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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

EARNEST EXHORTATION.

—
A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 9TH AUGUST, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."—HEBREWS x. 25.

ALL that the Lord intends to save he will draw in or bring into the knowledge of Christ Jesus. He is the great centre to whom all are to be drawn, as it is written, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth." And then there are reasons that show us why the Lord thus draws the people. The first is because of his love. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore in loving kindness have I drawn thee;" that is, he so reveals that love in and by his dear Son, as to make it attractive to a poor sinner that is made to see and feel his need of the infallible friendship of heaven. Another reason why he thus draws them is because he hath chosen them; for "Him that I have chosen I will cause to draw near unto me." He will so reveal the great truth of eternal election to them as to make it one of the attractions of the everlasting gospel. Another reason why he thus draws them is because he hath ordained them to eternal life; "he hath predestinated them to be conformed to the image of his Son;" and, therefore, he draws them to Christ in order to conform them to him. Another reason why he thus draws them is because of the redemption of Christ; for, Christ having paid the mighty debt they owed, there is nothing now legally to detain them; and the Lord will so reveal that eternal redemption to them which Christ hath wrought, as to make it attractive to them; and they shall thereby be drawn to set their hope upon, and to rejoice in that eternal redemption which is expressive of God's eternal mercy. Another reason why he thus draws them is because of the righteousness which the Lord Jesus Christ hath wrought in; therefore it is written, "Thy people shall be all righteous;" and so he makes the righteousness of Jesus Christ, in other words, he makes justification by faith, in contrast to human works, worth, or worthiness, attractive to them, and so they are drawn by it unto God. Another reason is because of the inheritance

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which he hath for them;—"In whom," saith the apostle, "we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Another reason is because he hath engaged—and we may say, "Wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth, at the thought"—he hath pledged, as it were, his own eternal being to bring them to himself. "He could swear by no greater, he swore by himself;" he will ever be mindful of his covenant; and because he hath thus entered into covenant, he will therefore make that everlasting covenant attractive to the people. These are the reasons, then, why the Lord attracts. And he has appointed the means by which he will bring about, while time shall last, these great ends; and one, as you are aware, of the most important means that he has appointed, is the preaching of the everlasting gospel. I shall not be able this morning—I have neither gifts, nor grace, nor powers of speech so to do—to set forth, on the one hand, the blessedness of the real attractions which we have to assemble together; and, on the other hand, to set forth the awful ingratitude, the indescribable sinfulness of neglecting to assemble ourselves together. It is one of the greatest sins that a Christian can commit. And then you have here a solemn and divine direction;—"but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." I will therefore, in going through the subject, in the first place, notice *the centre of attraction*—that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Secondly, *the falling off*—"as the manner of some is." Thirdly and lastly, the *solemn advice*;—"but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

First, *the centre of attraction*;—the attraction there is for us from time to time to assemble. And of course we know that the Lord commanding would be enough; but we must go further into the subject than that; we must take the Saviour's words to begin with; let them be our guide. He saith, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." You will observe two things there, the presence of the Lord, and the manner of his presence. You must observe those two things; they are both included in that verse; for his being in the midst of them has a deeper meaning than may at first sight appear. Now the first part would be enough, one would think;—"There am I in the midst of them." Of course, it means the presence of the Lord in his approbation of the people; it means Jesus Christ's presence by his mediatorial work. Where he is, there the Father is; and where he is, there the Holy Spirit is; for "in Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." But I shall keep chiefly to the other point there—namely, "in the midst of them;" "There am I in the midst of them." That brings before us at once the manner of his presence. The Old Testament dispensation was typical, and intended to shadow forth eternal things; let us, then, look at the Old Testament dispensation, and we shall get an explanation of what is meant by his being in the midst of them. You are aware that the tabernacle was to be in the midst of the people, and that there was in the tabernacle the mercy seat, and that there was the presence of the Lord; and that there the high priest entered once a year; so that we here see after what manner the Lord is in the midst of such. Let us take just a slight glance at the three great annual assemblies, and let them be a kind of figure, not only of our being gathered together unto Christ Jesus, but also as a type of gathering together as a people to meet the presence of the Lord in his own way, according to his own gracious promise. The first assembly, as you are aware, was that of the Passover. That stands first; that was the beginning of months; that was put in the forefront of everything. And it seems so pleasing and delightful to think that the very first thing in coming to the house of God is that atonement presented to us by which we are exempted

