

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

FOLLOW THIS ADVICE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 4TH, 1866, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“ Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace ; thereby good shall come unto thee.”—Job xxii. 21.

The next chapter is a kind of answer to these words, wherein Job setteth forth his own deep longing, both of heart and soul, to find the Lord ; his helplessness, his sincerity, and the immutability of the blessed God. So that these words, which Eliphaz thus addressed to Job, were not attributable to him in the sense that Eliphaz intended them ; because Eliphaz here treated Job as though Job knew not the Lord, as though he was not already acquainted with him, and as though he was not already at peace with him, and as though he had not already realized the good that is here indicated. We shall therefore take the words as applicable, according to the analogy of the word of God, to the Lord's people in all ages. We shall leave Job out of our consideration of the text, and leave out the idea of the wrong application of the words in the first place. And we also know, and it is a very solemn thing to consider, that there is a line of distinction to be drawn between the letter and the spirit of the word of the Lord ; that is, that the letter, unaccompanied by the spirit, is sure to fall to the ground ; and that therefore the words of our text will apply to those only to whom the Lord is pleased to apply them, and to no more. It is not natural for us to seek, at least not in a manner that is in keeping with the vast and solemn importance of the subject, an acquaintance with the Lord ; for Satan persuades every natural man that he already knows quite enough ; and therefore each is, generally speaking, content, until the Lord is pleased to convince the sinner of the necessity of a vital, experimental, and personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing that vengeance is to be taken on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel. I will therefore at once proceed to notice our text, and how it applies to us. First, I will notice *some of those experiences by which we become savingly acquainted with the Lord*. Secondly, *the peace that is here advised*, “and be at peace.” Thirdly, *the promise*, “thereby good shall come unto thee.”

First, then, I notice, *a saving acquaintance with God*, “ Acquaint now thyself with him.” The word of the Lord speaketh very beautifully upon this matter. To have a saving acquaintance with him is to have that which is better than silver and gold, yea, than much fine gold, and all things we can desire are not to be compared to a saving acquaintance with

the blessed God. An acquaintance with him is indeed a tree of life, and happy is every one that retaineth the same. First, then, the church of God by the word of the Lord becomes attractive. I do not know, in this first part of our subject, that I can do better than just notice, step by step, the language of wisdom in bringing a sinner into acquaintance with these things. "Wisdom hath builded her house; she hath hewn out her seven pillars." Now, if we take this house to be Jesus Christ, and the seven pillars, as the learned have very well said, a definite for an indefinite number, and those pillars stand as an attraction, and refer evidently to the prophets and the apostles. Well, then, let the house be the Lord Jesus Christ, and the pillars are ornamental pillars; the house is built first, and the pillars come afterwards as kind of attractions. This has been the business of ministers in all ages, to aim to be the means of attracting poor sinners to wisdom's house. Let it, then, first mean the Lord Jesus Christ. "Wisdom hath builded her house," and this is to become attractive. This is in accordance with the Saviour's own words: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Then it comes to this; you are a sinner, and you are hastening into the presence of your Judge as fast as time can carry you. Now, how are you prepared to meet your Judge? What will you say and what will you do? for every one of your sins will be there, and God himself will be witness against you. This is what a convinced sinner feels. Now, he says, how shall I escape this? Then the answer is, that Jesus Christ is the refuge, he is the hiding-place. "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." You will see that Jesus has become the refuge, that he has become the surety for sinners. If sin be called a debt, he hath paid the debt off. And if you are led to believe this, and thus led to look to him, and to desire that the Lord would bring you into the blessedness of the freedom that is by what he has done, then this is one step towards acquaintance with him. And if sin be called guilt, or if we look at it in that criminal form which leads us to the appalling and terrific idea of its guilt, then it is written upon the very forefront of this house, yea, it is the language of the Lord himself, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins." And if sin appear, which is only another thought meaning the same thing in substance, in its terrific form as the way of condemnation—and a terrible condemnation it is; it is a condemnation of body, and it is a condemnation of soul; it is a condemnation in life, and a condemnation in death and in judgment, and to remediless woe; then the answer is, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Now then, what say we to this? Can we say that Jesus Christ has been made so far attractive to us that we see he has paid the mighty debt that sinners owed, that he has blotted out the thick clouds of their sins, that he hath taken away the condemnation, that he hath taken away the curse; he was made a curse for us? Oh, to have a clear understanding of this, and to seek the Lord in accordance with it—whatever we may delight in trifling with, whatever we may play with, or whatever we may make a jest of, there is something in

