

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE RIGHTEOUS.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 8TH, 1864, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"But the righteous into life eternal."—Matthew xxv. 46.

THIS verse states the destiny of the lost and of the saved; that the one is to go away into everlasting punishment, but the other into life eternal. This doctrine of endless torment is, as most of you are aware, reckoned by many people—I may say many now—unscriptural. And I certainly have myself read, I believe, nearly all the learned, and some of the simple, works that have been written to prove that there will be an end, in some period of eternity, to the sufferings of the lost. But I remain just where I was, quite unconvinced of the truth of their position. I will not hide it either from myself or others, that I felt I should like to see such a doctrine established as that of the annihilation of the lost; that is, if the Bible itself authorized such a doctrine. For the idea of being lost, lying under the wrath of Almighty God, without mitigation, without termination,—there is something, the more deeply you think upon it, the more you tremble at it. But terrible as it is, I am myself constrained still to hold the same doctrine I ever did upon that, namely, the endless misery of the lost. They tell us that the word *everlasting* is frequently used in a limited sense; as when the Lord gave Abraham Canaan for an everlasting possession; and when he gave the priesthood to the Levites for an everlasting priesthood. In these cases, say they, the word *everlasting* is used in a limited sense; and so it is; I think no one can deny that, except that the word *everlasting* in those cases acquires an eternity in the antitypical realities signified by the land of Canaan and by the Levitical priesthood. But what is it that brings us to the conclusion that the word *everlasting* in those cases has a limited meaning? It is this, that while we have the word *everlasting* used there in relation to that dispensation, we also have a clear account of the end of that dispensation. The time did come when that dispensation waxed old and vanished away; and we learn by the end which is set before us—for there is the end of it—that the word *everlasting*, and the words *for ever* there, certainly have a limited meaning, and mean the Old Testament dispensation. But when we come to the final destiny of the wicked, and read of everlasting punishment, and that they shall be punished with everlasting destruction, and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever, and the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; I certainly should be inclined myself to think from such language that the misery is endless. But still, those words I have now quoted, strong as they are, would not by themselves establish the eternity of the punishment of the lost. That which is to me an insurmountable difficulty in my way of receiving the doctrine of annihilation is this; that when the wicked are cast into the lake of fire, there is no account of their end. If they are to die at some future time out

of existence, there is no account of it. If hell at some time is to cease with them, there is no account of it. If they are to be annihilated at some future period, there is no account of it. And, therefore, their being annihilated at some future period, their misery being terminated at some future period, is purely and entirely assumption. And I think we should never assume anything. There is the word *everlasting*; there are the words *for ever and for ever*, and we have nothing said to authorize a termination of those periods. If we had something to show that the fire would go out; or, if not the fire, the torment, should cease, that the worm should die, that the creature should cease to exist, and that would be a great event; millions, unnumbered millions, will unquestionably, at that tremendous day, be found on the Saviour's left hand. And it is not likely that, while the Lord has given us an account of the drowning of the world, of the burning of the cities of the plain, of the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host, and of the destruction of the Jewish nation, as well as of heathen nations; it is not likely, had he intended the annihilation of the lost, that he would have withholden from us that great event. He would have given us some account in his word of the period when the lost should cease to be. But the Bible contains no such account. Therefore it is that I still hold, unshakenly hold, the terrible, the solemn doctrine of endless torment: I admit that it is indeed awful to the last degree; but then it is scriptural, there it is. We are creatures of a day, and it is not for us to rebel against the Judge of all. He doeth as he pleaseth among the armies of the heavens and the inhabitants of the earth. I am sure the more you look into that doctrine, the more in earnest you will be concerning the salvation of your soul. Ah, then, what solemn matters are implied in the language of our text, taking into connection therewith the preceding clause!—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." When, therefore, those who hold the doctrine of annihilation can bring scriptures to show that after the lost are in the lake of fire, a circumstance occurs in which they cease to be; but no such scriptures being found, I must still take those terms, *everlasting* and *for ever and ever*, in their absolute form.