from our sins, from the wrath to come, from the curse of the law, and by which we are sheltered from all fatal evil; so that no plague shall come nigh thy dwelling." Now, for us to assemble from time to time to learn what Christ has done, to learn what the atonement of Christ has done, and to enjoy from time to time the renewings of the Lord's pardoning mercy, and the revivings of that peace which we have by the blood of Christ, what a blessed privilege is this? Let us look a little into it. Now, our experience is such that we need this every day of our life, we need it from time to time—namely, what has been done, and what is done, and what shall be done, by the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Moses was commanded to declare this unto *all* the people—unto *all* the people, denoting that all the true Israel should ultimately be brought, as the Saviour saith, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Why should we be afraid to assemble? Are we guilty? Well, then, here is pardon. Are we poor? Well, then, here is rich mercy; for he is rich in mercy unto all them that call upon him. And are we unworthy? Well, then, here is worthiness in the Lord Jesus Christ. And are we unrighteous? Then, here is righteousness and strength in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let our condition or state be as bad as it may, I was going to say, and the more we are conscious of it, the better; the more we are made to feel and see that, apart from the work of Christ and his precious blood, we come under that dreadful description—it is very humiliating, but there it is—as poor beggars on the dunghill; we should not like to be spoken of so as creatures, but that is the description of us all as sinners; "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill." Nay, we may go further, we are represented as criminals cast into the pit, and unworthy ever to see the light again; but then comes the declaration, "By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water." Now, if God be with us, and give us faith in Christ's atonement, he is with us to deal with us according to that atonement; and what mercy, what blessing can we need that that atonement cannot bring unto us? And if Jesus Christ be with us, he is with us by his own mediatorial work, if we are blessed to know our need of that, and have confidence in it. And the Saviour is well pleased for us to have confidence in him, because he well knows that he is worthy of confidence; he well knows that he never did and never will betray any one's confidence; and he knows also whether we have confidence in anything else. But if we have confidence in nothing else, and have confidence in him, then the Lord is with us entirely by his precious atonement of Jesus Christ. What a beautiful leveller we have here. There was, of course, among the Israelites a very great variety of character; but the best could not escape without the blood of the Lamb, and the worst did escape by it. So bless the Lord, it brings us all before him without spot and without fault. This is one attraction, "I will be in the midst of them." As the Lord was with the people then by the paschal lamb, and by the mercy seat, and by the daily sacrifice, so he is now in the assembly of his saints, by the sacrifice by which Christ hath for ever put away sin. Then, secondly, there was the assembly of Pentecost or ingathering, the feast of first fruits preceded the ingathering; because the first fruits represent the Lord Jesus Christ; and if the first fruits be accepted, the harvest is sure to be gathered in; so that the harvest was taken care of and gathered in by virtue of the first fruits being accepted. Now, the apostle instructs us upon this matter very beautifully when he saith, "If the first fruits be holy, the lamp also is holy." Why, my hearer, does it not make our hearts rejoice sometimes to think of it, that there is not anything more clear in the holy scriptures than this, that the Lord Jesus Christ was holy, that he was without spot, and that he has put our sin away, and has made us legally and virtually like himself, and brings us to God? Thus, as the

