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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE BOOK OF LIFE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 19TH APRIL, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

"And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."
REVELATION xx. 15.

CLEARLY to comprehend the structure of this Book of the Revelation is one important and essential step towards the right understanding thereof. Hence we have in this Book a succession of subjects, but not chronologically written—that is, the subjects do not follow each other in the order of time as they are written. John has followed in his writing not the order of time, but the order of the subjects which he had in hand; so that the various subjects in this book are ranged in columns, as it were, side by side, and synchronize with each other all through. For instance, in the 4th chapter you have a description of the commencement of the gospel dispensation, where you have a revelation of the Lord, in the way in which he will deal with men. Then John goes on until he gathers in, as it were, testimonially, down to the end of the 7th chapter, a number that no man can number. Then in the 8th chapter he goes back again to the beginning of the gospel dispensation, and takes up the operations of the enemy, and those judgments the Lord should bring upon men. Then, when he gets to the end of his 9th chapter, he goes back again in the 10th to the beginning of the gospel dispensation, and shows the coming down of Christ, the mighty Angel, in the universality of his dominion. Then in the 11th chapter he goes back again to the beginning of the gospel dispensation, and takes account of the temple, that is, the church, and of the altar, and them that worship therein. Then in the 12th chapter he goes back again, and gives us the Church as arrayed with the sunlight,—in the moonlight of the gospel—having culminating upon her head the testimonial stars of the prophets and apostles. Then in the 13th chapter he goes back again to the beginning of the gospel dispensation, and notices those wild and mighty powers that should rise to afflict the Church. Then in the 14th chapter he goes back again to the beginning of the gospel dispensation, and presents to us the people of God in their purity and perfection before the throne of God, till he gets to the end of the 15th chapter; then at the beginning of the

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16th chapter he goes back to the beginning of the gospel dispensation again, and goes on until he gets down to the end of the 19th chapter; and then, at the beginning of this chapter, the 20th, he goes back again, and shows how, by the resurrection and power of Christ, Satan was bound for the mystic thousand years. This thousand years is spoken of in Psalm cv. 8 "as a thousand generations;"—both those scriptures evidently mean the same thing—that is, a long time, known only to the Lord. What the thousand years means as to length of time, it is all vain to guess; it is one of those times and seasons which the Lord hath put in his own power. Now, at the end of this chapter John comes to the general judgment. And unless you take care to notice the structure of the Book, you would think that the commencement of the next chapter means a dispensation that is to succeed the present. But no such thing. After presenting to us the general judgment, John then goes back again to the beginning of the gospel dispensation, and says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth;" and what are these but the gospel dispensation? "for the first heaven and the first earth"—that is the Jewish heaven and the Jewish earth—"were passed away; and there was no more sea:" that is, no more breach between God and man, no more wrath, and no more trouble,—that is to say, that Jesus Christ put an end to trouble. If you are thus careful to look at the structure of the book, then you get rid of all the secular and carnal nonsense about an earthly millennium, and you will then see that the Book of the Revelation was as much written for the Church in her pilgrimage as any other book in the Bible. Now, all the different subjects in this Book, thus ranged, as it were, in columns side by side, may be summed up in two. This Book shows, like other books of the Bible, that there will be two currents flowing through the world—delusion and truth—and that these two currents run side by side, and very close to each other, as long as time shall last. And the reason why they run side by side, and are so close together, is that many who are now carried along by the current of delusion shall, by the interposition of the grace and power of God, be brought out of the current of delusion, and be carried no further by it, but shall be brought into the current of truth, and be carried by it ultimately into the new Jerusalem. Now, when the general judgment comes, these two currents part? the one goes down to unfathomable depths, like a most tremendous cataract, carrying with it every one that is led by delusion down to the lowest hell; while the other current, that of truth, takes those that are led by it up to the new Jerusalem, there to dwell for ever. And why do those two currents there part, and there is a great gulf between the two? Because there is then no more conversion. Once in hell, in hell for ever; once lost, lost for ever. Look, then, at the structure of the Book; if you can comprehend it, it will be one step towards clearly understanding the book.

Our subject this morning will be *the book of life*: taking care as I go along to point out what the character of the man is whose name is in this book of life; and whosoever is not in that book of life must be lost, be he who or what he may, let him think what he may of himself, or let others think what they may of him.