I may just, before I enter upon the subject, observe that the two words *everlasting* and *eternal*—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal;" the word in the original language is the same; it is the same Greek word translated *everlasting* that is in our text translated *eternal*. Our translators adopted this, no doubt, for the sake of euphony; that is, for the sake of excellency of sound. They reckoned that the verse would read better by that little variation. And by closely watching the Scriptures you will find that the Scriptures are very often very careful in varying words where the meaning substantially is the same, in order to make it read with the more force, and sound the better. There are variations in Greek words which are not found in English words. I suppose no language ever was or ever will be so musical as was the Greek language. I think it is reckoned the most elegant language that now exists. Our language is plain and forcible, and rather rough, and therefore comes not near the Greek in elegance, in eloquence, in excellency of sound; but that is of very little, or, indeed, of no essential importance unto us. Having, then, made these remarks just to show that I still hold the doctrine of endless misery; I still hold that to be the scriptural doctrine; for there is no account in the Bible of the annihilation of the lost; and until I can find that account, I have no right to believe men's assumption. We find nothing in the word of God to authorize that belief. These are matters of infinite and eternal weight, and may we never be left to trifle with our own souls, to trifle with these eternal things, but that we may feel their importance and their weight more and more; that we may not be found among those chaffy

and trifling professors that care but little what they hear, care but little how they hear, care but little which way they walk, care but little in reality what kind of religion their religion is; and yet at the same time there is the solemn truth that "strait is the 'right' gate, and narrow is the way, and few there be that find it."

I shall this morning occupy all your time in setting forth *those distinctions which the Lord makes between them that are his and them that are not his*. And we have, in connection with our text, those distinctions very clearly set before us. How will he separate one from the other at the last day? How will that be done? If you can ascertain how that will be done, you will see that there is a close analogy between the separation which shall then be brought about between the sheep and the goats; between the separation then to be brought about, and the separation now spiritually brought about, there is a close analogy. I will mention five of the elements that will make up the distinction of the saints of God. And as I go along I shall have to show that we possess all those elements now. If we are the people of God, we possess now, by the quickening power of the Eternal Spirit in our souls, all the elements that will make up the excellency of the body at that day, that will make the body a glorious body, like unto the body of Jesus Christ. You will find the believer has in him all these elements now. And this is the first thing we have to look after in this matter of salvation. He shall, therefore, separate the sheep from the goats at that day by raising them from the dead first. He shall raise them first in incorruption. "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption." Just as now the soul is born of God, the soul of the Christian is born of God; born of an incorruptible seed by the word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever. Now let me look at the evidences as I go along. If your soul be born of an incorruptible seed by the word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever, I will tell you one evidence of it, and it is this,—that nothing but that kind of gospel by which the Lord hath quickened your soul will be your support. Now the promise in Christ Jesus is yea and amen. There, your being brought to see what Christ hath done, and to rest upon what he hath done, there the promise is, "I will never leave thee." You see in that promise there is not a word said about your sins, whether you are good or bad; there is not a word said about your temperament or about your circumstances. There is the positive declaration that "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Now if you are born of God, nothing short of that can be your support. You will see and feel so much of your state as a sinner as to say before a heart-searching God, "O God, thou Judge of all, thou knowest that I feel if there be the slightest conditionality in thy promise; if it be not positive by the finished work of Jesus, by thine immutable oath, by thine infallible faithfulness; if my goodness can earn it, or my sins interfere with it; Lord, thou knowest that I feel in that case I could have no hope. But if I am complete in Jesus, and if the promise be mediatorially made yea and amen, and if the promise be a sworn promise, and if thou hast, as it were, pledged thy very being, sworn by thyself, to fulfil the promise, then I have hope." Now, if thou art brought thus far, thou art a righteous man; thou art a believer in Jesus, thou art born of an incorruptible seed, as is proved by nothing short of this yea and amen promise being your support. You are no longer then under sin, no longer under the law, no longer under death, no longer at the Saviour's left hand; thou art a righteous man. Thus the analogy, then. Again, the body sown in weakness, but raised in power. And so now you have, if you are born of God, what you once had not, and that is power, power to understand God's truth. You can understand it now; you can see the way in which God is just, and yet your justifier; you can see the way in which he is both just and merciful. You can see the way in which he hath chosen you, that it is entirely by

