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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

A GOOD DESIRE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 22ND DECEMBER, 1867,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNAACLE, WANSLEY STREET.

"And multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness."—2 Cor: ix. 10.

THIS was a prayer of the apostle on behalf not only of the Christians of the Corinthian church, but of the Christians of all churches and of all ages. The apostle, from what he himself had experienced by the grace and goodness of God, and what he had seen by those extensive revelations made unto him, had ever had unbounded confidence in God's ability, and therefore always felt that he could not outpreach God's ability, that he could not pray for anything which the Lord was not able to give; and he also well knew from experience, that let his tribulations be whatever they might, God was able to sustain him under those tribulations. With all the stripes and imprisonments, the shipwrecks, the various afflictions, sorrows, and troubles, and cast out as the offscouring of all things, he could say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry I have received of the Lord, to testify of the gospel of the grace of God. While, therefore, the apostle exhorted the Corinthians to all those liberalities that should adorn their profession, he well knew, at the same time, that without the Lord's blessing in furnishing them wherewith to give, and bestowing upon them sympathy with his cause, no good could be done. Therefore, he says, "Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness."

I will take a twofold view of our text—first, *spiritually*, and then *providentially*.

First then, we take the text *spiritually*. "Multiply your seed sown." We must begin carefully with the language of our text. "Your seed sown." There is a seed sown that belongs to you, and of that seed that is sown that belongs to you the apostle here prays that it may multiply; that is, that it may yield an increase of blessedness, as the matter shall require. I shall take a fourfold view of this. In the first place, then, the Lord Jesus Christ is our seed sown; and we dwell for a moment with great pleasure upon it. That is a wonderful scripture to this effect in the 12th of John, where the Lord himself saith, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." And so the dear Saviour, when dwelling upon his going away, and in so doing suffering for our

sins, meeting death and swallowing it up in victory, and delivering us from the wrath to come, and obtaining eternal redemption, says, "It is expedient for you that I go away." And that which the disciples were not well acquainted with at the first they became so familiar with afterwards, when the Holy Spirit led them into the blessedness of his death, that they could join with the apostle when he said, expressing the feelings of every good Christian, "Thanks be to God, that causeth us always to triumph in Christ." Now, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." Just look at the condescension of the Lord Jesus Christ. He came into such a position that we are authorized from his blessed word to say that had he not died he must have abode alone, a kind of living witness either of his unwillingness, his want of love, or his want of power, to achieve that eternal salvation for which he came into the world. I am not going too far in this, for he himself saith, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come." "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." So then Jesus Christ is the seed sown. And remember that while he died, there is this infinite difference between the death of the grain of wheat, and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ,—that the death of the grain of wheat is by decomposition and corruption, at least of its outward parts. Not so with the Saviour. He did not die by corruption. As there was no fault, no sin in his life, so there was none in his death. It was a mysterious, an incorruptible, shall I call it an immortal death, so that while in the grave he is called the Holy One. "Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Now if Jesus Christ die this wonderful death, he shall bring forth much fruit. I should suppose that the much fruit would mean everything that results from his death; it will mean all the promises of the gospel. What a sweet thought it is that every promise which he hath thus confirmed by his death is unto faith. The longer you live, the more you will prize that term of the gospel, that "the promise is unto faith," "all things are possible unto him that believeth." If, therefore, we are blessed with faith in the promises that he by his death hath confirmed, then the promises belong to that faith, and the promises are yea and amen. Besides whatever our proud and pharisaic hearts may say, the Lord knew infinitely better than we knew, even now or ever shall know, what we should need. It is a strange thing, and yet common too, that we should be in such a state by nature that the Lord needs to chasten us and to try us in ten thousand ways, just to bring us to know his goodness and his love, just to bring us to know what Jesus Christ has done; just to bring us to feel that it is by faith, that it might be by grace, that the promise that Christ's death hath confirmed might be sure unto all the seed. And whatever sin, whatever trouble, whatever wretchedness, whatever doubt, fear, weakness, bondage, casting down, rebellion—whatever sickness, whatever sore there may be, precious faith lays hold of this death of the Lord Jesus Christ and there is the remedy. The characteristic of the death of Christ is that of being remedial. Then my text saith, "Multiply and increase." Is it not so with some of you that have travelled now for years, in the Lord's way? Why, where you needed one promise, you now need two. Some of you, where you seemed at one time to live upon one promise, you now want twenty. Some of you at one time could rejoice in some particular promise brought home with power; but now you want to range over I do not know how many promises; and you rejoice that they are multiplied, that they are increased. You find as your necessities abound so grace abounds. Yea, the apostle Paul has said that which if the Surrey Tabernacle minister had said he would have been reviled as much upon it as he was upon another subject. The apostle Paul saith—and I bless God he has said it, because my heart at any rate, with all its pride, is quite humble enough to receive it, and glad to receive