The book of life is named seven times in this Book of the Revelation; and if time allow, I shall notice each as I go along, in order to make them clear to you. What is the book of life? What is the Lamb's book of life? Can I bring it before you? Can I make it, as it were, almost tangible? Can I give you to see what it really is? If I can do so, that will be some help as to whether our names are there or not. And I answer, without the slightest hesitation, that the book of life—the Lamb's book of life—is nothing else but the new covenant. And the proof of it to me is this: In Malachi ii. you find that this covenant is called a covenant of life,—“My covenant of life and peace was with

him;" that is, with Christ Jesus. And is he not the mediator of this covenant? It is also a remarkable thing, and that will press itself upon our attention, as we go along this morning, that there is not a single thing said of this book of life, or anything in connection with it to which the new covenant does not completely and entirely answer. First, then, this book of life is the new covenant; and there are many who have had their names in this book nominally, professionally, but their names have not been there really, and so they will have to be blotted out. The Saviour saith, in his address to the Church in Sardis, "He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life,"—fairly implying that some names shall be blotted out,—that that which they profess to have shall prove to be only profession—that which they seem to have shall be taken from them. Let us, then, be as careful upon this subject as its solemnity and weightiness demand. In the closing up of the remarks to the Church of Thyatira, it is said, "He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end." Now it is clear beyond all dispute that there is only one way of overcoming sin, death, Satan, and tribulation, and meeting the demands of law and justice; and that is, by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ in the victory which he hath wrought. "This is our victory over the world, even our faith." We have not to achieve victory except by receiving it. When Jesus Christ is received as the end of sin, death, Satan, and hell; when you see that he has met the demands of law and justice, and settled everything, hereby it is that you overcome. You cannot overcome sin legally but by Christ's atonement; you cannot overcome condemnation legally but by Christ's obedience; it is his righteousness that delivers from condemnation; you cannot overcome death but by receiving that atonement that hath swallowed up death in victory. Now mark, "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end;" that is to say, he that receives my works, by which I have wrought the victory (and God giveth that victory unto all those for whom it was wrought); he that thus receiveth my works; by which he receiveth the victory, and keepeth them unto the end. What do we say to this? Is there not a victorious power in Christ's atonement that we feel we would rather part with anything than with that? Is there not an infinity of value in the righteousness of Jesus, Jehovah our Righteousness, that we could not and would not part with it for ten thousand worlds? And is there not an infinity of value in God's sworn covenant concerning this victory? for "the Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Most of us have received this victory, and have at times in our souls triumphed in Christ. What do we say about keeping it to the end? Have we ever met with anything that, could rival it in our estimation? If we have not been taught the value of that victory which he has wrought, why, in that case we may some day meet with something we like better, and consequently throw this away. Just mark the Israelite;—here is the Israelite, a carnally minded man; God has brought him out of Egypt, as many come out of the world by the gospel; he has given him the victory; he goes on a little while, and then throws it away. Where is the God that brought you out of Egypt? I don't think anything of that now; I don't like this God exactly. We have met with other doctrines we like better. That God that brought us out of Egypt is too high for us; he is the Most High; and that Melchizedek is as bad, for he blessed the Most High, and blessed Abraham in the name of the Most High. This God that brought us out of Egypt—we think nothing of that; we think we shall go back to Egypt again, or if not, we shall unite with the heathen around; they appear to be better off than we are. They did not think of the end of so doing, but only as matters were then; and so they threw the victory away. And how many have professed God's

truth, but apostatized therefrom; they have met with something better, in their estimation. Now, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." Here, then, is an understanding of the victory of Christ; here is reception in the soul of what he has done in the love of it; and here is a looking unto God for the happy consequences of the delightful truth that he hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. Can you say that your hope and your sympathies are in what Christ has done? If so, then he will not blot your name out of the book of life, unless you have a name to live, and are dead; as was the case with some at Sardis. What a wretched life is that—dead. Is our God dead to his people? Christ died *for* them, but he was never dead *to* them. Was he in any degree dead to them when he lived? Never. Was he in any degree dead to them when he died? Never; not even when his sacred body was in the grave. And is he dead to them now? Verily no. His whole delight is to make intercession for them, and plead what he has done on their behalf. Is the Holy Spirit dead to them? Is God the Father dead to them? Our God is the living God, and as such his interest is infinite and intense in eternal things. What is it to have a name to live, and to be dead? Why, to be dead is merely to give assent to the doctrines, but all your sympathies, affections, and anxieties are to get on in the world. Whereas if you are alive, you will hunger and thirst after the Lord's presence; you will go to his house with a sense of need, with wounds, and bruises, as it were, and putrifying sores about you, and saying, Lord, send an healing word to my wounded mind to-day; send a leaf from the tree of life to heal my bruised soul to-day; that it may be a day in which thou shalt do with me as thou didst of old—"he sent his word, and healed them." Is it not the very mission of Jesus to bind up the broken heart? But there must first be the broken heart. Is it not the mission of Jesus to set the prisoner free? But there must first be the imprisonment. Is it not the mission of Jesus to set at liberty them that are bruised? But then there must be the bruising. So that those that are alive from the dead are made from time to time conscious of what they are. They are the afflicted and poor that dwell in Zion; and these are they whose names will never be blotted out of the book of life; for they know their need too deeply of the victory of Christ ever to wish that to be blotted from the Bible; they bless the Lord that it is in the Bible, that they see it there, and understand it, that it is never to be taken away, but to stand to their account to all eternity.

