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# Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

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THE RIGHT NATION.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 27<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

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“Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”—Matthew xxi. 43.

THIS text belongs to the subject we had last Lord's day morning from the 28th verse of this chapter; and I felt then, and I feel now, that some more things may profitably be said upon the same subject; I felt we had not got, as it were, to the end of the subject. And these words having been with me, paying no attention, or but very little, to what people call the season of the year, I have, therefore, given way to my impression, and have taken these words as our text this morning.

Now the first thing will be to point out *the nation to whom the kingdom of God is savingly given.* Secondly, *the way in which the kingdom of God was taken from the Jews.* Thirdly, *how the people of God bring forth the fruits of this kingdom.*

First, *the nation to whom the kingdom of God is savingly given.* You will observe that there are two reasons why the people of God are called a nation. First, because the Lord was pleased to make the Jewish nation, as a nation, a type of the Church, so that the true Church of God takes this typical name, and is called a nation in the scriptures we shall name. And the second reason they are called a nation is because of that unity in which they stand in oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ. We must, therefore, in entering upon this subject, discard all ideas of earthly nations; for it is clear the Lord did not substitute for the Jewish nation any one earthly nation whatever. The nation to whom the kingdom is given must be understood spiritually. I will try and point out who this nation is, and shall not, of course, pass over individuality, for nations are made up of individuals. Now the first feature of the nation to whom the kingdom of God is given, and that bring forth the fruits thereof, is that they are a righteous nation. “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation that keepeth the truth may enter therein.” We at once, then, commence with that that will remain very dear to us while we live, and will be very dear to us when we come to die, and will be very glorious to us to all eternity—namely, the substitutional righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. In whatever zone or part or age of the world the people may

be, this nation means those who are brought to feel that by nature there is none righteous, there is none that doeth good; in a word, they are brought to feel and see their need of the substitutional righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; they are led to see that his atonement puts away sin, and that his righteousness justifieth every one that believeth. These are the people. This is where Cain was not; this is where Esau was not; this is where the Jews were not; for though they had a zeal of God, yet, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they had not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. The apostle there takes a very mild view of their condition—their being ignorant of God's righteousness. That was not the worst; the worst was, that there was a deadly enmity against it; that they hated Christ, and that they hated his gospel, and that they hated his ministers and people, and therefore had no desire to learn or to understand the dear mystery, for I cannot help saying so, of the substitutional work of the blessed Redeemer. "Open ye the gates," that is, the promises of God; open up those promises; "that the righteous nation that keepeth the truth may enter in." You will observe here that righteousness and truth are connected; because it is the business of the new covenant truth of the blessed God to set forth the new covenant Mediator, and the new covenant righteousness. And as I have before said, I make the same remark again, this righteousness is as suited to us in the manner of it, in the terms of it, as it is in the very character of it. "Unto him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." They are therefore a righteous nation, and these are to be admitted into the city of God. "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation that keepeth the truth" concerning this righteousness; and the truth concerning that righteousness is God's sworn yea and amen promise, "may enter in." Now just bring in in this part the last verse of the 21st of Revelation: "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." By precious faith receiving the substitutional work of Jesus Christ, as you stand there you are free from defilement. Hence the Church is called the undefiled; and we shall not go too far if we say, not only undefiled, but undefilable; as it saith in another place, unproveable and unblamable. "Neither whatsoever worketh abomination;" alluding to idolatry, where idolatrous principles and practices were put into the place of God's truth, and God's Christ, "or maketh a lie," meaning false doctrine. Now those that thus receive Jesus Christ, as I have described, open ye the gates, that this righteous nation may enter into the city. They are the citizens of heaven; they see the city, they see the way to it; and this is that nation that the Lord hath chosen. But we have another scripture that bears upon the same thing. In the 60th of Isaiah they are represented as righteous, and then follows that which is very beautiful as the result of their being righteous: "Thy people shall be all righteous;" now mark the consequences;—"they shall inherit the land for ever." If I receive the dear Redeemer in the eternity of his person, and righteousness, and redemption, how can it be otherwise than to inherit the land for ever? For we gat not the land in possession by our sword or our arm, but by the righteousness of the blessed God himself. "Thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever." What poor, feeble believers we are! Instead of judging of ourselves by our faith in Christ, and by what the Saviour is, we are nine-tenths of our time judging of ourselves by what we may feel. If we feel cold, and dead, and hard, and unable to get at anything spiritual, then we begin to write bitter things against ourselves. Yet amidst all this, our faith still holds fast the blessed truth of that completeness that is in Christ. "Thy people shall be all righteous; they

shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified." What is our experience, and what are our sentiments? Why, they both go one way—namely, to glorify God:—"that I may be glorified." Why, so far from its being difficult for us to acknowledge the truth, we love the truth, and rejoice in it; so far from its being difficult for us to exalt the Saviour, and to glorify God, it is our very glory to lie low in the dust at the footstool of his mercy, and to exalt him; I have never yet met with a minister that has lifted up the Saviour too high for me, nor you either; I speak to those of you that understand what I am talking about. You never will meet with a minister that will glorify God too much for you, that will speak too highly of his love, righteousness, mercy, and salvation. "A little one shall become a thousand:" there shall be an increase of these people. What is our object in preaching from time to time but to be the means, under the Lord's blessing, of bringing poor sinners to this acquaintance with a covenant God? "And a small one a strong nation." I dare to say you have often observed how very beautifully the Holy Scriptures unite divine strength with the righteousness of Christ. It saith here, "A small one shall become a strong nation." If you look back at the righteousness of Christ, spoken of in the preceding verse, you will see how it is they are a strong nation. They are strong because, by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, God is on their side, and is therefore their strength. And so the prophet Isaiah, in his 26th chapter, connects strength with this righteousness; for he saith, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." They shall be a strong nation. And David saith, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God;" and then if you ask how he will go in the strength of the Lord, the next clause tells you—"I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." And the prophet in another place saith, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength;" and "the way of righteousness is strength to the upright." Ah, what cannot a man endure here? Take the 11th of the Hebrews, and take the martyrs, all they have ever endured, this is the great secret of it, being brought into this acquaintance with the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ, God was their strength, God was on their side; and they did indeed bring forth the fruits of this kingdom; they correspondingly glorified God, the author of this amazing mercy. They are a strong nation, then; so strong that they could bear to be burnt to ashes; so strong that amidst the tortures and death of the body their souls could bear testimony; "yea, in all these things," such is our strength that "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." And then, thirdly, they are a united nation. Hence it is amazing that men professing to be Christian ministers should point to that scripture in the 37th of Ezekiel, and say, Ah, the time will come when those words will be fulfilled,—why, they are fulfilled, and are fulfilling now, and will be complete in their fulfilment when the last destined man to be one of this nation shall be gathered in. It there saith, "I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel." I am not quite sure what is there intended spiritually by the mountains. May not the mountains mean, in the first place, the love of God? And are the people not one in the mind of God's unchanging love? Are they not one in his sovereign, gracious, eternal choice? Are they not one in the completeness that is in Jesus? Is he not the very height of Zion, where we have the goodness of the Lord, and to which the people flow together, where there is an end ultimately to all their sorrows? And are they not one also in the work of the Holy Spirit? Is he not the teacher of them all? "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." And are they not one in the everlasting covenant, and shall they not be one in eternal glory? "And one king shall be king to them all." I can hardly ever touch upon the royalty of the Saviour without being reminded of the infinitely delightful truth that he reigns as king by