harvest was accepted in the first fruits, so we are accepted in the Lord Jesus Christ. Accepted in Christ, approved in Christ. Accepted unto what? Why, accepted unto all that he himself is accepted to. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Now, if the Lord be with you by the atonement of Christ, and with you by Jesus Christ as the first fruits, accepting you simply on the ground of what Christ has done, then you will have to be accepted not on the ground of anything legal that you have done or not done, but as a believer in Jesus Christ, having remained in the faith, rooted and grounded, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel. Your acceptance into the everlasting kingdom will be by the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so at the last day, and so to all eternity. Then thirdly, there was the feast of tabernacles. The chief thing that marked that, was that of plenty. They had just gathered in their harvest and their vintage; and when they had no other gods in the land, but abode by their own covenant God, rejecting all others, their fields brought forth so abundantly that they hardly knew what to do with what they had; and their cattle so increased, and their pastures, that they got on and got on and grew so rich that even silver was of no account in Solomon's day. What wonderful prosperity they were blessed with when they kept to the true God, and renounced all false gods. This, of course, has a typical and a spiritual meaning. Oh, my hearer, to keep close to thy covenant God, to keep close to thy blessed Emmanuel, to keep close to the gospel, thou art then keeping close to where there are durable riches; and the things of this world will be with thee a very secondary consideration in comparison of the plenty and blessedness thou hast in Christ Jesus the Lord. "Not," then "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." If there were no atonement for us, then in vain would it be for us to assemble. If there were no representative who is accepted in the highest heavens for poor sinners, then in vain would it be for us to assemble. And if the love of God were exhausted, if his grace in any way were insufficient, if his mercies were not in numerical character broad enough to cover all our sins, then we might be discouraged. But, then, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," by this mercy sent, by this sacrifice, by this acceptance, and by this infinite plenty. Oh, what a blessed thing is real religion! If the Lord is pleased to bring our souls into fellowship with him in and by these things, then away go our doubts and fears. But I will give in this part one more representation. There is another representation of the gospel which, I think, is very attractive indeed; no doubt it is intended to be understood spiritually, I mean that beautiful representation in Isaiah lviii., "Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands of wickedness." The Pharisees of old had wickedly bound the people; they had bound them by human traditions and lies; just the same now as Catholicism binds so many millions with wicked doctrines and wicked inventions. I grant the priests themselves do not think those inventions and traditions wicked; but they are, because they are lies, and being lies, they are of Satan, murder the soul, and insult God. The Pope sometimes, as you are aware, writes and sends out a letter to point out how many errors there are. I sometimes think it would be a good thing if some one that was able would write to the Pope and tell him that, according to his letter, the Bible is the most erroneous book in the world; for I do this morning most solemnly declare that of all the books that have ever been written, there is not a book in existence that has so many dreadful errors in it as the Bible, if tested by the laws of Popery. So that Popery brings the Bible in to be the most erroneous book in existence. And as to Peter's epistles, why, they are worse than all; the Pope makes Peter out a dreadful character. Peter begins his first epistle with a doctrine that Popery

everywhere repudiates that of eternal election; and so he goes on—"not lording it over God's heritage," and so on. So that, tested by the laws of Popery, Peter, the first Pope as they say, was the most erroneous man that ever lived. Ah, what a mercy, friends, while men thus wickedly bind others, that the Lord steps in, shews up the delusion, and shews that his blessed book, and his blessed book only, can be trusted; that his blessed book only is pure, free from error, and can make us wise unto eternal salvation. And then the Lord saith, "To undo the heavy burdens." If it is a burden of guilt, the gospel can remove it; and if it is a burden of bodily affliction, the gospel will strengthen the spirit to sustain it. "And to let the oppressed go free;" and the gospel, whatever your oppression may be, can make you free. "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed." "And that ye break every yoke." There shall be one claim upon you, and that is what the Lord hath; whatever other claims there are upon you will come to nought, but his claim upon you will never come to nought. "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?" Does not the gospel do so? "And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house." Does not the gospel do so? Does it not bring us to God? Does it not bring us into the house of bread? And "when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him." Ah, there is the poor sinner, clothed with filthy garments, which is in one sense being naked, as it were; shewing that he has no righteousness or holiness of his own. But when Jesus meets with such, he throws over them the best robe. Ah! he says, I saw thee when thou wast in this wretched condition; "when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee." "And that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh." Now this, then, is a very concise epitome of the theme we have to deal with. And as to the objects, the great objects, why, it would take twenty sermons to give a mere specimen of the great ends that are answered by this glorious gospel.

I have now, secondly, to notice *the falling off*. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." This is that in which Satan has ten thousand means of trying us. Satan will inspire the mind against the minister; he does not preach as he used; and I have got nothing lately. A thousand things will Satan throw into the mind. Sometimes he will put the wine bottle, sometimes one thing and sometimes another. He works in a great variety of ways to make you think little of the house of God, and if possible, to get you to crawl there once a month, or something like that, and persuade you to take it easy. Now I only say this, friends, if any of us feel anything of that kind of spirit coming on, the Lord help us to take the followings things into solemn consideration, and to ask ourselves whether we should not tremble at the very thought of such dreadful things coming to pass. Let us notice what the apostle saith. Of course, I hold that no real child of God can fatally apostatise, no real child of God can thrust himself into hell; but he may bring a great deal of hell into himself, though he cannot bring himself into hell. Now the apostle says, "If we sin wilfully;" the sin here spoken of is not generally the sins that are recorded of the saints of God, but it is evidently the sin of malice aforethought. Neglect the house of God, get an antipathy to the minister, then to some of the people, and then to all the people; if you can see some fault in them, take that fault, and paint them all over with your own brush, make them as black as you can; and so work hard to justify yourself in thus neglecting the house of God, and caring not to assemble any longer. Now hear what the apostle says upon this. This is the sinning wilfully, with secret malice, that would lead you, if the Lord does not stop you. If I am speaking to any such—if he does not stop you as he did Peter;—Peter began to anathematise, he began to apostatise, but the Lord in mercy stopped him—it would lead you where Satan would delight to see you. Now the apostle

