

For the convenience of friends in the country, three copies will be forwarded, post-free, on receipt of three stamps, to be forwarded to Mr. E. Butt, 3, Denmark Terrace, Cold Harbour Lane, Camberwell; or friends wishing them sent weekly will please direct as above.

Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE RIGHT GIRDLE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 24TH FEBRUARY, 1867, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”—
Isaiah xi. 5.

WHEN the Lord calls a sinner by his grace, one of the first likenesses to Jesus Christ to which that man is conformed is that of faithfulness; for “they that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.” God makes a certain revelation to them as to the way of their salvation, and they lay hold of that, understand it, and keep to it. They hold these blessed truths fast, and from time to time profit thereby; and the Lord will at the last say to each, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.” How essentially important it is that every Christian should thus have a definite principle to act upon; that every Christian should be guided by principle! Hence we find in the Old Testament; when people were guided by principle they did well, but when they left principle, and were guided by persons, then they adopted all the errors of those persons, and away they went into captivity. Hence it is, then, that faithfulness is one of the essential features of conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I know not what a minister would do without this quality. If he did not feel in his own conscience that he was taking heed to himself, faithful to his own soul, and faithful to God’s truth, and if he did not feel in the most secret and solemn moments that he was faithful also to the people, what an unhappy man he would be! But his rejoicing is the testimony of his conscience that in simplicity and sincerity from time to time he advances the glorious truths of the gospel, according to the humble gifts and abilities with which the Lord has been pleased to favour him. And with this feeling he must not know any man after the flesh, but simply go straight on with what he feels and believes to be the truth as it is in Jesus. And sometimes a minister may have to step a little, perhaps, out of his usual course of things, as was the case with us last Lord’s day evening. I will not state the opinions which some have advanced concerning our funeral sermon last Sunday evening, who have seen the sermon in print, because their opinions are so flattering, I was going to say, to me, that it would not become me to advance them. There is one opinion advanced which I will just state. A person who read it said, “Well, I tell you this—that every minister in the world that wishes well to the gospel, that wishes well to the cause of God, that wishes well to all men, to the souls of men, and especially every minister also that wishes

well to himself, will carefully read that funeral sermon, and recommend the same to his congregation." Now I am myself somewhat of the same opinion concerning that sermon. That sermon, as well as our last Sunday morning sermon, is out to-day; and when you go home, and have had your dinner, and before you get sleepy, just read the sermon; or let the best reader in your family, one of your children perhaps, read the sermon, and you listen to it before you get sleepy. It will do your son or your daughter no harm to read it, and it will do you good to listen to it; and when you have read it, perhaps you will say something different from what some have said. I do not feel in my conscience the slightest uneasiness. I feel that I was serving God, and that I have spoken that which I believe to be right; and I could take that sermon and make it a part of my dying pillow as well as I could any sermon I have ever preached. I am fully aware, of course, of the solemn reproof which that sermon deals out to some; and if we were a literal hive of industrious bees, why, the drones, to whom that sermon deals out a reproof, would have been bundled out long ago neck and crop. But we are not a literal hive of bees; we are a company of Christians, and our religion is forbearing, and forgiving, and restorative, and healing, and reforming, and saving; and by its perfect and divine qualities we ever wish to be guarded, to be guided, and to be governed. Now the Saviour himself came into the world, and he acted upon principle. You could never get him to deviate, either by friend or foe, from principle. He came to do the will of God. He knew what that will was; he knew what was in God, and he knew what was in man; therefore he would not commit himself unto man, but he would commit himself unto God. And the more we know of God, the more we shall love him, the more we shall trust in him, the more we shall glory in his dear and his holy name.

But I will, after these few remarks, come to the language of our text, and notice it in the twofold form in which it is presented. First, then, *we have the Saviour here represented in his righteousness*—"Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins." Secondly, *we have him represented in his faithfulness*, which I will exemplify by that state of things which he has so faithfully brought about, is bringing about, and will bring about.

