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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

ALL WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

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A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 1ST DECEMBER, 1867,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

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“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”—Romans xiv. 12.

IN addition to what I said last Lord's day morning upon these words, I will this morning advance, first, a word upon that with which we closed—namely, that *the people of God must of necessity have nothing at the last to give but a good account*; secondly, that *they shall give a good account practically*; and thirdly, *the personality of this account*. “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God;”—not give account of others, but of himself. So that this morning, as well as last Lord's day morning, our attention will be confined chiefly to the people of God; and I hope to be able to give a sermon by and by upon the other side—namely, the dreadful account that they must of necessity give who shall be lost.

First, then, *the people of God must of necessity have nothing at the last to give but a good account*. In addition to their giving a good account by what the Saviour has done, you will observe there is another law or rule by which they will give a good account—namely, the everlasting covenant. And the more we read the Scriptures, the more we know our own hearts; and feel from day to day our own weakness and sinfulness, the more we shall prize the testimonies of God in relation to the destiny of his people. Upon this subject of giving a good account by the everlasting covenant, we take, in the first place, the psalmist David. I will not go into the circumstances of his life. You all know the awful circumstances that occurred in his life; and also that if he had been left to the judgment of men, he would have been a damned or cursed man. Nay, Pharisees can sometimes hardly abstain from expressing their indignation at the Bible, in consequence of such a man as David being called a man after God's own heart; of such a man as David going to heaven;—little knowing that their enmity to God is infinitely hateful to him, and that they themselves are not one whit better than was David. This they do not see nor feel; and therefore, if they meddle with these matters at all, it is only in their ignorance of and antipathy to them. David looks at the everlasting covenant; and in that covenant was included the imputation of all his sins to the Mediator of that covenant; in that covenant was included, in a word, everything that pertained to his eternal welfare. David under-

stood this covenant; he lived in it and rejoiced in it. And how does he sum up the whole? When looking at temporal, and even domestic matters—though his house was not with God as he could desire—where, then, is the good account? “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Here is God’s sworn promise, here is God’s eternal ransom, here is God’s eternal righteousness, here is God’s immutable counsel. “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.” Now, as dying men and women, if we are called upon to enter eternity to-day, can we say that we are brought into the knowledge of this covenant, into the bond of this covenant, that we do understand, receive, and love it; that our souls are assimilated to it; that we feel there is no life, no mercy, no grace, no pardon, no redemption, no anything in a way of salvation outside of this covenant—that everything is in it? Can we also say that we are so convinced of our condition that it is all our desire, that we do not desire anything else—let everything else be rejected and despised, and let this matrimonial bond, this joint-heirship, be the unity in which it is good for brethren to dwell together? Those of you that are perhaps seeking the Lord, but do not understand this covenant, you cannot love him as those that do understand it. Oh the pleasure, the peace, the interest, the full assurance, it gives! Why, David was satisfied that no fault could by any possibility be ever laid to his charge. He knew well that by covenant arrangement every sin—original, heart sin, lip sin, life sin—before he was called by grace and afterwards,—every sin was imputed to Christ and destroyed. And we see from the same paragraph that David saw the Saviour as a morning without clouds. Our sins were the clouds; Christ blotted out every cloud, and rises as a morning without clouds. And as soon as the soul is brought into the knowledge of the Mediator of this everlasting covenant, there it finds a standing-place that cannot be equalled by any other. “God is abundantly willing to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, that we may have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold of this sure hope set before us;” which hope we have in consequence of these two things—namely, the eternity of Christ’s perfection, and God’s immutability; we have a hope that is as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast. What do you say to this? Why, in our day people say, “Never mind this; if you believe in Christ, that is enough.” But that depends upon two things,—first, what kind of Christ you believe in; and secondly, after what manner you believe. What! believe in Christ, and strip him of the everlasting covenant! Believe in Christ, and separate from him God’s immutable counsel! and so make salvation a kind of precarious thing, a kind of chance thing! That is not God’s Christ. And it depends also upon how you believe. If you do not so believe as to make God himself the very element of your soul, so that the soul is brought out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, and God thus becomes your exceeding joy, all your springs being in him—if it be not that kind of faith that shows you that every other hope is dried up, and that you have no wells out of which you can draw the water of life but the wells of eternal salvation;—if this be not your belief, then you do not believe aright. “This is all my salvation and all my desire, though he make it not to grow.” If we die ignorant of this covenant, we shall be damned; for it is written that “the secret”—that is, the counsel—“of the Lord”—what he means to do—“is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.” He hath said that he will put the laws of this covenant into their minds, and that he will write them in their hearts, and their sins and their iniquities he will remember no more. And what, think you, will be the great proclamation at the last? When the Lord shall call to the heavens and the earth, what will