his grace; you can see the way in which you are to go to heaven. You have the spirit of power. And there was once that weakness in your visual power, I might rather say such blindness, that all the preaching, and all the reading, and all the talking in the world could not give you power even to see men as trees walking, spiritually, much less to see every man clearly. So that you were so weak-minded while in a state of nature that you could not understand these things; and now you have power. This knowledge is power, you know. But then take the word *power* in the more proper sense, that you have power with God. Sown in the first Adam in weakness, but now you have power with God. Let your trouble be whatever it may, you look to the Lord. And the Lord looks, and I must tell you this, because it is an encouraging truth; I have found it in my own experience, as well as I see it in the Bible; the Lord looks very much upon the meditations of your heart; he sees what you are thinking about; he looks very much upon your ruminations, and troubles, and doubts, and tremblings, and fearings. And you look east, west, north, and south; everything seems to go against you; and there is a sort of secret sigh, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me."

Now, then, what is this but power, you will presently find, with God? The Lord sees what you need, and he says, "Before they call"—there it is—"I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear." So that you have power with God. Let your trouble be what it may, the Lord help you to look to him. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are; yet he prayed to the Lord, and the Lord heard, both in withholding rain, and in sending fire to consume the sacrifice; the Lord heard. So he will now; he will hear, and the Lord will step in in his mercy, and make you happy; and he will step in in his providence, and deliver you, and show his kindness for you; and thus you have power with God. And so at the last day the body shall be raised up with power. And so the Christian has the element of power in him now, and that element is confidence in God, that element is faith in Christ. "Have faith in God." "All things are possible to him that believeth." The third element of separation is that of honour. "Sown in dishonour, raised in honour," or glory. And what have we about us by nature but dishonour? Our very righteousnesses are as so many dishonours to us, and all our sins are dishonours to us; our state is a dishonour to us; we are all under disgrace, and all under dishonour, by nature. But quickened by his grace, we are raised in glory. And what is that glory? Why, Christ is our glory. And if we are raised up from dishonour, from sin, from the curse, from the state we are in by nature, we can then understand the meaning of the apostle when he saith, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Another element of distinction is that of spirituality. "Sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them." You read such a scripture as this, that "he hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings;" and then you want to know what those spiritual blessings are, and you soon find out that those spiritual blessings denote those provisions of adaptation to our necessities. Do I need life? That life is in Christ. Do I need sanctification? The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. And do I need justification? In the Lord have I righteousness. Do I need sustaining? In the Lord have I strength. And do I need wisdom?—do I need, in a word, all those things not only that make up, but that accompany salvation? They are all found in Christ. Now you can understand these spiritual things; you know what they are, that they are in Christ, and that you are complete in the blessings that are in Christ. The fifth element of separation is that of heavenly; born in the image of the earthly, we are now to bear the image of the heavenly. So if you are in your soul conformed now to