these eternal truths that forbids anything and everything in the shape of lightness or in the shape of playfulness. There is a gravity, a solidity, a solemnity, a ponderosity, an eternity of weightiness, that made the Saviour himself sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, falling down to the ground. I am sure that those who are convinced thus of the solemn importance of a saving acquaintance with the blessed God by Christ Jesus, must feel it to be one very great part of their burden that they are not more sincere, that they are not more earnest, that they are not more diligent in seeking the Lord; for he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and no employment for the soul is so advantageous as thus diligently seeking him. So the apostle saith, "That ye may show the same diligence unto the end;" and again he saith, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." Now, Jesus Christ then is thus the way in which we are to acquaint ourselves, as the Lord enables us, with him. This acquainting ourselves with him must be understood in the same form that we must understand such scriptures as the following:—"Save yourselves from this untoward generation;" that is, by holding fast God's truth, wherein everything is made straight and right. Then again, "Building up yourselves in your most holy faith;" that is, by seeking the Lord. "Keep yourselves in the love of God;" that is, staying in the faith, staying in the testimony of his love, never giving up the testimony of his love. "Continue ye in my love." "Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." The next thing is that of provision. It is said of this wisdom, that is, this gospel wisdom, that "she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table, she hath sent forth her maidens;" all of which course must be understood figuratively. You are aware that this is one of the modes in which the Lord sets forth his mercy. The gospel is compared to a supper, compared to a feast, "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow of wines on the lees well refined." The idea is, that the people who are thus made acquainted with the Lord, shall be sustained by him. We said just now that Jesus Christ may be looked at as the house; and "We," saith the church of old, "shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thine holy temple." Therefore sustenance is the meaning there intended. The Lord sustains his people by means of his word. The promise sometimes is like wine to cheer the heart, sometimes like a cup of cold water to slake the thirst of the feverish soul, and sometimes like a feast that strengthens and delights, and makes us fat and flourishing, and it is that that sustains us. The idea is that we are under the Lord's care, and that he hath all that by which all our needs are supplied. But the points I wish to aim at here are chiefly to show the kind of way in which the Lord draws us to himself. "Wisdom hath sent forth her maidens; she crieth upon the highest places of the city," that is, of course, in the most public manner possible; "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither; as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live." Now she saith to him that is simple, "Come, eat of my bread;" that is, a man who has but one end in view; he says, my end is to know Jesus Christ died for me to know, that God hath loved me, and to know that he hath called me, and that I may live with him, and walk with him, and be found at the last at his right hand. Now she saith to him, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled;" keeping up the same idea, that of the sustenance of the gospel. "Acquaint now thyself with him." Well, even those that know most of the Lord, want to know more; they say, We want to know more and more of the Christ of God, and of that freedom we have by him; we want to know more and more of the provisions