the proclamation be? "Gather my saints together;"—but who are the saints?—"those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." What sacrifice? The sacrifice of Christ. Art thou brought, then, into reconciliation to God by the sacrifice of Christ, and dost thou see it to be the blood of the everlasting covenant? It is our ordinance to-day; and what business have we at the ordinance if we do not understand God's everlasting covenant, if we do not love it, if we are not brought to it by faith in the atoning blood of Christ? We have no right then to the ordinance. "This is my blood of the new testament;" that is, the new covenant. Thousands in our land will sit down to-day, professing to commemorate the death of Jesus Christ, who are as ignorant of his everlasting covenant as are the Hottentots in Central Africa. Such is the state of things in the professing world generally. "Gather my saints together, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." How are they made saints? First, by the Lord choosing them, setting them apart in his eternal counsels, giving them to Christ, and imputing to Christ their sins. Secondly, by the Saviour having sanctified them with his own blood; put away their sins by the sacrifice of himself. And thirdly, by their being brought to understand, receive, and abide by what God has done for them. He has loved them with an everlasting love: they are to understand that, and abide by it. He has chosen them before the foundation of the world; they are brought to understand and receive that, and abide by it. He hath, in the exercise of his own native prerogative—having a right to do what he will with his own—predestinated them with an infallible decree to eternal glory; they are brought to understand and receive that, and abide by it. Jesus Christ is the end of the law, and has brought in everlasting righteousness; they are brought to understand and receive that, and abide by it. His atonement is the end of sin and death, and everything that stood against them; they are brought to understand and receive that, and abide by it. And that he that hath begun the good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ; they are born of an incorruptible seed by the word of God, that liveth and abideth for ever; and they can no more stop short of what God has for them than Christ could stop short in his reign, in his warfare, in what he came to do; his delight was to finish the work, and he did finish the work. And then, again, they are to understand that the sufferings of this present time, even if they were ten thousand times more than they are, are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed. Can we give this account to God? Is it our rejoicing that this bond of the covenant can never be broken, that there is no separation thus from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus? "As for thee, also,"—speaking of course, as we understand it, to his dear Son,—"by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water." The Lord comes and says, You must not stop here; your debt is paid, your sin is pardoned, your slavery is ended; my law is magnified, the honours of my holiness and justice are all sustained; you must not stop here. So he sends the soul out of death into life, and the light shines by degrees, till such an one begins to see every man clearly; and that man shall give a good account to God after God's order of things—brought thus into the bond of the covenant. Thus, then, you are accountable to God for the profession you make; I am accountable to God for the profession I make, and for what I preach. But I am not accountable to any man or woman under the canopy of heaven for what I preach. I preach just what I believe to be God's truth, and those that disapprove can exercise their legitimate and proper liberty to go and hear those that they can more entirely approve. So that while the minister is not to be accountable to men, he is not to turn the chapel into a prison, and say, "You must hear me:" but let him go on honestly, and speak what he believes to be the truth; let him give in his account daily to God, and