Then mark another thing—that those whose names are in this book of life so clearly understand the order of eternal salvation, that you cannot delude them. The very wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. The truth itself flashes its own heavenly rays into their souls; they already begin to walk the golden streets; they see the order of eternal mercy. In the 13th chapter of this book, where gigantic religious powers arise, and draw away thousands upon thousands, as you know Popery has done, and as Puseyism is now doing, it is said that "all shall worship the beast whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain "from the foundation of the world." Ah, says the believer, the Lamb of God that has taken away all my sin; the Lamb of God, who came to me because he loved me; sent to me because the Father loved me; that appeared unto me because the Holy Spirit loved me; I see him to be the Mediator of this better covenant. And so all shall worship the beast, shall worship the ecclesiastical powers, the devices of men, whose names are not in the book of life. If thy name be there, nought can delude thee.

Now, just see how this accords with the new covenant. What is the language of that covenant? "They shall all know me, from the least to the greatest," little faith and great faith; "and I will be merciful to their

unrighteousness. Is it not so? Where should we have been long ere this if it were not so? "And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." So that all shall be deluded, shall be led astray from God's truth, shall come short of eternal life, short of heaven, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb. Here is Christ in his sacrificial character, "If it were possible they should deceive the very elect." What do you say to this? I know what I say;—I say what I have lately said—that it is one part of the glory of our religion, that it is a personal and individual religion. I am indebted to no man nor class of men under the heavens for what I preach, and I am accountable to none, responsible to none. My religion is entirely of God; and I no more believe that I shall ever move an hair's-breath, or be deceived in any of these essential things, than I believe Jesus Christ himself could be deluded. God has given me that assurance, he will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom. I am so satisfied with this book of life, this well ordered covenant and state of things, that I cannot be moved. Just so with the greater part of you; it is given to you to see the truth so clearly that no device, no contrivance whatever, can ever move you. And if they beat you all to pieces in argument, that would not beat you in the truth—certainly not. A man may be very ingenious in argument, and I may not be able argumentatively to meet all his arguments; they may be so sophistically framed as to puzzle one; but then that would not alter the facts that I am a sinner, and saved by grace. There is nothing like the eloquence of facts; as we say, facts are the most eloquent things in the world; they speak with power and with decision. And when the facts of experience are realized a man becomes fixed; he does not stand by his ability to argue, but he stands upon absolute facts; he stands upon the great fact of the victory wrought by the Saviour, and the yea and amen promises that come to us by that victory, under a sight and sense of our need of the same.

The book of life will lead us then to another scripture—the 8th verse of the 17th chapter:—"They that dwell on the earth shall wonder"—that is, with admiration—"whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." "All shall wonder." Popery dressed itself up, so that the women began first: Dear, how beautiful that man did look in his vestments; and how beautiful that organ was, was it not? and what a beautiful service that was, was it not? Beautiful indeed! As a Catholic some time ago said to a Protestant, "How you Protestants sit in your places of worship I can't make out. I spend my Sundays thus:—I go to chapel in the morning, and I go to the theatre in the evening"—that is in France; "and all the difference between the two is that the one is called religious and the other is not; I am equally charmed with the two. So I think we ought to make religion," saith such, "pleasing." And thus people see it and admire it. Hence if you go to a Puseyite church, you will see four or five of those fellows run round the church four or five times before the service begins. That is to show themselves, and to gain the applause of the ladies; but then such ladies are lady fools; and then these lady fools make some men fools, and so it goes on. "All shall wonder whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world." But the strong, sturdy, rough Reformers said, Why, that is all man millinery, that is all rubbish, that is all of the devil together; they are nothing but deceivers dressed up to please the flesh. So then let a soul turn to the Saviour, and see what he is, and see what he has done; the Redeemer stands the altogether lovely, the chiefest of ten thousand. He is the bright and morning Star to the soul, and such disdain to admire, and disdain to express any approbation of these human inventions. Hence these men practise before a looking-glass that their gestures in public may be such as will gain admiration. And hence their exquisite politeness in private. If you go to their houses,