says, "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth;" that is, this sin of malice aforethought, malice against the minister, against the people, against the cause, and then against the truth;—he says, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,"—now it leads to this,—“but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law”—and one part of the law of Moses was that of the annual assembly; and, oh, what did they get by assembling? Time would fail to point out even the temporal advantages that they gained by assembling, and how the Lord took care of their lands and houses while they were gone; for “no one shall desire thy land when thou shalt appear thrice before the Lord thy God.” Now “he that despised Moses' law”—the remedial law of Moses, and the gospel is a remedial law, a remedy for all our woe,—“died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace?” Will that ever be my lot? Oh, unhappy man! The apostle, therefore, in deep love to the souls of the people, speaketh thus;—“Nor forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” Then again you read in the 6th chapter of some that were enlightened, but they were not regenerated. It is really painful to think that some ministers want to persuade us, and positively declare, that the characters spoken of in the 6th chapter of this epistle are good people, and that the apostle is there arguing against the possibility of their falling. No; when the apostle takes up the doctrine of final perseverance he never argues upon it. You cannot find an instance of the apostle reasoning or arguing upon the doctrine of final perseverance. It is a doctrine that has been in all ages so clear to the church, and is made so clear now that the apostle when he touches upon that subject of final perseverance speaks of it positively;—“He that hath begun the good work will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.” In Hebrews xi. the apostle takes up all the ancient believers, and declares, allowing no exception to the rule, “These all died in faith.” And besides, he knew that God in his immutability was on their side, and God himself must fall from his throne before one of his children can come finally short of what he has for them. So the apostle never treats final perseverance argumentatively; it is a doctrine laid down positively and plainly, and it accords, as every other doctrine in this matter accords, with the order and nature of salvation. Now some were enlightened, so that they could talk, but they were not regenerated. They were not convinced of their state as poor and needy sinners. They had tasted of the heavenly gift—Christ; admired him, and had a kind of taste for him, the same as one man may have for one science, and another for another science—have a kind of taste for it, and so pursue it as long as he has a taste for it. “And were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,” not in the operations of his power, but only in the testimony of his word; “and have tasted the good word of God;” that is, they have said, That is a good man, he preaches good sermons, and he preaches a good gospel, and I am very pleased with him;—“and the powers of the world to come;” the world to come seemed to have some effect upon them;—“if they shall fall away,” our translation renders it; I will not be responsible for the alteration, but a little Testament I have, which is lately translated by the New York American Translation Society, renders it thus; so I will throw the responsibility upon them;—they read it thus,—“and have fallen away;”—“For it is impossible for those that have fallen away to renew them again unto repentance.” Now, why cannot you renew them to repentance? Let us be clear here as the noonday if we can, because it is the turning point.