it—"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Jesus Christ then is the seed sown. "The holy seed shall be the substance thereof." This is the one seed that has brought forth all the promises we can need. Our hope is in him, our confidence is in him. The apostle Paul describes the incorruptibility, in other words the certainty of the promises of the gospel. He says, "The gospel which we preached unto you was not yea and nay." Now, the gospel which Moses preached, that is, the old covenant, national gospel, was yea and nay. There it was,—Here are certain blessings for you on the ground that you conform to certain rules; but when you violate any of those rules, then, "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." You shall thus, by that fault of yours, bring in a nay, and the promise falls to the ground. But not so in the gospel. Here in the gospel, Jesus Christ is the remedy, and the promise is not to the goodness of the creature, but to faith. And therefore the man continuing to believe in Christ, and to hold fast Christ, no nay can come in on account of anything in the believer, because Jesus Christ's death has put a negative upon the whole. Therefore, saith the apostle, "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which was preached by me, and Timotheus and Silvanus." We all agreed to preach one Christ; it was not yea and nay.

So then all the promises of God in Christ Jesus are yea, and they are amen, to the glory of God by us. Jesus Christ then is the seed that was sown, and we shall never need another seed sown, not of course mediocrally so. By him stands the declaration, "My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." He fell into the ground and died, and he has put an end to everything against us, and has brought forth the yea and amen promises to every poor sinner that is made to know his need and to believe in the same.

Secondly, I will notice in this matter the work of the Holy Spirit. The Christian is spoken of as ploughing and sowing. It is said, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Let us take that as the first feature. Why sow in tears? Well, if a famine were upon your heels, and you feared that the supply would not come in time to save you, and you felt while you were sowing the seed but a trembling hope that it would not be blighted, mildewed, or blasted, knowing that the Lord alone can give first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear; would you not sow in tears? If this be true temporally, look at it spiritually. Ah, saith the soul, I am praying to God; but suppose God should not hear me. I am believing in Jesus Christ, I have a grain of faith in his blessed name; but suppose it should not be the right kind of seed. I have desires after the Lord, and he knows that my soul without the manifestation of his eternal mercy to me is unhappy; but then I fear that famine might overtake me, and I should perish eternally with hunger. And such an one will sometimes have all sorts of thoughts. Such an one will sometimes sink into dreadful terror, and he will form in his own mind all sorts of views of hell. Ah, he says, in hell where shall I be? Why, I shall be shut up in a kind of iron case, I shall see no one, I shall hear no one, and no one will hear me; and this iron kind of chest in which I shall be shut up will be in the lake that shall burn to eternity; there will be no one to hear me groan; men cannot hear me;—such will be my abode. How dreadful the thought! And such an one will say to himself, What are the passing affairs of time, what is bodily affliction, what is domestic trouble, what commercial loss, what are national calamities,—what are all these? Why, they are only as so many passing stormy clouds in comparison of that dreadful and unalterable state awaiting all those that shall live and die without a saving acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, then, these are solemn feelings! Well might I sow in tears. Then comes the encouraging part, "He that goeth forth and weepeth," weeping after the Lord, "bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again

rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Here, then, this sowing means believing; for if there be a grain of true faith, even as a grain of mustard seed, thou shalt not be lost; and if there be but as the smoking flax, if thou feelest that thou art but a bruised reed, yet the Lord has blessed thee with a sight and sense of the importance of these things, the weightiness of these things, so that you do feel to the best of your judgment that you would not part with the testimony of what Christ has done, that you would not part with the encouragements of the holy Scriptures to seek the Lord for a thousand worlds;—if this be your feeling, then you have got hold of the importance of it. And you may depend upon it if you have not got hold of the vital, universal, and eternal importance of vital godliness, you have never got hold of vital godliness yet rightly. God the Father did not give an unimportant gift when he gave his dear Son; Jesus Christ did not come to achieve an unimportant work, and the Holy Spirit doth not descend and dwell in our souls for unimportant purposes. All other purposes are as a mere nothing in comparison of the great purpose of our eternal salvation. We have to-day our annual collection for the poor, but that is a very secondary consideration in comparison of that good we desire to get for our souls. Some of us feel to want more and more fellowship with God, that we may face life with more reconciliation to its circumstances, and that we may look forward to death and see that the sting is gone, that the substance is gone, and that we may enter a little more into the spirit of the apostle when he saith, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain;" and another scripture, "Whether we live or whether we die we are the Lord's." Now, in this sense also the Lord multiply your seed; that is, increase your faith, your prayer, your concern, your desires; and not only so, but fulfil his own word, that such shall come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. Here, then, we have a twofold representation of the seed so sown; first, the Lord Jesus Christ; secondly, precious faith and solemn prayer to God. And these seeds of faith and prayer sown will never be lost. They may be lost to us for a time; but in the morning we are to sow our seed, and in the evening not to withhold our hand, for we know not whether shall prosper, this or that, or whether they shall be both alike. Therefore in our religion we are not to be hypocrites, and observe the clouds and the winds, and when everything goes smooth, to sow our seed. When the sun shines, and worldly circumstances are all going on flourishing, it is an easy thing then to get on. But the Lord intends his people to sow in tears, to the end that they may reap in joy. They are to go forth weeping, bearing the precious seed of faith, and the precious seed of God's word; and they shall come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. Again, we must be careful also to be in order in this matter, for if we do not believe in order, and pray in order, and seek in order, then our seed will not flourish, and we shall not get on well, and the fruits of our righteousness will not be so increased as to make us happy. Hence in olden time one said to another, Well, I do not know, there seems a great deal of opposition one way and the other, and a great deal of trouble; I do not think the time is come yet to build the house; we must stop till some more favourable time. It is not so essential, we can get on without the priesthood for a time, we can do without the sacrifice for a time, we can do without the mercy-seat for a time, and we can do without the presence of the Lord for a time; because we cannot be all religion, you know: we cannot be always at it—no; we must attend to the world, you know; and we must look after ourselves, you know. And so they adopted this plan; and they sowed a great deal, but somehow or another, they did not reap much; and they ate pretty well, but somehow or another it did not seem to do them any good; and they drank, but somehow or another it did not quench their thirst; and they were clothed, and yet all the clothes they could put on—as much as a draper's shop could hold pretty well—

could not make them warm. "None of you is warm." And when they got a good deal of money to-day they would come back for it to-morrow, and there was a hole somewhere, and it was all gone. : So the Lord saith, "Ye have sown much, and brought in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." Well, Lord, that is the truth. Why is it? "Because of mine house that lieth waste." Now then, "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house," and thereby practically show that you cannot get on without me. Then, by the sacrifice, I will come to you; by the intercession of the priest I will come to you; by the mercy-seat I will come to you; and by the temple I will dwell with you, Then ye shall sow little, and bring in much; then ye shall eat and be satisfied, and shall praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you; and my people shall never be ashamed; and ye shall drink, and praise the name of the Lord, and shall be refreshed as giants with new wine; and I will clothe you with the garments of salvation, and cover you with the robe of righteousness, and you shall be warm, and you shall say, "Do not our hearts burn within us?" You shall save money—that is, my blessed promises—and you shall lay up treasures in heaven, where thieves cannot break in and steal, where moth cannot corrupt, where no evil can befall—even the true riches; and by and by, when I call upon you to retire from this world, you shall find that you have enough to last you to all eternity. You will never have to go to work again, you will never have to go to prayer again, you will never have to labour the labour of faith again; all your labours are eternally terminated, and you shall enter into everlasting rest. So, then, it is a mercy to be kept in order. I never found those sermons bring me anything worth having which did not proclaim Jesus Christ in his person, sacrifice, and intercession, and the presence and blessing of God by him. Hence the Saviour hath said, "Without me ye can do nothing." When they were in order, why, they hardly knew what to do with what they had. They got on so well, that they had millions of quarters of wheat and barley to export to the starving heathen around; gold was so plentiful that silver was thought nothing of; and such dominion they had that there was not an adversary nor an evil occurrent. See what a beautiful picture this is of the gospel! The glorious gospel of God supplied not only the Jews, but it became scattered into a starving Gentile world; millions of souls have fed upon this finest of the wheat, and are now gathered out of the Gentile world into eternal glory, a number that no man can number. "And multiply your seed sown." So that in relation to the death of Christ there will be an increase of blessing, and in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit there is an increase of blessing. Now this world has but a very little more for some of us. Some of us are beginning to see the bottom of the cup, some of us are beginning to see the bottom of the measure; some of us are wearing our last suit of clothes—rather seedy, not to have another; so that this world has not much more for us. But is that anything to fret about? Not if you know the Lord, not if you understand his truth, not if your conscience bear you testimony that your soul sincerely stands out for that blessed truth. Then, though the outward man decay, the inward man shall be renewed day by day, until it burst forth into that eternal perfection of which those now in glory are the patterns, or rather of which the Saviour himself is the chief pattern. We do not like these ideas; they are not very pleasant to nature—no. "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and take thine ease." That is it. I knew a man some few years ago—he always used to search his wife's pocket before she came to chapel lest she should have a shilling to give to the cause. Then a daughter of his was brought to know the Lord in spite of her father, and he used to search her pockets