his priesthood. Take away his priesthood, there is no king in Zion. You know what the scripture saith upon this of Christ,—that he shall be a priest on his throne. If his priesthood were not enthroned, it would not be a throne of grace; it is a throne of grace because his priesthood is enthroned. He reigns therefore in the riches of his grace; he disperses abroad; he gives to the poor; conquers your foes and his foes; and supplies all your needs, by his priesthood. He reigns as priest. He was first a priest, and then a king. He must work out victory by his priesthood before he can be enthroned as a king. "Therefore," saith the Saviour, "doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." Obtaining eternal redemption, he is thus exalted. "One king shall be king to them all." And his heart never was, and never will be lifted up above his brethren. If we had not the word of the Lord to state this, I am sure circumstances are eloquent enough upon it. The Lord has graciously given us the words, but if we had not the words, I am sure we have facts enough to prove it; for if his heart had been lifted above us, never had we read of the babe of Bethlehem; never had we read of the man of sorrows; never had we read of Calvary's cross; never had we read of one that went down into the mighty deeps to bring us up, at the expense of a combination and a centralization of sufferings and agonies which none but such a person could undergo. Wondrous king! "One king shall be king to them all." "And they shall be no more two nations." The literal Israel became two nations; one under Rehoboam, one under Jeroboam, and both ultimately came to nought. But this spiritual nation shall no more be two nations; Christ and the people shall not be two; they shall be one; and the people themselves shall be one nation; Jesus will keep them together, and that to all eternity. "Neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all." The literal nation was divided into two kingdoms; not so with the dear Saviour; all his Old and New Testament saints are but one people. They were believers, so are we; they believed in a sworn covenant, so do we; they gloried in Christ's eternal priesthood and God's immutability, so do we; they could do all things through Christ which strengthened them, so can we. And then, mark, they are also a consecrated nation to God. Hence it goes on,—"Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols;" they stand in Christ free from idolatry; they are brought to take that position; "nor with their detestable things," alluding to such ceremonies as are practised by Romanism and Puseyism; no more shall they defile themselves with these Satanic inventions; for though these things pass for holiness among men, they are abominations in the sight of a holy and an all-wise God. "Nor with any of their transgressions;" there is not a sin they have that can defile them as they stand in Christ; "but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned;" the first Adam, and under the law, self, the world, "I will cleanse them," by the blood of the Lamb; "so," after this manner, "shall they be my people, and I will be their God." Now Peter sums all this up very beautifully;—"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a "peculiar," or purchased, redeemed "people, that ye should show forth"—there it is, you see—"the praises of him;" not your own praises, but his "who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Let us now have a word or two upon the typical nation. The Old Testament gives us a threefold view of the Jews as a nation in their typical capacity; and with the differences that the two covenants demand. I will quote three scriptures, and you will see at once how they spiritually apply to the people of God. First, the 26th of Deuteronomy. "A Syrian ready to perish was my father." So every one is brought to confess the meanness and wretchedness of his origin. There a Syrian represents Adam; Adam was ready to perish, and we were brought into the same state by the

fall—ready to perish. “And he went down into Egypt, and sojourned with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous.” So in this world. We are reduced to very few now; but in the apostolic age the true church did indeed become a nation—not an earthly, but a heavenly nation, great, mighty, and populous. I hardly know what the apostles must have felt when they preached the gospel, and such thousands, east, west, north, and south, were brought into a saving knowledge of the truth. Isaiah gives a little idea of what the feelings of the apostles should be. He says, “Thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged.” Now every one knows that fear contracts the heart; but there it says, “Thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged,” which is quite contrary to nature. The meaning must be that the Lord’s goodness was so great that they could hardly believe it; their souls expanded with fear instead of contracting. Hence, when the first tidings of the Saviour’s resurrection came to some of the disciples, the tidings were too good apparently to be believed. Now the more the Israelites were oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew:—there it is. Now you see we still keep Christmas Popishly. All of us adopt, not exempting myself, the Popish mode of keeping Christmas; that is, we have a little extra festivity, and a little sort of jollity. And what is the result? The newspapers rejoice that the London theatres are crowded this Christmas; but as for places of worship, they are sadly deserted. What has done it? Why, this Popish mode of keeping Christmas. I never yet found our mode of keeping Christmas any friend to spirituality, or anything tending at all to minister to the furtherance of our good. So, then, let us be careful how we speak against our friends the Catholics; we are Catholics ourselves once a year, at any rate, for we certainly keep Christmas still after the Popish manner. So you see, friends, we can throw stones at others sometimes, and think ourselves wonderfully innocent; but when we come to test ourselves, and examine our own doings, we have quite enough to do at home. Well, now, when the Israelites were in Egypt, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew. Why, if the Egyptians had kept feasting them, and using them well, what would have been the result? The Egyptians and Jews would have been all friendly together; they would have intermingled, and there would have been intermingling marriages, until by and by the Jew would have been lost in the Egyptian, and the Egyptian lost in the Jew, and they would all have become one. It is all for want of a little more trouble; it is all for want of that hatred from the world that would drive us closer to the throne of grace. So, then, when they were oppressed they became a nation, great, mighty, and populous; the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew. And the more the devil sets in upon us, and the more we are tried in a variety of ways, the more we run to our best Friend, the more we prize our heavenly rest, the less we think of earthly and the more we think of heavenly things. We do not like afflictions, we do not like troubles; yet we all know that we have profited ten times more by affliction than by prosperity, I mean in the spiritual sense of the word. So, then, it was a nation very few, very oppressed, and those oppressions made them cry unto the Lord; and they soon proved themselves to be great, and mighty, and populous; they soon proved themselves to be too much for their mightiest foes, because the Lord of hosts was with them, and the God of Jacob was their strength and refuge. The next representation of them is the victory which the Lord wrought for them. “Hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation,” as he hath taken you? I must not quote all the verse, as we have not time to dwell upon it. Here we have the sovereign interposition of the blessed God; here we have that doctrine that is highly appreciated by every Christian. I am sure sometimes when I look over my history, and come to the word of God, and

