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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PEACE OF GOD.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, 23RD AUGUST, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“Peace shall be upon Israel.”—PSALM CXXV. 5.

THIS peace is the foundation and essential mystery of the kingdom of heaven. There is no other peace that is like it; it is a peace that stands by itself; and there is not one person under the heavens can understand it, enter into it, or know what it is but they that are born of God. This peace may be shadowed forth by many things, but it is a deep mystery. You may have peace in every other respect, and yet not have that peace that passeth all understanding—that peace which our text presents to us. I do not know any one thing upon which Satan more deludes immortal souls than upon this doctrine of peace. Hence the common saying among our fellow-creatures that know not God, “I have made my peace with God,” when at the same time the Lord has had no hand in it. And you will find in the Scriptures, as well as in the world, thousands and thousands that know not this peace, but are utterly destitute of it. As I have said, there is nothing like it; it is indestructible; it can live through any and through every tribulation. Hence saith the Saviour, “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me”—but only in me—“ye might have peace.” And at the same time that you have peace in him, you have tribulation in the world; but his entire victory on behalf of those for whom he died makes this peace indestructible. Cain thought he had this peace, but he had not; for if he had, he would not have slain his brother Abel; and the false prophets thought they had this peace, but they had not; for if they had, they would not have forsaken God’s covenant, digged down his altars, and slain his prophets. The Pharisees of old thought they had this peace of God, and called God their Father, but they had not, they were total strangers to it; for had they had this peace vitally, they would not have slain the Lord of life and glory, who himself is the embodiment of this divine peace. And so it is, alas! alas! that we have to mourn over the peace that does exist among men in relation to eternal things. You must all see—even those of you that know not the Lord—how easily we are prone to satisfy ourselves upon eternal things, how we dislike to be troubled about eternal things. What an awful scripture is that, and yet it is a scripture that is descriptive of every one by nature, where it is said that “The strong man”—meaning, of course, Satan—“keepeth the palace,”—the palace we take to mean the

VOL. XI.—No. 513.

soul,—“and his goods are in peace”! And so the man takes his sleep of death for peace; he takes his worldly prosperity for peace; he takes his health and his brilliant hopes for this world, and the comforts which he has, for peace. He is quite content, and at the same time utterly destitute of that peace essential to eternal salvation. This, then, being the case, I shall, the few minutes I speak, enter with all the care I possibly can into this great mystery of the peace of Israel:—“Peace shall be upon Israel.” And there will, therefore, be two parts to our subject this evening:—First, *what this peace is*; and secondly, *the ground which it forms for confidence in God*; for this peace is by confidence in God, by faith in God. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.”

First, then, *what this peace is*. Now it is that, as I have said, that differs from any and from every thing else that you can name. And I am going to speak of this peace in the experience of it; and it will stand thus. Take, for instance, the 32nd Psalm; you will learn there what the downward experience of the Psalmist was. Let us honestly, for a few moments, test ourselves by that downward experience which prepared him for this peace of which I have to speak. He there gives us to understand that he was put to silence. He says, “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.” He was so conscious of the awfulness of his condition before God as a sinner, and of the majesty of God's eternal law, that David's mouth was stopped. He had not a single word to say why he should not be cast away; he had not a reason to assign why he should not be cast into eternal perdition; he had not one reason to assign why he should not be left to dwell with everlasting burnings, with devouring fire. And he was in trouble about it; he says, “My bones waxed old.” That, of course, is a figurative expression to denote weakness. You know when we get very old, our bones become weak, and we become very weak altogether. When the bones lose their vitality, the man becomes a mere little heap, as it were, of animation, without any vigour, or force, or strength, and a mere cumberer of the ground. Now understand this spiritually—that he was brought to feel that he was a poor, weak, helpless worm of the earth. And then mark something else;—the next clause is a description of very deep experience, and yet he was highly favoured to understand it. He says, “For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture”—which is nothing else but a repetition of the other clause of the other verse—“my moisture is turned into the drought of summer;” meaning that his false hopes and his false confidences were all dried up. “Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me.” The Lord pressed upon him like an unmerciful creditor, although the most merciful creditor in existence;—the Lord pressed upon him and kept saying, “Pay what thou owest, pay what thou owest. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge,” to God, “and the judge deliver thee to the officer,” justice, “and thou shalt be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.” Now the Lord seemed to be pressing—“Pay what thou owest; pay what thou owest.” Then would come the scripture, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” and “every idle word that a man shall speak, he shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” Now this made him miserable, this made him wretched, this brought him into real trouble. And as I just now said, the Lord was pressing like an unmerciful creditor; and many a poor creature knows what the terror of that is literally; but it is only the people of God that know what the terror of that is spiritually. For if we have our debts to pay in the spiritual sense, we can pay them only by eternal woe; we can pay them only by lamentation, bitterness, and woe for ever; and even then we cannot