you will find them most polite. Why, they say, they can't hate us now; we are so polite, and that is what the devil delights in—he is transformed into an angel of light. So that all shall wonder and admire, except those rough, sturdy old Luthers and Calvins, except those rough old Elijahs and Elishas, except that determined Paul; he will have none of it. He says, If an angel were to come and preach another gospel, let him be accursed. So that they cannot extort admiration from that soul that knows the truth, that has once seen how God in the perfection of beauty shines out of Zion. Oh, my hearer, beware of what you admire. See that you admire him who shall at the last be admired in all them that believe. Oh, how our souls will admire him through the countless ages of eternity, when he gives us an insight into the deep mysteries couched in the few words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God." His human nature was a visible part, as it were, of God, presented to our view; in that, or beyond that, as it were, lie infinite depths, infinite wonders; and by the human nature of Christ, by what he has done, God himself shall be all in all. So then, as good old John Gilpin said,—

"Of womankind I do admire but one;"

and so I say of religions. I admire but one, and that is a free grace religion; that is God's religion, Christ's religion; I can admire no other. They may be dressed up and painted up, and made to look as smart as old Jezebel; I would do as the eunuch did—bundle it out of the window, if it came to the dogs at last. Let me cling to the truth as it is in Jesus; there the soul is safe.

Again, fourthly, we have the book of life named in the 12th verse of this same 20th chapter, in a way that may apply to experience, though it refers to the ultimate judgment; that will most likely occupy our attention next Lord's day morning. "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life." Now mark, the books were opened, and after the legal books were opened, then comes the book of life. Just try this by experience. First, there is the book of federal law. When the book of federal law is opened to a sinner, how he stands aghast; I mean when the book of what you are by the fall of Adam is opened. When the Lord opened this book to Saul of Tarsus, and he was made to descend into his own heart, what did he find there? Why, he honestly tells us, "all manner of concupiscence." This is the book of federal law; this is what I am—sinful, unclean, vile, wretched, and miserable. Let God open that to a man, and let the man feel that he is every moment in the sight of a just and holy God, that will make him miserable; there will be no happiness. You will carry that disease and that wretchedness with you go where you may; you will lie down at night, saying, Would to God it were morning; you will go out with it in the morning, and say, Would to God it were evening. It will beset you, and send forth swarms of the worst thoughts out of your heart you ever had in your life. That is the opening of the book of federal law—what you are by the fall of Adam, what you are by nature. There appears to me to be a great deficiency in the professing world in our day upon this matter. The word of God declares that "they shall know every one his own grief and his own sore." If he doth not, he can never know the power of salvation. Then there is the book of personal law in addition to that—that whatever your personal sins are, you will be punished for them, and "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of the whole." So that if you have never in your whole life told but one falsehood, or committed but one wrong, whether that is a sin of omission or commission, that one sin has in it the strength of God's fiery and eternal law, and would damn your soul, though not with such a heavy damnation as will be the lot of those whose sins were more numerous and aggravated; but still that one sin would shut you up in hell for ever. When these books are opened, then the man is

made miserable. Then "another book was opened, which is the book of life." Ah, Ananias comes to Saul,—Now, Saul, the book of federal law has been opened to you, and you are taught what you are by nature, which has spoilt all your supposed holiness, righteousness, wisdom, and strength, and everything else; and the book of personal law is now opened to you, and you are taken into custody as a blasphemer, a murderer of the saints of God, and what is done to them is done to Christ, what is done to Christ is done to God. But now, Saul, I am come to open another book, which is the book of life; I am come to tell thee now that the God of our fathers hath chosen thee; thy name is in the book of life; that thou mightest see that Just One, he who died the just for the unjust, that by his righteousness, by his blood, he might bring us to God. Oh, my hearer, when the hour shall come for you to be brought into God's presence by the blood, righteousness, spirit, and suretyship responsibility of Christ,—“Here am I, and the children which thou hast given me;” it may well be said that we shall be presented before his throne with exceeding joy. “That thou shouldest see that Just One, and that thou shouldest know his will.” You know his will legislatively; you know what his will is in the law; but now you must know what it is in the gospel; and there you will see that it is a good will, acceptable and perfect; there you will see that Jesus Christ is the happy fruit of that good will. “And that thou shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. Arise, therefore, and be immersed.” You see there our translators have given in the Greek instead of the English. When they came to the Greek word *baptizo*, they said we had better have a piece of Greek here; it is not every one that understands Greek, and if we do not translate the word, we can tell the people anything we like to say about it. In all the different dialects of the Greek language, the Greek word whether in the shape of *bapto* or *baptizo*, can be never made to mean anything but immersion. Arise and be immersed, and acknowledge thereby that Jesus Christ was immersed in God's wrath to take away thy sin, and thereby acknowledge that he rose again from the dead, that he might be thy life, and bring thee eternally to God. And he arose and was immersed, and went immediately and,

“Told to sinners round
What a dear Saviour he had found.”