First, then, *we have the Saviour here represented in his righteousness*—"Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins." Now it is happily a settled point with all of us that the Saviour was abstractedly, in and of and from himself, righteous; that he was a righteous person naturally. I say we are all, bless the Lord, settled upon this. Our souls would rise, and very properly, into the highest indignation against any doctrine that would in any shape or form insinuate anything belonging to Jesus Christ in the abstract sense but holiness and righteousness, purity, perfection—everything, in fact, that made him what the word of God declares him to be; and a beautiful representation it is—that he is the brightness, without a spot, cloud, or drawback,—that he is the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person. This we glory in and rejoice in. But I apprehend this is not the meaning of our text. I apprehend the righteousness here means the actual accomplishment of his mission;—that he came into the world to accomplish a certain work, and that the righteousness here referred to lies in his having accomplished that work. This is the first thing I have to point out here; that is to say, he came into the world by the will of the Father, and by his own loving and voluntary action, to accomplish a certain work, and that work which he was to accomplish constitutes his righteousness as the mediator of the better covenant, and this righteousness is for the people. Now there are many typical circumstances in the Old Testament that represent this, but I will notice only two of them, for that is as much as time will permit, to illustrate the first idea of our text—namely, Christ's active or mediatorial righteousness. Have you not often admired the hand of the Lord in this one thing?—that Moses, we see before he left Egypt that he slew an

Egyptian ; that was an error ; we see that after he was in the wilderness with the people he himself rebelled, and committed some error, as his smiting the rock instead of only speaking to it ; that is the second rock, on the eastern side of the peninsula. And yet this same Moses, who was man, and liable to err—this same Moses, in order to make him a striking type of the Lord Jesus Christ, was not suffered to commit one error in his mission of salvation. He came to Egypt, and he did everything that the Lord commanded him to do. He went through it all in perfection ; there was not one error, and the consequence is that you see the people presently entirely free ; you read their song, recorded in the 15th of Exodus ; there the people stood in safety ; and thus Moses, we see, became a saviour of that people—a righteous man. Now I must not attempt to meddle with one-half of the scriptures that, in the after prophets, spiritualize that circumstance, to show us that that deliverance from Egypt had a meaning, apart from itself, infinitely greater than it was in itself. Isaiah takes it up and spiritualizes it. Let us look at it. “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord ; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon ?” Now we shall see that Isaiah spiritualizes this circumstance, and shows that that mediatorial achievement of Moses had, as I say, an infinitely greater meaning apart from itself than it had in itself. In itself it meant only that which was temporal, but in its typical character it meant that that was eternal. Now, “Art thou not it,” this arm of the Lord ? And where do we see the arm of the Lord ? where do we see Jesus Christ put forth the greatness of his power ?—“Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep ?” Now that western arm of the Red Sea was not a very great deep ; it could not have been above six or seven miles across where the Israelites passed over, if it were so much as that. But Isaiah goes into the spiritual meaning ; he passes away from the Red Sea, and goes to a greater deep. “Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep ?” There was a deep greater spiritually than the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Mediterranean, and all the oceans in the world put together ; and that great deep was the great deep of God’s boundless and everlasting wrath, in which the world would be drowned and lost, and that for ever. Art thou not it which dried this sea ? He dried it up by his sufferings. May God give you to see that Jesus Christ is God ; that his drying up by his sufferings this sea was not the work of mere manhood, it was the work of complexity, it was the work of God and man in one person. “The waters of the great deep,”—a great deep, a bottomless deep, a shoreless deep. Those in hell are like the drowning world in that sense,—there is no port, there is no haven, there is no refuge to look to. As the flood was a sea without a shore, so hell is a sea of liquid fire without a shore ; it is a great deep. “That hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over.” And would you believe it, that the dear Saviour would reckon himself unrighteous if he had not dried this sea, if he had not dried this great deep, and if he had not made these depths a way, made a way through them by which the ransomed should come to what we shall presently notice. He would have regarded himself unrighteous, for he saith to his disciples—and where is there a Christian that has not read the words with something like astonishment at his humiliation, at his love to man, at his righteous carrying out of his wondrous engagement,—he saith of himself, “Ought not Christ”—ought not Christ “to suffer these things ?” The original word means, it was his duty to do so. That is, he had made himself a debtor, became under the law, and became a debtor to pay, as we said last Lord’s day, our debts, and to free us. “Ought not Christ to suffer these things ?” There we stand and listen, and think, What a wonderful thing that our God should thus undertake to deliver us from his wrath, infinite and eternal