pay them; even then we shall be as great debtors, and have as much to suffer after millions of years as we shall at the beginning. But then by and by it is to be brought to light that the great Creditor himself has prepared a ransom, that he has found a ransom, and that he himself has contrived a way in which all the demands of justice are met; and while he seems pressing you, as it were, for the debts that you owe him, he does not intend to take a farthing of you, he does not intend to take a mite of you, he does not intend to take from a thread to a shoe-latchet of you. But then you do not know this until the Lord takes you along a little further in this matter. Now this downward experience, what was it for? Why, it was to bring the soul into solemn feeling before God. Therefore saith David, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." Just look at it, he was brought to acknowledge that he had nothing else to confess to the Lord but iniquity, transgression, and sin. Oh, what a difference between this character and the Pharisee! He came, as you see, with his fasting twice a week, and one thing and the other, as all unconvinced people do; but David, being convinced of his state, acknowledged that he had nothing but sin to call his own. And when he was thus led to make this true confession unto the Lord, then comes the testimony, "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." Now in comes that peace that passeth all understanding; now he is led to see that those mighty debts are paid, sins past, present, and to come, and that he is free for ever and ever; he is led to see that every sin is lovingly forgiven and forgotten, and that mercy rolls into his soul, and makes him more happy than he was before miserable. Let us hear his own account of it, and of the confidence which it inspired. He says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." Believe me, you can get rid of your sins before God only by his forgiving them, and he forgives them by that which the Saviour hath done. And then the Lord forgives sins in a way that covers them;—"whose sin is covered." What a sweet thought, that your sins and my sins, that thus know the Lord, they are covered out of sight, gone, and gone for ever! "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found; surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him." The floods of great waters appear to have reference to two previous circumstances; first, the drowning of the world. The time came, the door of the ark was closed, judgment began, and then they could not come near to the ark; no mercy after this. Just so with you that are not born of God, death will presently come in upon you, and when you get into the flood of death, that will waft you into eternity; no mercy there—I mean, not in hell; no mercy there; the rich man shows that clearly enough. Then it seems to allude also to the Egyptian host that were drowned. They could not come near the Israelites,—they could not come near each other all the night. How great the mercy, then, of being brought into trouble now about this matter; for "blessed are they that weep, for they shall laugh; blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed are they that hunger and thirst, for they shall be filled." And then just see, before I go to the ground of this peace, what confidence it inspires. David, when he was thus favoured, says, "Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble;" that is, I shall never meet with a fatal trouble; whatever trouble I shall meet with I shall be sure to overcome. Dr. Watts has hit upon the very thought when he says,—

"If sin be pardoned I'm secure;
 Death has no sting beside;
 The law gave sin its damning power,
 But Christ my ransom died."

“Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.” So that he looked for many deliverances, and with those deliverances he was favoured. Now do not dream that you can have this peace without this work of the Holy Spirit, without this downward experience. It is not the whole, but they that are sick, that need the physician. I wish I could see, if it were the Lord’s will, the professing world thoroughly convinced of what they are, and in solemn, awful soul-trouble about their condition, with the determination, grace enabling them, to do spiritually as Mordecai did literally, when Esther sent the change of apparel;—Ah, he says, what is this? what is the good of this? I want deliverance. And so Mordecai would not accept anything that did not bring deliverance. Then, when the king sent, there came deliverance. And so you,—“For this shall every one that is godly pray.” You will seek the Lord, and you will never rest until you are told by his Spirit’s mouth with divine power that you are interested in this mercy, in this forgiveness of sin. And then, when you are brought into the peace, it would be in vain for you to seek for language to describe how precious Christ is to you; it would be in vain for you to seek for words to describe how glorious the God of Israel is to you; it would be in vain for you to seek for any simile or metaphor whatever that could clearly give out and express the wonders that God has done for you, and what he is now in your estimation. Ah, you will say, now I can enter a little into that scripture, “mark the perfect man” —perfect, as we have said lately, in this fourfold respect,—perfect in Christ, perfect in kind, perfect in decision, and perfect in prospect, as he shall be perfect at the last day; “and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace;” this peace that is by Jesus Christ. Cruden gives us, under the word “reconciliation” in his Concordance, three very nice thoughts upon this matter, and I will just repeat them. Speaking of the peace that Jesus Christ has made, and the reconciliation (for of course that is the ground of it) which he has brought about, Cruden says it required these three things in the mediator; first, that the mediator intercede for the transgressors; secondly, that the mediator give or make satisfaction for the injury done; and thirdly, that the mediator stand engaged to see that the offenders should offend no more. I thought they were three very nice ideas. Let us make a kind of text of them just for a moment. It is beyond all dispute that the Lord Jesus Christ did make intercession for the transgressors; for if he came into the world to save sinners, he came to intercede for sinners; and so he pleads his own blood, his own righteousness, his own name, and the promises which he hath by his mediatorial work sealed. He then is indeed our Intercessor, appearing in the presence of God himself; and often have we sung the sweet words,—