to see whether she had a shilling. He meant to retire. Just as he meant to retire he died, left his property, and it all went like chaff before the wind—all scattered. Then I thought within myself, Well, there is a man—for thirty years he toiled, and laboured, and grudged himself almost the necessaries of life, except now and then; and now the whole of it is scattered to the winds. Oh, how uncertain are riches! They do indeed make themselves wings and fly away, and it is not easy to catch them again. It is a great mercy to be seeking after something infinitely better. Now this precious seed of faith is sure to be multiplied—the fruits of our righteousness, that is the righteousness of faith; so that you will have more fruits, more food, more pasturage, more liberty; so that so far from your growing poorer and poorer in the Lord, you will grow in the manifestation thereof richer and richer.

Let me now glance for a moment at the wonderful prosperity these people are spiritually to have. They are represented as an establishment, and they are represented as being in that establishment useful to others; and then they are represented as having a wonderfully prosperous land, and then they are represented as being ultimately settled therein, never, no, never, again to be moved. “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen;” the tabernacle of David of course means the church of God, the kingdom of God; he raiseth us up by faith in Christ Jesus; it is that that raiseth us up, and giveth us a standing equal to all the demands of law and justice. “And I will close up the breaches thereof”—the mediatorial work of Christ closed up the breach;—“and I will raise up his ruins,” at the last great day, and present the people without fault or spot. But there is a good purpose in this world also in relation to this establishment, “That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this.” Our God established this tabernacle in the apostolic age. Ah, what numbers have been brought in since then! I do bless God that ever I was brought in, that I know what the experience of a real Christian is, that I know what the hope of a real Christian is, that I know what the salvation of a sinner is, that I know what Jesus Christ is, that I know what God in covenant is. And if I were thrust out to-morrow circumstantially, I should remain in spiritually with the people of God while I live, and I am sure I shall to all eternity. Oh, see the blessed end, then, friends—the ingathering of others. And I could not but feel my heart go out in prayer this morning, on reading a little note a friend sent to me, that their parents were brought to know the truth here, and they themselves were brought to know the truth here, and now my prayer is that the third generation may grow up to be brought to know the truth here. Such answers are the best we can have for the enemy. May God increase among us evidences of his mercy in opening the eyes of one and another to know his name. And then, while other people are quarrelling about us, we by the grace of God will go peacefully on, and bless God for every manifestation of his power, for every brand that is plucked as from the everlasting burning. These are the answers that will satisfy the minister and the people, overcome Satan, and glorify God. So then bless his dear and holy name for the great purpose of this establishment. We are not only placed here for ourselves, but for others. Ah, what hundreds have heard the gospel here that, speaking after the manner of men, never would have entered the old place, the hidden corner where we were in the Borough Road! The Lord has brought us out, and he has blessed us, and we trust that many, many will yet be blessed here. While on the one hand, I would neither do nor say anything to offend you, on the other hand I never do, and trust I never shall, preach to try to please you; but I can say that I do aim to profit you, and I am sure such a motive as that must please you more than anything else; for no honest man likes to be trifled with; no one that knows the worth of his soul, and the essential