the image of the heavenly, then your hope will be in heaven, your affection will be in heaven, the rest that you seek is in heaven, the God that you seek is in heaven, the blessedness that you seek is in heaven. Now he shall thus separate them the one from the other in this way. See what a complete separation it is. Here is the soul born of an incorruptible seed; see how nicely that will accord with the incorruptibility of the body, in contrast to its present corruptibility. Here is the soul, having in it the element of omnipotent and eternal power, for God is its strength; see how nicely that element, when brought into full play, will accord with the power in which the body shall be raised. Here is the soul having in it all the glory of the gospel; see how that will accord with the glorious state of the body. Here is the soul spiritual, having a spiritual life, a spiritual light, and hungering for spiritual things; see how the soul is already fitted for its glorified body. Here is the soul looking to heaven, and looking to heaven as its home. "Jerusalem, my happy home," the place where we shall dwell for ever. How is the soul thus fitted already for the resurrection body? Now, between the heaven-born soul and the elements of the body there is a complete antagonism, or, to use the plural, innumerable antagonisms. The tendencies of corrupt nature are at war with the desires of the heaven-born soul. Here is the Christian, now, with two classes of elements in him; the one from God, the other from Satan; the one consisting of that that fits the soul for the glorified body and for the glorified state; the other that that would fit you for hell but for that separation the Lord hath made. So how true it is, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven"! Now, if what I am saying be right, if this be true, God of heaven and earth! what will become of ten thousand times ten thousand, that now make a profession of the name of Jesus Christ, that know nothing of being born again of this incorruptible seed, that know nothing of being raised up by the almighty power of God, that know nothing of the glory of God's eternal salvation, that know nothing of spiritual things, and that their hope is based upon something more or less that they do,—that the realities of eternity that are laid up in heaven are things for which they have no taste. You cannot offer a greater insult to them than to preach the new covenant, which is the only heavenly covenant that will outlive time. How clear it is, then, that that which shall be done to fit the body for glory must now be done to fit your soul for heaven, or when you die, you are a damned man! When you come to a dying hour, if your soul hath not in it this incorruptible seed, if your soul be not raised into the perfection of Christ, if your soul be not raised into the power of Christ, if your soul be not raised into a spiritual life, and conformed to spiritual things, and if your hope be not in this new covenant heaven which Christ hath prepared, then, when you come to die, your soul—with all your profession, and all your doings, and all your morality, and all your piety—your soul is no more fit for the mansions of the blessed than the devil himself is fit for them. "Ye must be born again." Your soul is no more fit for heaven than your body is now fit for heaven. Your body could not enjoy heaven; you could not endure heaven. There is not the kind of food there that you want for your mortal body; there is not the kind of sociality there that would suit your mortal body; there is not the kind of employment that would suit your mortal body. You could not go to heaven in your present body: Enoch went to heaven, but he underwent the change that the saints shall undergo at the last day, and Elijah in the same manner. This is the way he will separate his people. Oh, what a difference between the two!—the one incorruptible, free from corruption; the one standing in eternal power, free from weakness; the one standing in a perfection of glory in Christ, free from dishonour; the one standing in all the spiritual excellency of Christ: the others left in their sins, in their guilt, in their corruption, in their wretchedness, to go away into everlast-

ing punishment. Thus, then, the righteous man is the man that is born of God, that has all those elements in his soul that fit the soul for the glorified body; and thereby that he becomes, body and soul, fitted for that eternal glory which he shall enjoy. If this be scriptural, then, which it is, what becomes of your ceremonial religion? what becomes of your formality? what becomes of your creature doing? Never forget that true religion lies in a new existence, and a transition from our old to a new existence is not a transition that can be wrought by any creature whatever; no, it must be by the Spirit of God, the grace of God, the power of God: as I have said, "Ye must be born again." Now I hope I have made the analogy clear. I felt anxious to point out this, in order that you may examine, from time to time, yourselves, and say, Am I born of this incorruptible seed? Am I made a believer in the perfection that is in Christ? Have I power with God? Have I spiritual eyes to see? Have I a hunger and a thirst for spiritual things? Is my hope in this new covenant heaven? If these be not my characteristics, I may indeed solemnly question whether I know anything of the great secret that is with them that fear the Lord, and to whom he shows his covenant. Separation, then. I say nothing of the different destinies between the two. There stands the one in his corruption, clothed with all his sins; weak, carnal, earthly, devilish, as miserable in appearance as he is in reality, miserable in reality as he is in appearance; down they sink to rise no more. Oh, then, if we are brought to know something of the difference the Lord makes now between the precious and the vile, can we too much glorify that God that has done such great things for us?