“For me He pleads the atoning blood,
For me the righteousness of God.”

And this mediator also must make satisfaction for the injury that has been done. Oh, how nicely has the dear Saviour done this! oh, how has he met the demands of justice! I make no hesitation in saying that sin did not entail a single sorrow that the Saviour did not endure, overcome, and terminate; and that sin did not bring one mischief which he did not endure, overcome, and terminate. Hence Daniel’s description, that “He shall finish transgression, and shall make an end of sin, and shall make reconciliation for iniquity, and shall bring in everlasting righteousness.” Ah, when this peace flows into the soul, it is, as we have said, something beyond all description,—a peace that passeth all understanding. There is no fear of life then, when you have this peace, because you feel, and see, and know that the God of peace is with you, and will be with you. And there is no fear of death either, not when this

peace rises and overflows the banks of unbelief and your sins;—you can then look forward to that happy hour. It was the realisation of this that made Simeon say, “Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” Then the other thought, which is a very nice one, that the mediator was engaged to see that the persons so offending were to offend no more. Now, say you, how in the world is this brought about? This is enough to cut us all off; for James says, “In many things we offend all;” that is, we all in many things offend. Just so “there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good, and sinneth not.” And there are thousands now for whom Christ died in a state of nature, and they go on in blind enmity against God. Where, then, is the propriety of the notion that he was engaged to see that they should offend no more? Well, that matter is as easily understood as possible. That is brought about in two ways. First, by him as their representative. While we are daily sinning, and are compassed with infirmities, he is our representative; and as he does not sin, we by him are reckoned as not sinning; as he did no wrong, and does no wrong, and never will do any wrong, they that believe in him are held as offending no more, as doing no more wrong. Thus it is that the Lord will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. Ah, Christian, sensible of thy daily faults, lose sight of thy representative, then thou wilt have all manner of hard thoughts of God, and thou wilt be always despairing. But if thou canst view him as thy representative, and believe the Lord’s word, that he will not behold iniquity in Jacob,—that there shall be no enchantment against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel; for of Jacob and Israel it shall be said, “What hath God wrought!”—if thou canst thus view him, then how great will be thy peace! That is one way in which it is brought about. That made the apostle say, “The life that I now live is by the faith of the Son of God.” See what an infinite blessing faith is;—I shall not recall the word; I say that faith is an infinite blessing, uniting us to God thus where there is this reconciliation, this peace that passeth all understanding. I could not live any other life but this life of faith; it is this that gives me such confidence. And these eternal things when I was ill last winter were so opened up to my mind that as far as I was personally concerned—I should not have thought then half so much of dying as I do now of preaching a sermon. Oh, my hearer, the peace of God, the joy, the delight, the endearment, the glory! Precious faith receives Jesus; and if you receive him, you want no other holiness, no other righteousness, no other salvation, no other way to God, no other life, no other light, no other kingdom, no other possession. In receiving him you receive everything, for “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” That is one way, then, in which the Lord brings about this peace experimentally, and by a representative who has made reconciliation. Now I will still abide by my text out of Cruden;—I never preached out of Cruden before; we all feel highly indebted to that laborious man for his excellent work, the Concordance. Now the next way in which the Mediator brings about that great result, that the offenders offend no more, is this—that at the last great day he will raise us up from the dead in his own likeness; when it will be impossible either in soul or in body to sin any more, to offend any more, to make a mistake any more. “Here am I, and the children which thou hast given me.” So if Satan should say, “Well, but Jesus Christ undertook that they should offend no more; he has not done that yet;”—but he will by and by. The devil may go on now; but what will he say at the last, when—

“Our inbred foes shall be all slain,
Nor Satan break our peace again?”