of the gospel, and we want to know more and more of that bread of life and that wine of the kingdom that sustaineth us in the service of God. And then mark the advice—"Forsake the foolish, and live." I will just run through the different descriptions of the foolish that we are to forsake. Forsake the foolish adviser. Job's wife advised him to anathematise God and die; and so there, "Forsake the foolish, and live, and go in the way of understanding." So if anyone or anything advise us to anathematise the truth, to give up Christ, to give up the truth, and to give up the service of God, then the advice is to forsake such, because their advice leads to death. And we are also to forsake the foolish traveller. Hence you read, "The labour of the foolish weareth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city." Jesus Christ's perfect work is the way to the city, and those who are seeking their way to the ultimate city of God by any other means than by the righteousness and by the perfect atonement of Jesus Christ, these are foolish, that know not how to go to the city; for there is not anything that defileth, worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, that can enter into the city. Now I want to know, how can you enter into the city undefiled. Only by that blood that cleanseth from all sin, and presents you to the God of the city undefiled. How can you enter into that city of righteousness? Only by that righteousness which Jesus Christ hath wrought, and which maketh you righteous. "Thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever." "Or worketh abomination;" and everything hostile to God's truth, however feasible it may appear, is an abomination to him. There are religions in the world that are infinite abominations in the sight of God, although very admirable in the sight of men. Nothing can enter the city, therefore, with anything like a false religion. "Nor maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." So it appears then here, that in order to enter the city you must be brought into the straight path of God's truth. "Whom he did foreknow"—the election according to his foreknowledge that he was pleased to make of you—"he also did predestinate;" you must be brought into this path, or else you cannot enter into the city—"he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." So we must forsake the foolish adviser; if there be any that advise us away from God, we must forsake those foolish advisers; and if there be travellers professedly going to God, if they are not going in the straight path of God's truth, if they are striving to enter into the city by any way but by the perfection that is in Christ, we must forsake such. We are to forsake not only the foolish adviser and the foolish traveller, but we are also to forsake the foolish builder. If any one would bring us anything to build upon but the Rock of Ages, we must forsake all such. Let not our hope be in our prayers, let not our hope be in our faith, nor in our works. We live in a day when men think they can govern heaven and earth, that they can govern time and eternity; and by certain revivals which they contrive and produce they create a vast amount of excitement, and hereby think that the Lord will bless them. Now this is nothing else but laying other foundation than that which God hath laid. If you expect to be blessed on any ground but that of Christ's work, if you expect to be blessed on any ground but that of the yea and amen promise of God in Christ, then you are building upon a sandy foundation. The foundation that men thus lay, their own foundation, may be very feasible, and if you will not build with them they will say you deny prayer, and that you make light of prayer. Well, we must bear all that, for it has been the business of the professing world in all ages to misunderstand, and consequently misrepresent, the people of God. Therefore, I say, we must

forsake the foolish builder. The foolish man builds his house on the sand. There is a wonderful deal of this delusion in our day. Now, I say, if we expect to be blessed, let it be entirely on the ground of what the Saviour has done, upon the sworn promise of God by him. I may, perhaps, give you one scripture that well sums up this. When the Lord appeared to Abraham, he revealed to Abraham the Saviour's day; and Melchizedek was especially a particular type of the eternity and perfection of Christ's priesthood. Now there were two things which formed the one foundation upon which Abraham would rest. First, the day of Christ; he saw the day of Christ, and he saw that by Jesus Christ the promise was yea and amen: second, the eternity and perfection of the Saviour's priesthood. This was his foundation, and it must be our foundation also; we must forsake all other. "Forsake the foolish, and live." We thus acquaint ourselves, by the Lord's mercy, with Jesus Christ as the refuge; we acquaint ourselves with him as the feast of fat things; we acquaint ourselves with the various truths of the gospel, represented by the maidens. "Wisdom hath sent forth her maidens;" and that, I think, is to denote that the truths of the gospel come in a way that would not break the bruised reed, in a way that would not quench the smoking flax; for though the gospel comes in the strength of omnipotence, and is the power of God unto salvation, yet it comes in all the melting, soothing gentleness of the love and the mercy of God. "Forsake the foolish, and live;" we must forsake the foolish adviser, the foolish traveller, and the foolish builder. One more—we are also to forsake the foolish professor. There is a professor, he has the lamp of profession, but he has not God's truth; he thinks his profession will serve him, he thinks his duties and his doings will suffice. By-and-bye is heard the voice of the Bridegroom; and then, when death comes, that is a midnight cry. Death is a midnight cry; oh, it is a frightful cry, it is an awful cry! it is a dark night to the man that knows not the Lord. Then the foolish professor discovers that his lamp is gone out, and he looks to his fellow-creatures to help him. No, saith one, we cannot give you of our oil. I take this oil to be the truth of God; let us be as definite as we can; I take this oil to be the living truth of God; saving acquaintance with and faith in God by his truth; that I take to be the oil. So that the wise virgins represent those that have the truth of God, and those who have the truth of God are by that truth united to Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom. They are brought by that truth into the spirit (and here I must be exceedingly careful) of indissoluble union to Christ; such are brought to see and know that there is an eternal oneness between Christ and the Church, that there is no separation from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. That is the oil, then—this truth in its spiritual and living power. Therefore the wise virgins went in with the Bridegroom; they were one with him in the spirit of the marriage, in the spirit of indissoluble unity; they were one with him, and they went in with him, and they could not go out. What can extinguish the promise of God? What can extinguish the new covenant truth, the sworn truth, of God? What can extinguish the work of the Holy Ghost in the soul? "Born of an incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever." What can extinguish them? Their lamp of salvation is a lamp that burneth to all eternity; their lamp, the truth of God, is that that endureth for ever; their lamps cannot go out. The others had not this oil. What was their oil? Why, their duties, their doings, and their ceremonies; and it does not take much to extinguish them. Ah, hear me all of you, when I tell you that one sin—you shall live for a thousand years, if you live so long, and you shall not be able to find fault with yourself outwardly, and no one else able to find fault with you; you shall be the most exemplary man that ever lived; you shall have all faith, and all knowledge, and speak the languages of heaven and of earth, and you shall have that courage and perseverance by which you shall surmount

