

Now it is by the perfection of the Saviour's service, then, that we serve God. Our service is not to make up something that men suppose deficient in his service, no. What a beautiful representation there is given of the Saviour as the servant of God in the 15th Psalm!—that will bring me to the question of putting the money out to usury—"Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?" Not Aaron, for two reasons. First, because his sacrifice could not take away sin, therefore he must give place, and let One come into God's tabernacle that can take away sin, and did. "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle?" Not Aaron, for he will die presently, like all other mortals, and he must give place to one that never dies. Christ laid down his life, but while he was the dying Christ he was at the same time the living God; there was life through death; life and death met at once and at the same time in Christ Jesus the Lord. So that while Aaron could not continue by reason of death, Christ continues by means of death. "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle?" And if he is not in this tabernacle, we might as well be somewhere else, and better too; and if he does not go with us into the new tabernacle that he is giving us, and be with us there, we may say with Moses, "If thy presence"—and Christ is the angel of God's presence—"go not with us, carry us not up hence." But he will go with us, he will go with us; no doubt of that; and will be there with hundreds of you when I am gone home and happy. And "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" Not David, for he is a poor, sinful mortal, and could not reign over his own sins; he must give way, therefore, give up his throne, and give up his sceptre, and give up his royalty, and let a better king take his place. In comes Jesus Christ; he is the king, and he will reign till a sin does not exist in the church; he will reign till the last enemy, death, is finally conquered, and all his subjects are raised in his own royal likeness, in his own divine likeness, making them all kings and priests to God. He is the servant. So if we would serve God it must be in this spirit of faith. God is a spirit, a life-giving spirit, and they that worship him acceptably it must be in this way. Again, "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" Christ Jesus does, because he hath done no sin, and put away the sin of those that have sinned. "He that walketh uprightly." This the Saviour did in perfection. I have been wonderfully delighted, when I look at my deceitful heart, deceiving me every day,—every moment, pretty well, in some shape or another,—to think that there is One that walked in a perfection of uprightness, not for himself,—it was for you, for you. You are upright in the faith, but you are anything but that in the flesh; I know you by knowing myself, and by knowing the word of the Lord. That perfection of uprightness set to our account. "And that worketh righteousness"—which he has, worked out and brought in righteousness—"and speaketh the truth in his heart;" the new covenant truth of God, that covenant of which Christ is the Mediator, was heart-work, and Jesus Christ did speak the truth in his heart. He had the love of God in his heart; he had the sovereignty of God in his heart, the Spirit of God in his heart, the promises of God in his heart, every item of the new covenant in his heart. There was nothing in his heart that was contrary to the heart of God. "Grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God, even thy God, hath blessed thee for ever." That is the person. And if you dwell in God's tabernacle, it must be by receiving this Priest; if you dwell in his holy hill, it must be by receiving this King, where "grace reigns to pardon crimson sins;" if you abide in this tabernacle, it must be by uprightness in the faith, receiving Christ's uprightness, and receiving his righteousness, and speaking the truth in your heart. Why do I lay emphasis on that? Why, the child of God can do no otherwise. I never preached a doctrine in my life yet but I have done it with all my heart and soul. I was going to say, if I am lost at last, I can say, independent of man, simply in the sight of the blessed God, if there was not another believer upon the face of the earth

besides myself, that every one of these new covenant truths are dearer to my heart than mortal life. And so you can say that you do speak the truth in your heart, that you do believe every gospel truth with your heart, that you do love them with your heart, that you do rejoice in them at times in your heart. "I rejoice in thy word, as one that findeth great spoil." The perfection of service is in Christ; we by faith follow after him as our forerunner, and serve God in our little and humble way. "He that backbiteth not with his tongue;" Christ never did. And if there is one sin in our day that needs more pardon than another, it is that of backbiting; so that really there is great need for a Saviour that never did backbite with his tongue. Some people seem to do hardly anything else; you have only to be in their company for ten minutes, and you are robbed of every sacred and spiritual feeling you have. However, they are quite welcome to the trade; we are sorry to see it among the sons and daughters of Zion, truly so. It is so unlike the Saviour; he did not backbite with his tongue. "Nor doeth evil to his neighbour;" he did good to everybody, he did evil to none. "Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour:" which he never did. He may well be called the hiding-place; I am sure there are plenty that need him as the hiding-place in this as well as in other respects. "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned." A vile person there means a hypocrite; the Pharisees, their object was to get on in the world, to devour widows' houses and aggrandize themselves, and they did not know any better way of doing it than making long prayers, and imposing upon the people the idea that those men were wonderfully holy. Whenever you hear ministers speak in that tone; I am not come—that is what they ought to say—I am not come to preach Jesus Christ to sinners; I am come in his name, but it is to tell you how good I am, how holy I am, and how pious I am, and to lay out a nice long train of duties for you to perform. But the Lord saith of such, "They shall not profit my people;" the Lord's people run away from them, because they are full of enmity against the truth, while making great pretention to fleshy sanctity. There is a generation pure in their own eyes, but they are not washed from their filthiness. The real child of God despises such a system; he hates the whole of it. "But he honoureth," that is, Christ honoureth, "them them that fear the Lord." His disciples feared the Lord, and how he has honoured them! And his people now fear the Lord; and I could, but I must not stop here to do so, show how many honours he puts upon them. Now this 15th Psalm belongs to Christ, although you may follow after; the Lord help you to take up all you can; but still, let him be first. "That sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." Is not this Jesus Christ? Did he not swear to his own hurt? Did he not enter into a vow in which our sins became his, in which the curse of the law became his, in which the bitterness of death became his? Swearing to his own hurt. Did he ever change? The same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. If, then, we would serve God acceptably, it must be by Jesus Christ. And not only so, but "he that putteth not out his money to usury." Now to put your money out to usury is to lend a man some money, not to do him good, but just to entrap him. I will lend him the money; I have ascertained he is worth so-and-so. He shall pay me ten, or fifteen, or twenty per cent; I know he will not be able to pay me; I will fix the time, and then, when the time comes, I will step in, if he cannot pay me, and take his bed from under him; that is what I will do. That is the way the Jews do now. I never dealt with a Jew yet but I have been bit. I have dealt with three Jews (I am not going to say there are not some exceptions to this rule); three Jews have I dealt with in my time, and every one bit me;—afraid of them now. Now that is putting money out upon usury; you care not if you work the utter ruin of the person to whom you seem to do a favour, if you can but enrich yourself. Now what is the money the Saviour puts out? His truth, his truth; that is the money: lets his people out as much as they need; does not put