Here, then, is an Intercessor; here is one that has given every satisfaction, that has brought mercy and truth together, righteousness and

peace embracing each other; here is one as our representative; here is one that will carry out the great decree, and which decree is this, that "he hath predestinated us to be conformed unto the image of his Son;" and "he shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself." The Lord help you to understand it. There must be downward work; there must be soul-trouble; because to proclaim peace where there is no trouble would seem to be superfluous. But when a man is brought into this real soul-trouble, then he is prepared for that peace that passeth all understanding. And you will find as you go on the Lord will often bring you or suffer you to be brought into many troubles of mind, and sometimes in circumstances; and then he will revive this peace; he will afresh breathe this same heavenly peace into your souls, as he did to the disciples—breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost;" and so he doth revive our peace again, again, and again.

I will now notice, secondly, *the ground which this peace forms for confidence in God.* I have no doubt that our text is a kind of summing up of the whole Psalm. The Psalm begins with saying, "They that trust in the Lord." Now those of you that are not thus brought into soul-trouble, and are not brought to see that Jesus Christ alone could make peace, that he is the peace, you may trust in the Lord, but you will be disappointed. But they that understand the truth, they understand why they trust in the Lord; they can give a reason for the hope that is in them. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." The mount Zion there alludes to the mediatorial throne of the Lord Jesus Christ; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom "there shall be no end." Ah, sweet thought then, if brought to trust in him, from that mount Zion, from that reconciliation, that peace, that friendship, that divine care, those divine advantages, this wonderful possession, from his promises, from his glory, you are never to be moved. You must be moved from many things—life itself presently,—but you will never be moved from him. The Lord enable you to trust in him, in whatever respect you may be in trouble, in his care for his friends; and those that are reconciled to him are his friends. When Abraham believed in these very truths I am now stating, he was called "the friend of God;" and such may trust in the Lord; he will not say them nay; "they shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." That is the first ground of confidence, then, I name, that is laid by what the Saviour has done. Then, secondly, see what a confidence David had—and these things are recorded in order that our faith may grow exceedingly, and our love to the Lord;—see what a confidence the Psalmist had in the care of the Lord over his people. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth, even for ever." And I cannot deny myself the great pleasure of naming here several scriptures that are beautiful representations of the Lord's care of his people; those representations made in that form, that he is round about them. I think in the Book of Zechariah there are no less than three different representations of the Lord being round about his people; just to show that whatever quarter your trouble may come from, the Lord is there to meet it for you, to understand it, to regulate it, to see that it does just what he intends it shall do, and no more. Hence in Zechariah ii. 4, the Lord saith, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein; for I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." So there are his judgments round you to defend you. And if I am speaking to any enemies this evening, if you are enemies to the Lord's people, there are fiery judgments which will fall upon you unless you shall

cease to be enemies. Though the Lord will suffer enemies to go on and go on to a certain extent, yet by and by the fiery judgment must fall upon them. Hence, in that same chapter where he saith, "I will be unto her a wall of fire round about," he saith to his people, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." Ah, amidst the calamities and uncertainties of life, is it not something pleasing to have the Lord compassing us about? Not that we glory in any of our fellow-creatures being subjected to judgments even on our behalf. When the Israelites saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore, they rejoiced, but their rejoicing must have been with great trembling; I cannot think that one Israelite could there rejoice without trembling. I am sure, friends, if we had been there, with what we know now of our own hearts, we should have said, Why had we not been those Egyptians? Are we better than they? No, in no wise. How is this, then, that we have escaped, and they are destroyed? Bless the Lord for furnishing us with the answer, for men would have given us some human answer; men would have found some reason in the Israelites why the difference was made. But the Lord has furnished us with the answer, when pointing to the paschal lamb he says, "Against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast; that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." "Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?" Oh, the Lord help us to glorify him for the freeness, eternity, certainty of his mercy. Then there are two more instances in the same book. The prophet lifted up his eyes, and he saw four horns,—that is, four powers, east, west, north, and south; "these are the horns which have scattered Judah." Just so the Christian sometimes; he says, If I look east, everything seems against me that way; west, everything against me that way; north or south, everything against me there; I cannot see a single thing in my favour; all seems wrong together. I wish I had never been born; I do not seem to have a spring of comfort anywhere; everything is against me on the right hand and on the left. I thought I was a Christian, and thought the Lord took care of his people; and yet here am I, driven about and knocked about; I do not know what to do with myself hardly. But the prophet looked up again, and he saw four carpenters or builders—four of them, the four quarters. What are these come to do? Why, they are come to cast your troubles out; that is what they are to do. The Lord has come to turn your captivity; that while things have appeared against you on every side, now things shall appear for you on every side. The very things that you thought were against you shall turn out to be for you; for the Lord will take care of his own. Then the Lord gives another representation of this same thing. He saith, "I will encamp about mine house because of the army." Ah, there is the army of our sins, and he will take care that army shall not carry us away from his blessed truth; there is the army of the world, and the army of false professors, and he will take care that his people shall, by faith in him, easily put ten thousand to flight, while they themselves shall never be put to flight, for they shall stand fast in God's truth. "Because of him that passeth by,"—that is, the priest and the Levite, the false parson, the false preacher, who does not understand the poor wounded sinner's condition; "and because of him that returneth,"—that is, the devil; he visits us, and tries to get us away from the truth; and when he cannot, he tries it again, and again, and again, and will do more or less all our lifetime; but the Lord saith, "no oppressor shall pass through them any more." Nahum takes this subject up most emphatically. He says in the last verse of his first chapter, "Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace. O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows;" that is, hold fast God's truth, abide by it; that will sum up all the vows; "for the wicked shall no more pas