every obstacle; you shall remove mountains; and your heart shall expand with such benevolence, that as long as there is an object of need you will minister, until you have given your last mite, and you will be at the end of the thousand years prepared to give your body to be burned. You could no more get to heaven by these excellent doings in their place than Manasseh could enter heaven by the awful courses which he pursued. Such, then, are the delusions we are under until God shall teach us better. If, then, you would have a lamp that will not go out, it must be God's salvation; and if you would have a profession, a little trimming up of which would make your lamp burn the brighter, it must be faith in God's truth. Now, then, can you see the force of this? The foolish professors were not brought into the spirit of the marriage; they tried to get in without the Bridegroom; the others went in with him, for they had the spirit of the marriage. You must have the spirit of Christ, the spirit of this indissoluble unity, the spirit of this everlasting covenant; for it is a covenant of marriage, wherein Christ and the people are made eternally one. So, then, you must forsake the foolish adviser, the foolish traveller, the foolish builder, and the foolish professor, and hold fast God's truth in the living experience of it; there you have a lamp that can never be extinguished: you have the spirit of the Bridegroom, you are one with him, and when the midnight cry shall come, that midnight cry will be to poor old nature, your soul will go into the marriage; and the door ever has been and ever will be closed against all that have not this spirit of the marriage. "Acquaint now thyself with him." What, then, do we say to this? Can we say that wisdom's voice has attracted us? Do we see the infinite necessity and solemn importance of this? Can we say that we do seek to be sustained in his service in this way? Can we say that we do desire in all these respects to forsake the foolish, and live, and to go in the way of understanding, and God's truth is the way of understanding?

Secondly, *the peace that is here advised*;—"and be at peace." First, essentially; secondly, circumstantially. First, be at peace essentially. Those of you that are acquainted with the truth, that understand the way of salvation, you will be at peace with the Lord essentially. There are five essentials pointed out by the apostle Paul in the 10th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and not one of the five things which he there points out was understood by the Israelites; the consequence was, they fell out with God, parted from him, went away from him, all for want of that understanding that would have endeared the Lord; they erred in their hearts, for they had not known his ways. Let us glance at these five things. First, "I would not that ye should be ignorant, brethren, how that all our fathers were under the cloud;" that is, they were defended, protected from the Egyptians by the intervention of the cloud between them and the Egyptians; a beautiful figure of the interposition of Christ between us and our sins. They did not understand this cloud in its spiritual meaning. Those that are taught of God do understand it; they see that Jesus Christ does stand between them and their sins—or rather, he has put them away; as the Egyptians were drowned, so our sins are cast into the depths of the sea, to be remembered no more. Will you fall out with that? Be at peace with mercy; you will be at peace with that. Oh yes, say you, I am always at peace with that. How is that? Because you can understand it, and you cannot fall out with it. This is nothing else but the law of substitution; the Christian will never fall out with this on earth, and I am sure he will not in heaven. Second, "They all passed through the sea;" that was by God's power; that deliverance was complete, not a hoof was left behind; and so "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." Now, be at peace with that. Third, "They were all immersed unto Moses in the cloud, and in the sea;" and so you are all buried with Christ, and in him you are dead to sin—not in yourself, but in him; in him you are dead to