feel daily before God more or less that he can fall back upon motive. Every minister mingles more infirmities with his ministration than the people see; for the minister generally sees perhaps twenty faults where the hearer sees hardly one; but notwithstanding this, the minister falls back upon motive, and his rejoicing is the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity he has had his conversation in these things. And so you in hearing the gospel, your conscience bears you testimony—I speak now to the true Christian—that you go to hear it because you feel it is the gospel. You feel that, however poor, however exercised, however tried you may be, the gospel is so remedial that there is no disease, no blasting, no mildew, no evil, for which there is not a remedy in the gospel. And though you cannot reach that remedy nor apply it yourself, yet you see where the remedy is, and therefore in wisdom you abide by that gospel that can heal you; and you say to yourself, If it has not healed me, I know it can heal me; if it has not blessed me, I know it can bless me; and if there is a blessing upon those that wait, I will still wait, I will still look unto the God of salvation; and he will hear me in his own time. We do read, and who can doubt that it was written for our sakes, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope? We do read, that “as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall part alike:” and it is written that this became a law in Israel. And so it is now. God will not turn away a poor, trembling, fearful, waiting believer, that has not yet realized his interest, but is waiting till Jesus shall come and move the waters, minister healing, and bring him into the liberty of the gospel. So that you can with a good conscience say, that you are sincere in your religion; that your sole object is really to know the Lord, to realize his mercy, and by the realization of that mercy, to go on to do what is predicted concerning the Gentiles that they shall glorify God for his mercy. I must avoid taking up all your time upon this part, but all of you that know the truth must perceive the importance of this part. Suppose the end of the world were to come to-day, what vast numbers of professors we have that could give no account of being brought into this covenant! But those that are taught of God are taught these things I have stated; I do not say all at once, but they are kept restless, and unhappy, and uneasy; they feel there is a something somewhere, but they do not know what it is. But when the Lord appears to the seed of Abraham as he did to Abraham, and swears by himself, “In blessing I will bless thee,”—Ah, saith the soul, that is it. Here is pardon for the guilty, here is life for the dead, here is salvation for the lost, here is everything I can need. The soul falls, as it were, into this heavenly river, and finds the waters risen, waters to swim in. I had intended a word or two, but I will forego that, upon the last verse of the 11th of Revelation. In that chapter you have the seventh trumpet sounding, meaning the gospel in the completeness of it, and you have the kingdoms of this world becoming the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ, which they did when Christ ascended up on high. The kingdoms of this world did not become his savingly, and never will, but they did become his subjectively. His own words explain it:—“Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” All the tribes of Israel were his subjectively, but they were not all his savingly; and so all the world are his subjectively, but they are not his savingly: there is a mighty difference between the two. Now, saith John, “the temple of God was opened in heaven,”—meaning the true church of God, “and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament,”—the everlasting covenant; and that is not the church of God where the covenant of God is not known, realized, or enjoyed. So if you can give account so far, you will give a good account. You can say, “Lord, I was a bondman to sin, and death, and the curse, and the

world; but thou didst reveal to me thy mercy, thou didst show me thy covenant, thou didst bring me into the bond of it; thou didst record the laws of it (and they are all laws of life) in my soul; my soul and that covenant became one; and thou hast been faithful to thine own promise, and so through that I have gone from strength to strength, and have arrived safe at the last.

But, secondly, *they shall give a good account practically.* In the 13th of Matthew you have two parables which will help me with this part. You will perceive that out of the four classes in the parable of the sower there was only one class that profited by the good seed; one class that brought forth, some among them sixty, some thirty, and some an hundred fold. Now take that in this way—that some of the people of God profit more than others do by the truth of God—that is the idea intended. Well, say you, but that is bringing forth fruit to themselves. Just in proportion as you are favoured to bring forth fruit in that sense to yourself you bring forth fruit to God; for just in proportion as you increase in the knowledge of the truth, and that truth is profitable to you, sustains, feeds, and comforts you, and you find you have more, I was going to say, at the end than at the beginning, then in that proportion you glorify God. You can thus give a good account, and say, Lord, thou didst sow just one grain of wheat in my soul, but then thou didst prepare the ground, thou didst bring life into the soul; there thy blessed truth took root, sprang up, and that one grain of truth brought forth another grain of truth, and that brought forth another, till I began to rejoice in the abundance of thy truth. Then in the next parable the people themselves are called good seed—in the parable of the wheat and the tares. “The good seed are the children of the kingdom.” I want you to listen to this, because there is a word here for some of you little ones. First, there is the word, which is the good seed sown in the heart; second, they themselves are called the good seed. Now the word sown in the heart, and they themselves called the good seed, means a likeness between the word that is sown in the heart and the character of the man himself. Is it not just so? What a sweet sympathy you and I have with God’s truth! There is something in God’s everlasting love and grace that we feel a sweet sympathy with; something in the dear Saviour’s mediation, as carried out to our eternal welfare, that we entirely sympathize with; and when the minister is led by the Holy Spirit, so to speak, and the people favoured at the same time to hear, what a sweet sympathy there is! Ah, you say, that sermon and my hope, my faith, my expectations, my feelings, are just alike. Saith one, I was fallen among thieves, and the word of the Lord met me, and poured in oil and wine—just suited. Ah, saith another, I was driven away into the desert, there I was solitary and miserable; but the word met me, and has brought me again into fellowship with the Lord. Thus the Lord enables his people to give a good account of his word. Does he not say, “Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?” The walk there is the walk of faith, for he whose soul is lifted up above God’s truth is not upright in him. As the old woman said, his soul is up wrong, not up right. But he who walks by faith, and is decided in that faith, his soul is not up wrong, but it is up right. We can then give a good account of the Lord’s word. Time would fail me to enlarge upon this, or else the parable of the talents refers to the same thing. The dead-letter professor says, This free grace gospel gets dreadfully in the way of my ceremonies, in the way of this and the other; and he did not know what to do with it, could not find any place for it. So he thought the wisest thing was to pass for a Christian minister, to pass for a free grace man, but take good care seldom to preach it, for it was not safe—preach something else. So by and by,—Here is thy talent; I have taken care of it. Yes, so it seems; you have not let my people have it, for