through thee; he is utterly cut off." What a beautiful representation have we of the care the Lord thus takes of his people, in this same psalm. "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity." Now the rod of the wicked means the power of the wicked; and the lot of the righteous means that that falls to their lot. Now I will try and make this plain. Here is an Israelite in Egypt, one of the slaves; his lot, by the mercy of God, is to be delivered from that slavery. But if Pharaoh by his rod or power could have prevented it—and they tried it, only Aaron's rod swallowed up all their rods—and have kept the Israelite there, then the Israelite must have put up with whatever Pharaoh chose to put upon him. And so, if the devil could keep us in delusion, and keep us away from God's truth, then we should put forth our hands to Popery, or to whatever system the devil pleased. But then the Lord opens the eyes of his people, turns them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. So that Pharaoh's rod could not so rest upon their deliverance as to hinder that deliverance; they were delivered. Second, it meant exemption; they were to be exempted from the angel of death. Pharaoh's rod could not so rest upon them as to hinder their exemption by the paschal lamb from the angel of death. Pharaoh's rod or power could not so rest upon them as to hinder their passing with safety through the Red Sea, obtaining the victory, and ascribing the same unto Him that had triumphed gloriously. And so the believing Israelite—still keep up that distinction—gets into the wilderness, and he cleaves unto the Lord his God, his lot is maintained; he does not follow after the golden calf, or any of the false gods, which he must have done if Satan could have had his way; but no, the rod, the power of the wicked, could not so rest upon the lot of the believing Israelite as to hinder him from cleaving unto the Lord his God. Moses turns round, his face shining, at the end of the forty years, and says, "Ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you unto this day." Follow the believing Israelites up into the land of Canaan, not all the combined forces of the adversary could hinder them from coming into their land. And so it was that the Lord brought them in, planted them in his holy mountain, scattered their enemies before them; so that Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah." Those of you that like to serve Dagon, Chemosh, and the gods of the nations, for the sake of a good name in the world, do so; as for myself and my house, we will serve Jehovah. And thus the rod of the adversary shall not so rest upon the lot of the righteous as to make the believing man go over from the truth, saying, The truth is no use to me, so I will go over from it, and join the devil. He would not say join the devil, because he would not think it was the devil. Why, say you, no man would be such a fool as that. Millions have been such fools; I will mention one only out of many I could mention. Take king Ahaz;—he is a king; of course he must understand everything; he is a great man. But what did he say? Why he said, the gods of the Assyrians fight for them, and they prosper more than we do, and so I will have an altar after their plan, and I will make some sacrifices myself to their god. And Ahaz actually cast or caused to be cast his own children into the fire to these gods. Thus Ahaz was not a righteous man, he was not a believing man; for if he had been, he would not have been thus overcome; and thus the rod of the wicked so rested upon him that he put forth his hand to the iniquitous systems of heathenism, went over, became a conquered man. But, saith the apostle Paul, amidst all the troubles and trials through which he passed, this peace of which I have spoken being the very support and strength of his heart, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."