But I, secondly, take up the pastoral idea. The Saviour appears as a shepherd, and his sheep are to hear his voice. I will just give a threefold representation of his voice; and if you hear and understand his voice in that threefold sense, then you are sheep; if not, you may call in question whether you are sheep. The first is, "I," he says, "am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." There is the door of salvation. Canst thou see that nothing but Jesus' obedient life and atoning death can open the door of heaven unto thee, the door of life, and the door of mercy? And can you see he has done that, and is that attractive to you, and are you aiming to enter in by faith in what he has done? that you are already prepared to give him the honour of being the end of the law, the end of sin and death, and that you can truly say, other hope have you none, other confidence have you none, and other way have you none? And are you sometimes, when looking to this matter—Christ as the door—is there something in this, at times, that makes you comfortable, and you get a little help by the way? What is this but green pastures, as it were, and what is this but drinking of the still waters? Now, then, if thou hearest his voice, thou wilt hear this part of his voice, "I am the door." You will seek no other way. Oh! the more you see how he is the door, the more dear he will be to your heart. We live in a day when there are ten thousand feasible, because gilded with a vast amount of pretended holiness, and piety, and sincerity, and wishing for the conversion of the whole world, all covered over with a vast variety of plausibility, so that, if it were possible, it should deceive the very elect. But if thou art rightly taught, thou wilt turn a deaf ear to the whole of them, and see that Jesus is the door; there thou wilt stay, and there thou wilt stop, and there thou wilt hope, and there thou wilt live. And thou wilt see why all the sacrifices of the Old Testament dispensation were to be offered at the door of the tabernacle to point out this great truth. So, then, Jesus' sacrifice is the antitypical sacrifice, and is the door of escape from sin, from wrath, from famine, from all danger. "I am the door." If thou art one of his sheep, thou wilt hear this part of his voice. The next respect in which you will hear and understand his voice will be his faithfulness. He was the good shepherd. He saw the wolf coming, but did not leave the sheep; he saw

the thief coming, but did not leave the sheep; he saw death coming; but did not leave the sheep; he saw all our sins coming, but did not leave the sheep; he saw Satan coming, and said, "Now is your hour, and the power of darkness;" but he did not leave the sheep. If thou hast heard his voice in this department, thou wilt set to thy seal unfeignedly, from the very centre and with all the powers of thy soul, when Jesus saith, "I am the good shepherd; I lay down my life for the sheep." Ah, you will hear this part of his voice, and instead of relying upon your faithfulness in abiding by him, you will rely upon his faithfulness in abiding by you. Hence saith David, in the last verse of the 119th Psalm, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments." What, cannot you find yourself, David? No, I don't know where I am exactly—hardly know whether I am one of thine or not; but if thou art pleased to seek me, and once more bring me to see that thou art the faithful shepherd, gathering the lambs with thine arm, carrying them in thy bosom, then I shall again be established. Now what sayest thou to this? Dost thou love him as the door, and dost thou love him in his faithfulness in abiding by the sheep, laying down his precious life for them? If so, thou art a righteous man; that is, you are right with God; that's the idea running all through my discourse this morning. Third, you will hear his voice also in the ultimate safety of his sheep—"My sheep shall never perish, I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them me"—look at it! you are indebted to God the Father for coming into his hands—"is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hands." If I am speaking to any Wesleyans this morning—if you be sincere, and if the Lord should open your eyes, you won't be a Wesleyan another moment; you will say, I went into that chapel a low Arminian, and I am come out a thorough high Calvinist; for I now see that none of the sheep of Christ can perish; I now see that he holds them in his hands—that God the Father holds them in his hands; and you might as well talk of God Almighty himself being dethroned as to talk of one of these being lost. That is his voice; and that voice his sheep will follow. And if some one says, Ah, well, I don't think it matters much whose voice we follow, that is a sad evidence against you, for he says, "A stranger's voice they will not follow."