the law; in him you are dead to the Egypt of this world; in him you are dead to all your slavery, but alive to eternal freedom. "Immersed unto Moses;" thus buried with Christ in baptism; dead to that that is against you, and alive to that that is for you. Now be at peace with that. "And did all eat the same spiritual meat," that bread that endureth for ever, unto everlasting life. You will not fall out with that, not call that light bread, will you? "And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ." You won't fall out with that, will you? Rivers of blessings come unto us by Jesus Christ. Now, then, these people did err in their hearts; they fell out with God in these matters. What a mercy is it for us that there is a better covenant, a better understanding; there stands the sweet promise, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." But with those that fell out with the Lord, with those he was not well pleased, and they entered not in because of unbelief, or disbelief. Now, then, be at peace essentially with God. Hundreds of you have walked in this peace now for many years; bless the Lord for it; you are at peace, and He is at peace; Christ is your peace. God is a God of peace, and such are children of peace, and they shall be called by the highest name that any creature can ever attain—namely, children of God. Secondly, be at peace with Him circumstantially also. Here is Job cursing the day of his birth. Well, what was the good of it. He punished himself in so doing. I know he could not help it, it was through the weakness of the flesh: but it did no good. Even that great man of God, Elijah, exclaimed, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers!" Well, no use to murmur about it. Ah, saith Jonah, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." Well, what is the good of that? And said Jacob, "All these things are against me." Well, that is your interpretation. Ah, saith Joshua, "Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan." What is the good of that? You may as well take it quietly. All you want is faith and patience. Ah, you say, this seems going wrong, and that seems going wrong, and everything seems going wrong. Well, may the Lord give you grace to be, as the poet says—

"Calm amidst tempestuous motion,
Knowing that our Lord is nigh;
Waves obey him,
And the storms before him fly."

Wait patiently. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass." When something occurs to disturb us, we think, oh, I will do this, I will do the other. Why, I might have written a large book in answer to the misrepresentations that have been made of me about Rahab; but then I thought, what good will that do, the Lord reigneth and he says that all things shall work for good, and there is a needs be. Why, there was a man, a blessed man of God, he was "calm amidst tempestuous motion," he bare his testimony in a very dignified way: he stood up very calmly, and said, "Sirs, ye should have harkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete." I advised you to stop, but you would have your own way, thought you knew better, I suppose, than I did; I am only a parson, and they are reckoned fools by some. But, he says, "Now I exhort you to be of good cheer." Oh, we will go back again. It is no use to talk about going back again; "be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship;" the ship must be broken all to pieces. Well, that is a bad job. Oh, never mind, bless you, we shall all be saved. "For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

How calm the apostle was. And he made himself very handy; he did his part, as we say. By-and-bye, "falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the fore part struck first, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves." Ah, said the soldiers, let us kill all the prisoners, or else we shall be hanged or shot for letting them escape. But then the Holy Spirit, by Paul, had said that not one that was on board should perish; therefore the Lord put it into the heart of the centurion to save the prisoners, so that he might save Paul. "The centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land; and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land." They did not come to land, you see, in a comfortable ship, but on broken pieces of the ship and on boards, and some swam as well as they could, but not one of them perished. And then Paul gathered a bundle of sticks for the fire. Ah, says the devil, that Paul is the worst among them; I should have got all these men into hell if it had not been for him. So the devil set a viper to fasten upon his hand; and they looked—Why, I wonder he does not begin to swell; I wonder he does not tumble down dead. "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm." So "acquaint thyself with him, and be at peace. You may drive yourself mad, and do no good when you have done. When you are enabled to rest upon the Lord, and leave matters with him, he will bring it to pass; he will make all your troubles work for good, and at the end they shall prove, even the greatest among them, to have been but light afflictions, working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. This is what the apostle means when he saith, "we beseech you," we pray you, "be ye reconciled unto God." They were reconciled to God in the essential, but he longed to see them reconciled also in the circumstantial. I am persuaded of it, that there is more happiness ten times in this, than in any other path. Oh, it is so soothing to think that there is a God all sufficient, all loving, all gracious, and all powerful, ever at hand, our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, and that he will help us, and that right early.

Thus then happy the people that are made to forsake the foolish; happy the people that are kept from falling out with the truth of God; happy the people that do desire to cast their cares upon the Lord, knowing that he careth for them. The other part of my text, that contains a very great deal, time forbids my touching this morning.