wrath! And the next words our hearts go with, do they not?—"And to enter into his glory." Yes, Lord, thou oughtest to enter into glory; thou oughtest to be made full of joy with God's countenance; thou art worthy to govern all worlds, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us out of all kindreds, peoples, and tongues, and made us kings and priests to God. Then Isaiah, when spiritualizing this event, gives a fivefold representation of its results. "Therefore the redeemed"—those that are brought, as all that are redeemed shall be brought, to see in what way they can return to God,—"the redeemed of the Lord shall return." So it is with us. We are brought to witness, though our knowledge at present is but partial, we are brought to witness what Christ has done, and the knowledge of it brings us to God; it makes us love God, it makes us glory in God, it makes us thirst for God, it makes us delight in God; it makes everything else look little by the side of this everlasting love, and mercy, and glory of God. That is one effect. "The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion." They shall come to Zion; that is, into that order of things after which this is done. We are not to come to Sinai, except to learn our distance as sinners from God; but we are to come to mount Zion, where the Lord hath commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. And to come to mount Zion is to come into the faith of Christ, for "he that believeth in him," receiving him in his righteous accomplishment of his work, "hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation." And then the third effect is—bless the Lord! it is fulfilled too—they shall not only return, not only come to Zion, but "they shall come with singing;" to denote their willingness, their eagerness. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." Oh, how willingly my soul runs along with the Lord! how willingly my soul from day to day searches his word, meditates upon his lovingkindness! how willing I am he should be my God! how willing I feel to glorify him! nor count my life dear unto me that I may finish my course with joy.

"They sing as they pass through this valley of tears,
The righteous shall hold on his way."

That is the Christian I love, that is the people that I am happy with, that do not want driving nor dragging, but that are willing to come to Zion. They shall come with singing, and shall rejoice in God, and what God has done for them, what he is to them, what he will be to them, and that for ever. The fourth effect is, they shall get rid of all their troubles—"sorrow and mourning shall flee away." They are not all gone yet; a great many of your troubles are gone, but not one of your blessings. You have as many blessings now as you had when you first set out. You cannot lessen the blessings. Not one promise has the Lord taken away. He has taken away your sins, and a great many of your troubles and enemies; it is true he has taken away some of your friends, but then he himself is more than a substitute for all; he can more than fill up the place of that he has taken away. So that sorrow and sighing must flee away. And then the fifth effect is, that "everlasting joy shall be upon their head; they shall obtain gladness and joy." Here, then, is Jesus Christ's righteousness; he achieved this mighty work; the consequence is, we are brought to God after the due order, and willingly; our troubles go away, and we have an eternity of joy before us.

One more point to illustrate this. "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Have you a mountain of sin? Let the Lord Jesus Christ come, down goes the mountain, up you rise. Ah, you will say, I never knew before what was meant by the mountain sinking to a plain; I never knew before what was meant by overturning the mountains by the roots. Oh, I thought my mountainous sins would fall upon me, for they care not for me. But before our great Zerubbabel the mountains melt away—the fire burneth, the mountains flow down at his wondrous presence. Have you mountainous trouble in

providence? Look to the Lord for wisdom, patience, perseverance, and go on steadily, and the mountain will go away: it may go a little bit now, and a little bit then; it may not all go at once, or it may all go at once. Do not you despair, you be quiet. The Lord drove out the Canaanites by little and little, and he will remove, perhaps, your mountain little by little; but he will do it, it will go. Never despair while you have God Almighty on your side, and you will have him for ever if you have him now, for "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." And is death a dark mountain? Our friends that have departed lately found, when they came to the sepulchre, the stone was rolled away; they found the mountain was gone. "Who art thou, O great mountain, before Zerubbabel?" Moses helps me out here, when he saith, "What people hath God so nigh unto them as we have in all we call upon him for?" Oh, to call God in for my help! to call Jesus Christ in for my help! Well may the Psalmist boast in the delightful truth, that "my help cometh from the Lord, that made heaven and earth; he will not suffer thy foot to be moved." He will keep thee from all fatal evil; he will keep thy soul. Zerubbabel thus cleared the way; Christ has cleared the way; he has laid the foundation, his hand shall also finish it, and the topstone shall be brought home with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it." The topstone means not only the last chosen vessel, but it also means the accomplishment of everything that concerns you, let it be what it may. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me;" and when the end comes, there shall be shoutings because grace has done it all. Mark the language,—“Grace, and grace unto it.” This is the language of those that have the Spirit of Christ. Ah, saith Satan, you do not get on very fast yet; for the kings of Persia have stopped you twenty-one years. They would have liked to stop them altogether. And that put the people to the test, and it came out that there were but a few among them of the right material; but I must not attempt to go there again just yet. Now the Lord by his prophet throws in a word of encouragement. "Who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel,"—to denote the work is going on. When the work is stopped, a man puts down the plummet; he has nothing to measure, no need to test how the building is going on; but when the work is going on, there is the plummet. And what is that but the truth? Let us apply the plummet of truth to see if we are going on straight, building aright. "They shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven"—seven eyes, a perfection of knowledge;—"they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." Now, then, Jesus Christ was thus righteous in his mission, and we have hereby eternal redemption from an infinity of wrath; we have hereby the removal of every impediment; we have hereby mercy's building rising, and that building must rise, and must be completed; we cannot come short of a single blessing the Lord hath designed for us in Christ Jesus.