You cannot renew them to repentance, because their faith is entirely gone. Mark the language,—“They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame;” that is, they disbelieve in the Son of God, and thus they do mystically what their predecessors have done literally—crucify the Son of God. You go to that man and say, Well, are you not doing wrong? He says, Do not come to me with your gospel, I do not believe it; do not come to me with the doctrine of substitution, I do not believe in it; do not come to me with the doctrine of eternal election, I do not want it; do not come to me with your salvation by grace, I do not believe in it. And thus he becomes a complete infidel. Now that man in order to be restored must first have faith. It is impossible to restore a man without faith; that is the first thing. So that convince a man of God’s truth, that the man shall believe it, and when the man is so convinced as to believe, then that faith will cause him to repent, that belief, that persuasion, will humble him to the dust before God, and he will seek for mercy. When it is said, “It is impossible to renew them,” I do not apprehend it means that the great God himself could not restore them. I myself am not one of those that look at the Lord as tied and bound hand and foot; I am not one of those that can hold for one moment with limiting the Holy One of Israel. But I believe that that description represents professors that have run well for a time, and by and by they turn round and disbelieve God’s truth. Well now, in the church with which I am favoured to be connected (and we are now forty-one years old, for I was born first, and this Christian church next, and so we have been brought up together from spiritual infancy. I did not begin by taking any one else’s church, or people, or pulpit, like Melchizedek in this respect; I had no predecessor, but I hope I shall not be like Melchizedek, and have no successor). We have always been pretty clear as to the persons we have received into the church; and out of the hundreds and hundreds that have been received into this Christian church I have never during all these years known more than two cases of actual and fatal apostasy into downright infidelity. I recollect both the men very well; one is dead very many years ago, and the other, whether he is alive I do not know; but they both went away into downright infidelity. And the one, when he was dying, you might see hell depicted on his countenance. It was very mysterious. Oh, my hearer, what a mercy it is to be kept where David prayed to be kept when he said, “Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.” Here then it is that this apostasy began in neglecting the house of God. When we look at the tidings that we have to listen to, when we look at the assurances that the Lord will be on our side—when we look at these things, and then look at the Saviour, what he did, and what he underwent, then for us to allow anything to make us neglect the house of God and the cause of God, must indeed be the worst kind of insanity. Now, I am not thus speaking because it applies to us; I trust this will never be the case with us; still there may be, for aught I know, individual cases among us; and if there should be, I trust that they will get right again, that they will not go any further; that they have only begun to be cold; only begun to be lukewarm; for if found lukewarm at the last, saith the Master, “I will spue thee out of my mouth.” This neglecting, then, has a tendency to carnalise the mind, and to make us careless. Then the apostle describes the people of God; as though fearing he had hurt the minds of some of the people of God, he speaks soothingly and kindly to them. Nowhere he means the people of God in contrast to the apostates whom he had just now described. He saith, “The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God.” These are the people of God; here is the good ground, that brings forth fruit unto God; they are blessed. “But that which beareth thorns and briers”—malice and

enmity—"is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." The Lord grant we may never live to see the day when we shall slight any of the wonderful privileges the Lord has blessed us with. The apostle then speaks kindly to the people of God. "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you;" you are not merely enlightened, but convinced of your need of these things, and therefore know their value; you have not only tasted of the heavenly gift, Christ Jesus, but he is your very life; you are not only partakers of the Holy Ghost in the testimony of his word, but in the operations of his power; and he that hath begun the good work will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ; and you have not only tasted the good word of God, but you have a keener taste for it than ever; that while in times past it has been sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, you still desire that it may yet be made sweeter and sweeter, and more precious to you; for "man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord." "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." What a proud position is mine this morning—forgive me for saying so. If this were my last sermon, I could in the presence of a heart-searching God quote the words as applicable to this Christian church and congregation,—“God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” And therefore “we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation.” You feel there is something in God’s truth and in God’s ways that you cannot give up. And then the apostle goes on, still anxious, still concerned for their welfare,—“And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful.” Now slothfulness is a disease that every one has more or less; and when it is coming on, you had better shake it off at the first; for if it get tight hold of you, you will be surprised what a difficult thing it is to get rid of. If you once get into a sleepy, take-easy sort of habit, you become as insipid, and careless, and dull, and as stupid as though you did not exist. You don’t know what you can do till you try. The Spanish general, Mina, used to say to his men, “Now we have some hard battles to fight, and I will allow you two hours to sleep, and that’s enough for any man.” And he took two hours himself, just the same as the rest. Now that was rather sharp work, certainly, but then it was in a time of war. So then, “Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” There is nothing so worthy of their affection and attention as the God to whom they owe everything, who has done wonders for us, and who will yet do great things; for his mercies go on multiplying and multiplying, and the longer we live the greater debtors we shall be to the Lord. Thus, then, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” Now, I do not know that we have any reason to complain. Whether as many of you as could come on Wednesday evening do come, I cannot say; and whether as many of you as could come to the prayer meeting on Monday night do come, that I cannot say; it is like every other question, there are two sides to it. I have known some very thoughtless women, who perhaps have carnal husbands, they come to chapel at all times and neglect everything in their homes; and then, of course, the husband, being a man who does not know these things, he feels his home is neglected, and complains; and the woman comes to the minister and says how she is ill-treated, when the truth is, she should not go out and leave domestic matters all higgledy-piggledy, upside down. Put things straight at home, then you could go to the house of God comfortably. On the other hand, you husbands, we shall not let you off—no, you may smile at what I have been saying to the wives, and think, “That is very right, sir,” but I shall give you a word as well.