they are my bank that I put my money into, and they go trading on, and they are sure to do well. What did you trade with, then? Why, with something else, Lord. Well, take the talent from him, and give it to him that hath ten talents. Well, but, Lord, he has ten. Why, of course, the more you like my truth, the more you shall have of it; the more you like my lovingkindness, the more you shall have of it. What, say you, does the Lord set people up in business like that? then that they are not to pay interest, but take interest? Just so; they are to keep the interest themselves, and the principal and all; so that they can bear testimony,—“Thy two talents have gained two more; thy five talents have gained five more,” that is ten, and now you shall take the talent of the dead letter professor, as it were, and that is eleven. So that from him that hath not in reality shall be taken away that which he seemeth to have. He does not bless his own people until he makes them willing to be blessed; and the more bitter herbs you have, and the more you feel the nothingness of everything short of him, the more you will love and enjoy his blessed truth. I cannot look back over thirteen thousand sermons that I have preached without feeling thankful to the Lord that I have never once been confused; never once been confounded, in town or in country, let it be where it may;—the Lord has indeed wonderfully sustained me. But it is not for my sake that he has so dealt and still deals with me, but for your sakes, and for the sakes of those to whom our humble ministrations might come in the shape of our printed sermons. But again—the Lord’s people, then, shall bear testimony practically of the profit of his blessed word to them. There is no word like it—the sweet word of the Lord. Those were solemn times when it is said, “The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” What would they have given for one word to have thrown light upon the path! “There was no open vision.” And, Christian, do not you often find it so? Is not the Bible to you—I know it is to me—at times a sealed book? the heavens seem as brass, the earth as iron.” And, therefore, do not think it is always with me as I have stated just now; but I stand amazed that it has been so well with me as it has; and I do find the more I can prize his free grace and his covenant, the more the Holy Scriptures unfold themselves, the more I feel prepared, whenever the moment shall come, to leave a world that is seen, and enter into one that is not seen. But, again, there is another kind of practice which I will just name, in which the people of God shall give a good account—practical sympathy with the poor of the Lord’s people. Let us take the apostle Paul’s words to Timothy,—“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded.” Those of you that have been favoured in providence—most of you, I hope all of you—can testify that you have not been made by your temporal prosperity to wax, as it were, fat after the flesh, kick at God’s truth, and lightly esteem the rock of your salvation. The Lord has not allowed his providential kindness to you to be a curse to you. That is something, I am sure, friends, to be thankful for; for where poverty has been a curse once, riches have been a curse a thousand times twice told. “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.” Now do not misunderstand those words I have just quoted,—“who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.” The apostle, I think, there does not mean earthly things, for the less you enjoy them the better, the emptier they are to you the better, the more they are like shadows to you the better. The all things that he giveth us richly to enjoy are the blessings that are in Christ Jesus the Lord. And therefore, if you have not a single pleasure in your mortal existence, never mind. The Saviour had not in his earthly existence; the apostles had not. Pleasure, did I say? Pleasure! pleasure! What, in this sin-damned world! Pleasure! pleasure! the very word is a mockery, a snare, and a delusion. There is no such thing out of Christ;

there is no such thing out of the love of God. We, in common courtesy, speak of this pleasure, and that, and the other, but in reality they are only names; for all these things are will-o'-the-wisps, all these things are passing, contemptible shadows; all these things are like the apples of Sodom—very beautiful in appearance; but take one in your hand, the apple breaks, the dust flies all over you, and there you stand and look just like a fool—thought it was a beautiful apple. The less you enjoy the things of time and sense the better. Yes, just creep along and leave the world an honest man—do your best to do that;—just creep along, and you will soon have done with it all. What, would you not have us enjoy ourselves? No, not in the worldly sense. I wish you to be thankful for the Lord's mercies; and if the Lord does give you some worldly enjoyments, you are welcome to them; but they will not last long, they will soon vanish away:—

“Solid pleasure, lasting joy,
None but Zion's children know.”

Watts is right enough, though you may say it is the language of an old bachelor; never mind if it was:—

“This life's a dream, an empty show;
But the bright world to which we go,
Hath joys substantial and sincere;
When shall I wake and find me here?”