But, secondly, he was not only righteous in his work, but he was righteous on all sides. "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins:" go all round him. Now that cannot be said of us except by faith. By faith we put on the girdle of righteousness; by faith we put on the girdle of truth. But personally we are compassed with infirmity. And it is said of Elias that "he was a man of like passions as we are;" but that did not hinder his prevalency with God. He was brought into sacrificial order, and knew where power lay. He used that power, prevailed with God to produce the three years and six months' famine, and then by sacrifice to bring down showers of blessing. And thus, though he was a man of like passions as we are, that did not hinder his power with God. So the apostle Paul, when they would have done sacrifice unto him and Barnabas, said, "We also are men of like passions with you;"—just such poor nothings

as you are, just as corrupted as you are; but by the grace of God we are made to differ from you, and we preach unto you with the desire that you should turn from these dumb idols, and be brought into the same grace. Now, I say, we have our weak points. And this was the reason the high priest was to be merciful. Our great High Priest is merciful from a higher motive; that was a good motive, but he is merciful from a higher motive. The Jewish high priest, saith the apostle, is to be one "who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." He is compassed with infirmity, they are compassed with infirmity, and so they have so many weak points that they need that I shall presently have to state. Not so with the dear Saviour. He was tempted, or tried, as the word "tempted" would have been in some cases better translated,—tried, never showed a weak part anywhere, never gave way. He was righteous on all sides. The enemy tried him every way, as you know. Time would fail me to show the attractive temptations and the repulsive temptations which Satan presented to the Saviour; and to dwell upon his sufferings in life, his sufferings from man, his sufferings from hell, his sufferings from heaven. He was tried in all points, yet in all points he stood the test. Therefore he was compassed about with righteousness. You are brought to stand in Christ Jesus by precious faith; and as there was no weak point about Christ, the consequence is that God is a wall of fire round about you; that as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about you henceforth and for ever. As there was no weak point about Christ, the consequence is, that "in that day"—the gospel day—"this song shall be sung in the land of Judah; 'We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.'" The literal Jerusalem's weak point was on its northern side. The northern wall was often broken down. When enemies invaded the land they went to the northern wall, because that was the weaker part. In the ancient mode of warfare they could get possession of the city better by the northern wall than they could by any other way of access to the literal Jerusalem. But the Jerusalem that is above has no weak point; no; you may go round about, you may tell her towers, mark well her bulwarks, and then listen to the song of the citizens, that "this God is our God for ever and for ever, and will be our guide even unto death." So when a weak part can be found, there the enemy will prevail, there God will depart, there our souls will be stolen away, and we shall be lost. But there is no weak part. What shall I say to this? I am at a loss; I hardly know what to say—that while we are weakness itself all round, Christ himself is righteousness and strength all round. I am trying to set before you, if I can, the mediatorial reason why the Lord does not forsake you. As there is no weak part in Christ, he stands by you, all around, everywhere; because he always holds you in Christ; he will not behold iniquity in you, nor see perverseness in you, as you stand in Christ. What a God is this! what a Christ is this! what a salvation is this, compassed about thus with righteousness! what a refuge for the poor! what a hiding-place from the storm! what a covert from the tempest! what a shadow of a great rock in a weary land! and what rolling tides of mercy unto the thirsty soul! Who would have thought, then, that the simple language of our text contains all this, and a thousand things more?—that "righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins." First, mediatorial righteousness carrying out the work; secondly, righteous on all sides. I do not much wonder that our departed friends, who were so well established in this delightful truth, were so happy in their dying hour. Some of you can understand me when I say, Did you ever have a few moments when you felt you could contemplate your completeness in Christ, your safety in Christ, your happiness in Christ, your fulness in

Christ, and so forget your sin and sorrow? If ever you have had a few moments of this kind, that is nothing else but a foretaste of perfect peace, a foretaste of the joy in heaven, and a little sight and sense of the infinite acclamations with which your soul shall be met when it enters the portals of heaven by the triumphant achievement and universally consistent wondrous work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, therefore, may it be said, "Thanks be unto God, that giveth us the victory by our Lord Jesus Christ." This is religion.