see how sweetly familiar the Lord has made my soul with his name, with his truth, with his salvation, with the victory the dear Saviour has wrought, with the new and everlasting covenant, and I can see the way to heaven as clearly spiritually as I can see from one end of this chapel to the other, I do indeed sometimes exclaim, Why me, Lord? While so many of my fellow-creatures are still left where I once was, why was I, the vilest of them all, made to hear thy voice, to understand thy truth;—for me to escape the wrath to come, and to feel that I am one of thy children, that I have a right among them? thou hast given me that right; it is precious faith in Jesus that gives me that right. I stand sometimes amazed at this. I mention this because I know it is expressive of your own feelings. Are there not solitary moments, when you are perhaps brooding over your troubles, and think the Lord deals very hardly with you? presently the thought strikes you,—Suppose he had left me where I once was; suppose he had left me to the spirit of blindness and hardness, till I had lifted up my eyes in hell; then I should have had troubles that never end; now I have no trouble whatever that will not come to an end; I have not a trouble that is not sure to pass away. Whatever your thorn, whatever your trouble, it is sure to pass away. “Hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation?” I am not going too far when I say that we are not acquainted with any race of beings for whom the Lord has done what he has for saved sinners. Why, even angels cannot boast as the saved sinner can; even angels have not that close relation to God that saved sinners have. “He passed by the nature of angels, and took upon him the seed of Abraham.” Now the Lord saith, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine; and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Now here, in the 19th of Exodus, there are some *ifs*;—“*If* ye will obey my voice;” “*if* ye will keep my covenant.” Ah, do you ask how I get over that? I get over that, friends, by bringing in the dear Saviour. He did obey that voice that I could not endure, and he did keep God’s covenant; and by faith in him we thus become a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. You will think again of the words of Peter, “*Ye are* a chosen generation; *ye are* a royal priesthood; *ye are* an holy nation;” no *if* about it; the matter is decided and eternally settled. Thus, then, they are a righteous nation, a strong nation, a united nation, a consecrated nation, a growing nation, a saved nation, a distinguished nation; and these are honours that all his saints shall for ever wear.

Now the kingdom of God is given savingly to such, Christ is given to them savingly; they feel that he is a Saviour, that they are lost in themselves, that he alone can save them. The Holy Spirit is given to them savingly, and the truth of God is given to them savingly;—“the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” Even ministers also are given to them savingly; that is to say, as instruments and means of their salvation. “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” Is it any wonder that there are some people in the world that do so highly esteem their ministers for their work’s sake? Ah, that minister was the means of bringing life into my soul, light into my mind; that minister was the means of bringing salvation to me, and of bringing God to me, bringing Christ to me, bringing an eternal kingdom to me. What will all my doings be, if I live for a thousand years, towards that minister? It is true it is not the minister himself, but the grace of God that is in him. Why, let me do whatever I may, I shall never be able to reward him; I shall always be his debtor under God, a greater debtor to him than it will be possible for him to be to me. Mind, I am not now

speaking in a way of complaint. But I do not wonder, when circumstances called for it, in early ages, that they sold their inheritances, and laid the money down at the apostles' feet. So diffused abroad was brotherly love that they could not endure there should be one to suffer need beyond what they themselves were suffering. So, then, Christ is given to his people savingly, the Holy Spirit given to them savingly, the truth given to them savingly, ministers given to them savingly. So that everything seems to say to them, salvation. Perhaps if we rightly understood everything, there is not a single thing that does not say to us, salvation. What means that trouble? what means the other? It means salvation. What means Job's loss and humiliation? Why, it means salvation. God stripped him and humbled him in order that he might make way for that wonderful interposition by which Job should profit in every way by his affliction. Everything means our salvation. "All things work for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose." Thus, then, the kingdom is given to these people savingly, and they do bring forth the fruits thereof, by love to the truth, and by their sympathy with the cause of God. If you ask Noah,— "Noah, where is your fruit?" he would say, "There it is—there is the ark." If you asked Moses, Where is your fruit? he would say, "There is the tabernacle."