it out upon usury, and say, You must pay me so much for it, or else I will ruin you; no. But stop, say you, I do not know; I know he does say there was a man with five talents, and he came and said, "Lord, these talents have gained five more;" and another said, "Thy two talents have gained two more." There, say some, that upsets you altogether. Do you think so? Better not go too fast. The question is, that while the five talents gained five, who had the gain? the master that gave the money? No; the servant that received the money. Why, I have had the gain myself. And then, while the two talents gained two more, who had the two? Did the master take them, and say, "Give me the two, and go to work again?" No; keep them yourself. What a kind master! Who would not serve such a master as that? Then comes the one with the one talent. Oh yes, I have got the letter of truth, that is the one talent; and I have wrapped it up very neatly, and put it in the earth, hidden it in the earth very carefully; would not let it go into circulation. "Take it from him,"—and give it to me, the master? No; "Give it to him that hath the ten talents;" he likes the truth, let him have some more. It is true he received *them* as his own servants for ever, and in that sense received both principal and interest; but then their reception by this Lord of all is to their infinite advantage, and both principal and interest for their eternal enjoyment; in these essentials the one talent (mere dead letter) servant came short. Who would not go into such a trade as that? Why, he lends us money, takes care we do not lose, and gives us all the gain. Decidedly he does; that is the way he puts his money out; he does not put it out to usury, no; all he asks of you is an acknowledgment; all he asks of you is, "Dost thou love me?" Why, Lord, I cannot but love such a master as thou art; I cannot but love such a Saviour, such a Jesus Christ. If I go on like this, I shall be rich by-and-by. Of course you will. He has unsearchable riches at command. And some of us can say that his blessed truth hath brought many advantages to us; and will he ever take those advantages from us? No, never; no, never; no, never; no, never. He will take care that we shall so trade as to fulfil, mystically and spiritually, that scripture where the Lord says, "None shall appear before me empty." Not one of his people, though he gives them all first, to appear before him empty: yet ultimately not one shall appear before him empty; each shall come and say, "Lord, I was a bondman in the land of Egypt; thou didst bring me out; thou hast given me these treasures, thou hast given me the fruit of the land, and now I have brought of the fruit of the land as an acknowledgment of the wonderful things thou hast done for my soul." "He putteth not out his money to usury," then; all the good we can get by the truth of God we are to have. Ah, say you, I shall get eternal life by it, eternal salvation by it. Certainly you will; you will win Jesus Christ by it. The man that is in love with the testimony of Christ—Christ is in his love with him,—he that receiveth Christ's word receiveth him; and he that thus receiveth him receiveth God the Father. Who, then, in his true senses, would not pray and seek to be a true servant of God? The wages of sin is death, but the reward of the gospel is everlasting life. The wages of worldly pleasures are the bitterest dregs of wretchedness and woe, but the reward of the gospel is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. The wages of Phariseism is the damnation of hell, the reward of the gospel is a throne of glory. And beside all this, no weapon formed against any of these can prosper, nor can any tongue that may rise in judgment against them ultimately succeed. This freedom is their heritage; and their righteousness, being of God, is eternal and always the same, so that their course cannot break down; at famine and destruction they may laugh, nor fiery furnaces nor lions' dens shall sever them from that heavenly Lord and Master, whom they shall for ever love and serve.

But your time is gone, and so I must leave the other parts to some other time.