necessity of Divine teaching, can be pleased with anything else but God's truth simply, sincerely, and honestly proclaimed. So then, "that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name." When are they called by his name? As soon as ever they begin to believe in his name, as soon as ever they begin to call upon his name; they are then believers, and all believers, even the whole family in heaven and in earth, are named after the Lord Jesus Christ. In this sense then, may the Lord multiply the seed sown. The Lord hath a seed in this place to serve him. Let it be our prayer that in this sense also the Lord may multiply the seed, that he may add to your numbers just such as you yourselves are. I want no better; I want no other kind of seed. I am quite satisfied, I am more than satisfied. I do live a life of gratitude to God on your behalf when I look at the great things he hath done for you. Still, at the same time, it is right we should pray that in this as well as in every other sense the seed of precious souls may be multiplied, and more and more be yet brought in to know his dear and blessed name. And then just mark the prosperity of this people. It is an agricultural idea, but every Christian will understand it:—"The ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed." That simply means as I have often before said, the rapid rotation of crops. There are few lands in England—none at all, I believe—or in the world that would bear perpetually what is there described, though the Lord has blessed us with some very fertile and excellent lands, by which he carries out on our behalf his kind covenant of providence. But if you take it spiritually it is very beautiful. And I can tell you this, friends, whatever you may think of this rapid rotation of crops, one after another, as fast as you can sow, and as fast as you can reap, I know that when I have preached one sermon it seems but a very little while between that and the next. I am obliged to look pretty sharp, I can tell you. I think, well, here I am, and I have to plough, to sow, and reap, and get something together in these few hours. It is hard work, I can tell you. It seems but a very short time from one coming into the pulpit to the next. I bless the Lord that he does enable me to get on as I do. So then "the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed." Gather in what you have got: I will sow some more for you. Go on; I will tread the wine out for you. I see you are a poor creature, that you are ready to perish; but if I can get some pure blood of the grape for you, that will cheer your heart. And then it is added, "The mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt." Ah, let a drop of this wine fall upon your sin—it is gone; upon your conscience—the guilt is all gone: upon your heart—the burden is gone; upon your troubles—they are all gone. "The mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt." Ah, when you have had troubles, has not a word dropped that seemed to melt them away, to unload your heavy burdened heart, unfettered your chained soul, and you have said, Ah, there is a reality in religion, there is a vitality in religion; religion is, indeed, more than mere notion or whim; here is reality. "The mountains shall drop sweet wine." I take the mountains there to be the mountainous testimonies of God's truth;—they "shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt." And then, passing by the next verse, "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up;" sin may pull, unbelief may pull, Satan may pull, the world and tribulation may pull, but "they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." First, then, Christ is the seed sown; second; here is solemn prayer to God; that also is sowing to the Spirit, and he that thus soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life eternal. Third, here is the necessity of order. Without Christ we may sow much, but we shall bring in little; but by him every-

thing comes in that shall enrich us for time and eternity. Lastly, the sweet assurance of prosperity. The gospel land is always fertile: the tree of life is never barren; it yields its fruit every month. There is no winter in Christ, there is no blasting, no mildew, there; all is prosperous, all is well there.

But let us take the words, in conclusion, *providentially*;—"Multiply your seed sown." Now, friends, if we were a nation of Christians we should have no scanty harvests, no bad vintages, and we should not need this collection to-day;—not that the persons who are poor have made themselves poor, others have made them poor. But the enmity everywhere manifested to God's truth, and the ungodliness of the nation, is not to hinder the Christian from looking to the Lord that he would multiply our seed sown temporally. You are to labour with the gifts the Lord has blessed you with;—why should not I wish to see you all get on thoroughly well? Abraham got on well in the things of this world; so did Isaac, so did Jacob, and so did Joseph. Whatever your sphere of life may be, the Lord give you wisdom, multiply your seed sown, that you may have reason from time to time to say, Well, I am glad I took this step, and that I did not take that. I was sorry for it at first; I was going that way, but the Lord put a barrier in the path, and prevented me; I was obliged to turn the other way. and now I see it was for my good. And I have vanity enough to say that if I had remained in the world, had not been brought out of it, I think I should have done very well. When I was five years old I began to get my own living, and I have got my own living from that day to this. In the different positions in which I was placed I did well, and in some of them should have risen pretty high, only I was not there long enough. And even in my last position, as a minister, I have, by the blessing of the Lord, done well, and trust I shall. But whenever since then I have been obliged to meddle with the world, I have always burnt my fingers. But you are in the world, you have the experience of it, and therefore you are cautious from time to time. You know what Pope said, and of course you will reckon me one of his fools. He says that—

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

So with ministers when they meddle with the world. Well, then, pray to the Lord from time to time to give you wisdom, and to give you power. Nay, what says the previous part of the verse from which our text is taken? "He that ministereth seed to the sower doth minister bread for your food." So, then, the Lord multiply your seed in this sense, and lead you in the right steps. Then we do not stop here exactly, for when we see a considerable number of Christian men and women prosper in the world, and then look at their liberality, ah! how that adorns their profession. People may say what they will against the rich, yet at the same time if people have not got it they cannot give it, say what you like. This chapel certainly was paid for by those who had the money; they could not have given it if they had not had it. While I make that remark, I would at the same time give just as much credit to those among us—working people—who gave their sixpence and threepence a week. It was wonderful how they kept to it. I know what the Lord says of the widow's mite—all these works are of equal acceptance in the sight of the living God; for it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. On the other hand, of course, when the Lord prospers a man, and that man is selfish, he does not care for the house of God. As soon as ever the spring comes, off he goes on a Sunday, and what he calls enjoys himself. Now if he had not wealth he could not do this; so that there it is a curse to him. Therefore whenever our riches lead us to neglect the house of God, the poor of his people, and his cause, just so far as that they are a curse to us.