Well, now, I have already hinted at the fruits, and perhaps need not say any more upon that, which was to have been our last point; but I will now, in conclusion, notice *the way in which the kingdom of God was taken from the Jews*. It may be summed up in one word, but I think perhaps a little explanation may not be unprofitable; and I shall use three words—first, neglect, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" The Jews were scarcely out of Egypt when they gave up the wonders God had wrought for them; the salvation from Egypt became nothing. But those who took with them that salvation,—Oh, they said, he that thus brought us out of Egypt can do anything; he that thus distinguished us, preserved us, and has wrought such a victory as this, why, he can do anything. Who would give up such a God as this? Now he that wrought such a salvation, such a victory, as was wrought at Calvary; he that abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, as at Calvary; he that accomplished the warfare, as at Calvary, brought in pardon and the double grace here and glory hereafter;—"he that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" But begin to neglect this great salvation, then you must bring in all sorts of things to fill up the dreadful vacuum; and that is one step towards giving everything up, towards proving that you have not a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. God forbid that the salvation of Christ should ever in this pulpit or in one pew in this place be neglected. By neglecting the salvation which God had wrought the Israelites lost their inheritance, and did not even reach the promised land; but those that did take with them this free grace salvation—"Ye that did thus cleave unto the Lord your God are alive unto this day." The second step is a disbelief of the new covenant truth of the blessed God. The Jews became altogether ignorant of the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Because they were the literal descendants they thought that was enough, they did not understand Abraham's spiritual character; they did not understand Abraham's standing in the new covenant, nor Isaac's, nor Jacob's; they did not understand their fathers in this spiritual sense of the word, and therefore, while they drew near to the Lord with their mouth, and with their lips did honour him, their hearts were far from his truth. Then the last step I name towards the kingdom being taken from them was that of deadly enmity against God's order of things. Hence you will see in this parable of the vineyard, that represents the kingdom of God, the lord of the vineyard sent his servants

for the fruits; "and the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son." But when his son came, they perceived something about him that indicated his right to everything; they did not like the idea of his making himself the Son of God; they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard"—excommunicated him,—“and slew him.” Here the Saviour, of course, speaks of his own death; and, as we some time ago said, when this deed was done the fatal deed was done; for what good can the kingdom of God be to those that hate the Saviour and slay him? Why, it is slaying everything. This enmity, then, against God's truth led to the crucifying of Christ. People say, "It doesn't matter about doctrine, doesn't matter about creed." Why, if the Jews had held fast God's new covenant truth, when the Saviour came they would have said, Why, this is just the person that the truth predicts—a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. They would have understood their need of such a Melchizedek, of such a Shepherd to redeem the sheep, of such a Surety to be the surety of the new covenant; they would have distinguished between the old and the new covenant, and they would not have crucified him. But having got rid of these testimonies, and led by their traditions, the Saviour not at all answering to those traditions, the only remedy to maintain their ground was to crucify and slay him. I do long, and have longed for years—the Lord has not granted my desire yet—to give a sermon—I can't get at it yet—upon this one point, to show how essential a knowledge of the truth, yea and amen truth, is—I mean the doctrines—to our eternal salvation; to show, as might easily be shown, the impossibility of rightly knowing God without the truth of God. And it is a remarkable thing, in the 26th of Isaiah, a scripture I quoted at the beginning of my discourse this morning, "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." I am not going to find fault with the translation, but the original Hebrew word there is *amenim*, which is the Hebrew in plural, and as the margin renders it, "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the *amens* may enter in." To my mind that is very expressive. Now saith the apostle, "Our word is not"—like the old covenant—"yea and nay,"—yea if you do your part, nay if you do not do your part; "our word is yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us." So the new covenant truths of the gospel are all amens, they are all settled. One, with deep solemnity, and at the same time happy, saith, looking at time and all its convulsions and revolutions, looking at all the probable and possible troubles that might take place, and then looking at all the sublimities of eternity, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." Thus by leaving out God's salvation, thus by a disbelief of his truth, and thus by a deadly enmity against it, the kingdom was taken from them. Whereas those that receive salvation, that love the truth, and that love the God of truth, from them it shall never be taken; they have chosen that good part that shall never be taken from them.