But there is another thought springs up here. Not only does it mean that he was righteous on all sides, but it means also that he was strong. The Saviour might well speak always with assurance, for he always knew he was right. He might well always act with assurance, for he always knew he was right. What made him so strong at Pilate's bar? What made him so strong in the garden of Gethsemane as not to give way when he sweat great drops of blood falling down to the ground? What made him so strong, and gave him such self-possession on the cross itself the six awful hours that he there agonized? It was the assurance that he was right; it was a sense of right. "I always do those things that please him." We must be made strong, not by our righteousness, but by his. When pardoning mercy by him rolls into our souls, and we feel that we are right with God, what strength it gives us! Ah, it puts off our sackcloth, girds us with gladness. And the very point I am now touching upon, namely, faith in Christ being always right, faith in the strength of God by him, gave the worthies whose achievements are recorded in the Hebrews all the advantages there stated. And so in all his doings he was strong because he was right. This has been my support in preaching the gospel. I always know I am right in all the essentials. I may make some little mistakes in non-essentials, subordinate points, matters of opinion, where I may be right or I may be wrong; but in the great matter of vital experience, the great matter of mediatorial perfection, the great matter of the sovereignty of God's grace, the eternity and infallibility of his covenant, I cannot when I am in heaven be more satisfied of that than I am now. What should move me then? So with you, you that are established in the truth, what should move you? Why, your daily experience tells you you are right; the word of God tells you you are right; the dealings of God with you, in not suffering you to build yourselves up in your own goodness, holiness, and righteousness, demonstrate you are right. All his dealings are to strip you of all confidence in the creature, and make you depend alone upon the righteousness of Christ. Hence you find in the Bible righteousness and strength connected together. "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." This is where it is the minister must be bold as a lion, and the people too; because they know they are right, right by precious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

These, then, are three things represented here. First, that he was righteous; secondly, that he was righteous on all sides; and thirdly, that there was his strength;—he was right, and being always right, God was always with him in approbation. "I do always those things that please him."

But secondly, *we have the Saviour here represented in his faithfulness—* "and faithfulness the girdle of his reins." The word "reins," as you are aware, refers to the vital, internal organs of the body. That is definite enough for our purpose; it will go to a nearer definition, but that is near enough for our purpose. By this figure of speech, as Cruden very well observes, the vital affections of the soul are meant. Let us look at Christ's vital affections. Did they ever give way? No. How faithful he was in his love, was he not? "Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end." How faithful in his love to God, in his love to the truth! Many waters could not quench his love, neither could the floods drown it. "Thou triest the reins," the inmost affections, "of the children of men."

“Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins”—far from any vital affection. But Christ’s affections were vital. How faithful was he in the face of Peter’s unfaithfulness! But why do I thus speak? Where should we stop if we were to begin, and go on from circumstance to circumstance that exemplifies the vitality of Christ’s affections? I must, therefore, just glance at the state of things thus brought about, and then close.

Now Jesus Christ having accomplished this work, this glorious gospel goes on. The consequence is described beautifully in this chapter, “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” Some think this has a literal meaning. I think Peter’s vision would show us it has a spiritual meaning; and I will bring in one character which shall illustrate the verses that I have quoted. “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb.” Was not Saul of Tarsus a ravening wolf? Was he not as the ferocious leopard? Was he not as the roaring lion? Was he not as the savage bear? Was he not as the venomous serpent? He was in his character. “With their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips.” “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” Yet out of that body, that pyramid of serpents, out of that generation of vipers, God took a people. Saul of Tarsus had all the wily policy of the serpent against the saints, and all the venom of the asp. But when grace took hold of him, the fierceness of the wolf departed, and he lay down with the lamb; the ferociousness of the leopard departed, and he lay down with the little ones. The roaring of the lion departed; “a little child shall lead them;” the child Jesus Christ; “thine holy child Jesus.” A minister also is a little child; yet these are willing, as far as they can see he follows Christ, to be led by him. And did not the venom depart from Saul? Did not love take the place of enmity? Did not the wily, crafty policy of hell depart from him? and did he not become a transparent, honest, straightforward, God-loving Christian, loving the truth and loving the souls of men? Here, then, is fulfilled that scripture. And, remember, all of us by nature are alike; what was true in his conversion is true in the conversion of every one. “The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp.” That is, there is a place where there were people as venomous as the asp against God. The change is wrought, a change so mighty that now a little child may play with them. “And the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’,” or serpent’s “den.” There is a family, every one of whom hated the truth; and as to going to that family and speak about religion, you might as well go into a den of serpents. But grace has taken possession, wrought a change; now to go there is to be happy. There is the place that was once a den of serpents, a den of vipers. See the mighty change. Now they are reconciled to God. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth”—and I must remind you there are two earths; the earth we inhabit, and the new earth; I take it there to be the new earth—“shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”