Then we have three more yet to name in conclusion. Our text saith, “Whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire.” Do you not see here that if you are not a believer in the truth as it is in Jesus, if you are not a believer in this book of life, in this covenant of life, lost you must be. There is no other way of being saved. Ever remember that it is by the truth of God we know what kind of a Saviour the Saviour is; that we know how our salvation originated, that the people of God are described in their distinction from all others, and that God dwells with us and will bring us to himself at last:—all this we know by the truth.

Then at the end of the next chapter it saith, “There shall in no wise enter into the city anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.” See how this answers to the new covenant, in which the Lord says, “The sins of Israel shall be sought for, and they shall not be found. I will pardon those whom I reserve.” In that covenant there is the great High Priest, Christ Jesus, and by him there is no more conscience of sin, and no more remembrance of sin; his people receiving him, he is their life and purity; they are holy as he is holy, righteous as he is righteous, and truthful as he is truthful, because it is the law of faith, the law of the new covenant, which is put into their minds and written in their hearts. They cannot defile; they come in by Christ Jesus; that is the way they escape defilement. “Or worketh abomination.”

That word "abomination" has evidently a special reference to idolatry. And what infamous abominations were the idols set up of old, and the inventions of men that have been brought forward to take the place of the truths of the gospel of Christ, to assume the prerogatives of the Most High. These are idolatrous abominations, from which the people of God shall be delivered. "Or maketh a lie." Why, in these matters positively the child of God has no room for a lie. If I were to make one, I should not know what to do with it; that is, if I were to make a false doctrine, for that is what is meant. I have no room for it. There is no room for it in the love of God—that is complete;—election—that is complete—no room there; the work of Christ—no room there; the work of the Holy Spirit—no room there; the new covenant—no room there; and in heaven—no room there. I should not know what to do with it. "But they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Now what do you little ones say? Well, says the little one, I can say this testimony of what Christ has done is true; and I turn away from all false doctrines, however feasible; I must come to the blessed truth of God, where I find everything to admire and rejoice in; and I do know something of the books of federal law and personal law being opened to me, and also the book of eternal life. Ah then, think you that the Lord would have done all this for you if he had meant to destroy you? No.

Let us notice one more in conclusion. At the end of this book it says, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. The Christian add to it? Where is he to add anything? No, he says, my blessed God; thou knowest I have nothing but sin to add; I have nothing but that which is repulsive to add. I add anything, Lord? No; thy promise is yea and amen; thy truth is complete; thy work is perfect; let my soul go on abundantly to sing of thy great goodness. "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy"—if any man shall take away election, predestination, the sovereignty of God, the security of the Christian (and there is no book in all the Bible that more clearly shows the safety of the real Christian than this book of Revelation, as might easily be shown), "God shall take away his part out of the book of life." Such profess to have a part in the book of life, but they do not know what the book is; they do not know this immutable covenant ordered in all things and sure; for if so they would not take anything away from it. "God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Thus, then, I think it is pretty clear the Lamb's book of life and the New Covenant, of which he is the mediator, are one and the same thing; and the secret of the Lord, that is the counsel of the Lord, what he means to do both in judgment and in mercy, is with them that fear him; and he will then show them this new covenant; its first law is the law of faith, "he that believeth shall be saved." We must not separate the covenant from the Saviour, nor the Saviour from the covenant; take this covenant away, and you then take away that book of life which contains *all* the *gospel* will of God. God hath joined the Saviour and the New Covenant together, and has therein and thereby arranged and ordered that everything and all things in heaven, in earth, and in hell, *must* be subservient to this covenant. And so the mediator thereof must reign until all enemies are put under his feet; not one item of the Lamb's book of life can fail; the book of mortal life must fail, and our names soon be blotted therefrom. The Edenic book failed, the book of the Jewish covenant failed by the people forsaking it and throwing down its altars. They knew not the Lord, but *all* belonging to this New Covenant shall know him, from the least to the greatest. Such is the Lamb's book of life.