Again, he appears also as a king. Now, then, you must have upon earth the elements that fit the soul for the glorified body; you must have upon earth the elements that fit the soul for glorification itself. The soul will be glorified before the body, and all those elements that fit the soul for glorification will be brought into perfect action as you enter heaven. The incorruption, the power, the spirituality, the glory, the heavenly element, will all be brought into action as the soul enters heaven.—"The spirits of just men made perfect." Thus, if you hear his voice, and reject all others,—follow his voice, that's another proof thou art a righteous man.

But we come to the kingdom. He shall say unto them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." So that not only have you those elements in you, and you distinguish the Shepherd's voice, that is, his truth, from all the doctrines of men, but you will also receive the testimony of his kingdom. Now let me be careful here. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," expressly for you, "from the foundation of the world." Well, if I were to die to-day—I don't know that I shan't, I don't know that I shall, that's the Lord's concern, not mine—and to-morrow were the judgment day, and the Lord said, "Come, ye blessed of my Father," that would be sure to take me up; that's my doctrine, that's just it. "Blessed with all spiritual blessings," according as "chosen from the foundation of the world." "Inherit the kingdom

prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Sure to take me up, that would—sure to. Whereas it would thrust others away, those that hate this doctrine, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." I have something more to say upon this part that I am afraid I shall not be able to say as I want to say it. The apostle Paul felt concerned that the people of God should understand this very truth upon which I am now dwelling—namely, the foreordination of the kingdom to the people, and the people to the kingdom; and together with that which is implied in it, the immoveability of the kingdom. In the twelfth chapter of the Hebrews he describes the Mount Sion, "Ye are come unto mount Sion,"—neither time nor space allows me to quote it all. When he had traced out the various aspects of Mount Sion and the city of God, in which he had shown those very same truths, in all solemnity he saith, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh" from heaven. You profess to be Christians, and you object to these truths because of their stability and certainty. Hence the Galatians were led astray upon this, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven;" that is, the ceremonial heaven. And his voice of judgment did shake the ceremonial heaven. Christ in the beginning laid the foundations of the Jewish earth, and the Jewish heavens were the work of his hands—"They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed," which they were: "but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." The heavens, then, in the first place, mean the Jewish heavens that are shaken to pieces, and are carried away like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, never again to appear. "And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." Can the love of God be staggered or shaken? No. Can his choice be shaken? No. Can his eternal decree to life be shaken? No. Can the foundation he has laid in Sion be shaken? No. Can the foundations of the New Jerusalem be shaken? No. Can the walls of salvation be shaken? No. Can the Sun of righteousness be turned into darkness? No. Can the moon of the gospel die, and turn into blood? No. Can new covenant stars fall to the earth? No. Can God's sworn covenant be shaken? No. Can his people be shaken out of their life, and their standings, and their inheritances? No. Though the earth be removed, the Jewish earth, and carried into the midst of the sea, yet there is a gospel still remains; the streams of that gospel making glad the city of the living God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. Then the apostle sums up the whole of it thus: "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." Now these are the premises, then, brought into these elements, these elements of the truth, these are the premises upon which you are to work, these are the principles upon which you are to act.

Now it is our collection for the Aged Pilgrims' Friends' Society to-day, and what you give, give from these principles, out of love to God's truth; and then the Saviour will say to you, "I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink." Now the righteous are not admitted into heaven on the ground that they have done these things; but these things stand as evidences in their favour that they did, out of love to the saints, do these things. And the others are not sent to perdition because they did not do these things, but their not having brotherly love was the evidence they did not belong to Christ.