So if you are not quite so well pleased with your dress as you thought you would be, never mind that, but be thankful that you have one. And if your bed is not so soft as you wished when you ordered it from the upholsterer, never mind that, but be thankful that you have one to lie on at all. And don't you look forward to this and to that next month or next year. It is all delusion. Next month and next year with us may never come. Our breath is in the hands of the Lord. Ah, see the ancients of whom you read in the 11th of Hebrews, wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins, in caves and dens of the earth, of whom the world was not worthy. They did that with delight, rather than think for one moment of giving up God's truth. See the holy apostles; see the Lord himself. Think you that the Lord enjoyed carnally any of those socialities in which he appeared? No, no. He appeared socially, but it was all empty to him, all dark to him, all nothing to him. In the midst of it all, whether he was weary or not weary, hungry or not hungry, thirsty or not thirsty, his language was from time to time, from place to place, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” So, then, “having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.” “The tribulations of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.” Why, if I had thought while I was in a state of nature that the time would ever come when I should be content with a piece of bread and cheese and a glass of water for a Sunday's dinner, what a shocking thing that would have been—dreadful! But now I take it with rejoicing, because I would not encumber myself with anything that should unfit my body for the wondrous, the glorious service of the blessed God. Do not look, then, for pleasure anywhere but in Christ; do not look for joy anywhere else; all besides is as uncertain as the wind. Remember the rich man in the parable. “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” What a fool you are! What! I a fool? I am not; I am a wise man; I have saved enough to keep me without work. Very well;—presently a tremendous voice comes down from the throne of God,—“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall these things be?” Come, then, those of you that are poor, and not likely to be rich, do not fret about it; you are quite as well off; and those of you that are rich, and not likely to become poor, do not boast of it, for your riches will soon go; they make to themselves wings, and flee away.

The rich and the poor shall be together; and then the rich shall be as poor as the poor, and the poor shall be as rich as the rich; for all the saints of God, whether temporarily rich or poor, are rich in faith, and heirs of the everlasting kingdom. Now the Lord has been kind to hundreds of you in his providence, and you have made the best possible use of it—you certainly have. Your liberality as a people has been everything I could reasonably wish; I have no fault to find with you. It is wonderful what the Lord has enabled you to do. I hope, therefore, you will not take what I have been saying as anything unkind, but that which you know yourselves to be the truth—that compared with eternal things, everything else is but vanity and vexation of spirit. Then the apostle goes on in that chapter to say, “Charge them that are rich, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” “Now the foundation there cannot mean the mediatorial foundation of Christ, for no other mediatorial foundation can be laid but that which is laid. The foundation there of course means the evidential foundation. The Saviour will say to such, “I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; thirsty, and ye gave me drink; sick, and ye visited me; in prison, and ye came unto me; naked, and ye clothed me; I was a stranger, and ye took me in.” Ah, the righteous think nothing of what they do; they think it is all nothing in comparison of what the Lord has done for them. When saw we thee thus, and ministered unto thee? “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” And this shall be proclaimed in the presence of assembled worlds. So, then, there is an experimental and a practical good account to give. Not a word about their faults. He does not say, You gave me much, so much, but you might have given me more; or, you did so and so, but you might have done more. Nothing of the kind. The things in the body done are reckoned all good or all bad; that is to say, the Christian, by faith in Christ, the good that is about him is taken as an evidence on his side, and the bad all taken away by the sacrificial perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But thirdly, *the personality of this account*,—“Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” Here is no intervention of man, the account must be given to God. I must just have a word here upon priestly absolution. It is a very unpleasant thing to refer to people, as it were, personally; and therefore if there are any Puseyite priests or Roman Catholic priests here this morning, I am not going to speak unkindly, but going to speak the truth. Those very men that undertake to forgive our sins are literally incapable of discerning the character to which the forgiveness of sin belongs. It belongs only to the soul that is born of God, to the man that believes with the faith of God’s elect. “The world knoweth us not.” “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.” And “he that is spiritual judgeth all things;” or, as it may be rendered, meaning the same thing in substance, “He that is spiritual discerneth all things, but he himself is discerned of no man.” Now the prophets and apostles were capable of distinguishing the character to whom the forgiveness of sin belonged. But these Puseyite and Roman Catholic priests are not capable of distinguishing that character; for it belongs to none but those that are children of God. “I write unto you, little children”—they are called little children spiritually because they were born of God—“because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” Now if the Lord should open the eyes of these priests, and give them to see the character to whom forgiveness belongs, they would see at once the superfluity of their officiousness. They would say, Why, that man is brought into reconciliation to God, and God has forgiven him, and the promises are to that faith which God alone can give.