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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE UNCHANGING BELIEVER.

—
A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 23RD AUGUST, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“And the likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves: they went every one straight forward.”—EZEKIEL x. 22.

WE gave last Lord's day morning our reasons why we believe these cherubims are intended to represent the people of God; angels do not answer to many things that are said concerning these cherubims. We noticed their origin, their position, and their association with the wheels, the circles of eternity; their association with the Spirit of God, with the great High Priest of our profession, and with God the Father; their association with that establishment of peace which is indicated by the presence of the rainbow. In all these and in every respect they answer to the people of God, as the people of God stand in Christ Jesus the Lord. The glory of the church of God of course is hidden by our mortality, by our infirmities, by our afflictions, and by ten thousand things; but although thus hidden from the world, and partially hidden from us, yet the Christian is led to see that there is nothing that can bear a moment's comparison with the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that eternal life and blessedness which are by him.

Now we have this morning to notice two things: first, *their sameness*; secondly, *their uprightness in the faith*.

† First, *their sameness*. “The likeness of their faces was the same faces which I saw by the river of Chebar, their appearances and themselves.” I think this sameness will mean no less than five things. First, that the Lord himself will never change his people away for other people. In this world ten thousand changes have taken and must take place; but whom once the Lord loves he loves for ever; he never ceases to love them; and whom once he hath chosen in Christ Jesus he hath chosen for ever; this choice stands eternally the same. And just so the work of Christ; there they are complete in him; and that atonement will always be the same, and his righteousness will always be the same; it is written of the Lord Jesus Christ that he is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. I shall mention several scriptures that represent this delightful truth, for it is a

delightful truth ; for if we have any reason whatever to believe that the Lord does love us, that we are a part of the happy number that he hath chosen, and that Christ died for us, and that the Lord hath called by his grace, how encouraging the thought is that he will never give us up ! And the Saviour declares that he and the Father are one in this matter, for he saith, " None shall pluck them out of my hands ;" and he saith, " My Father which gave them unto me, is greater than I ;" that is, greater, of course, than he was as man, not greater as God ; " and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hands." Daniel gives a beautiful representation of this ; for the glorious gospel of God is a gospel that becomes Omnipotence, that becomes a self-existent God, a God of eternity, of immutability, a God above all mutation, lightness, change, or caprice whatever ; therefore Daniel saith, when looking at the last of the four great empires, and the ravages that should be wrought by Rome pagan and Rome papal, " In the days of these kings"—Rome pagan—" shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed ; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." So, then, they remain the same because the Lord remains the same ; that is the foundation secret ; there are other secrets in the matter which I shall presently notice, but the foundation secret is that the Lord remains the same. What a pity it is that those verses in the 65th of Isaiah should be in the slightest degree difficult for any of us to understand, where the Lord speaketh of that new state of things into which he brings his people ! and what a remedial order of things it is for everything, at the same time declaring their eternal continuation in the blessedness into which he brings them ! " Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth"—and the new heavens and the new earth mean just the same as new creatureship, just the same as the kingdom of Christ, just the same as when the Saviour saith, " Behold, I make all things new." Then the Lord himself explains what it is :—" Be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create ;"—you cannot rejoice for ever in providential things ; some of you have much to be thankful for in that respect ; whether those of us that are so favoured are as thankful to the Lord as he is bountiful to us, that I must leave for the present ; but " be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create ; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people ; and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days ; for the child shall die a hundred years old." Now that seems paradoxical ; why, it ought to be to us Christians as plain as A B C. Here is a child of God, or in other words, here is a man turned by the grace of God into a believer ; he is a new-born babe in Christ, and as soon as he is born he dies, as soon as he is born of God he goes out of this world, so that he is but a child. But how is he an hundred years old ? The hundred years old there means full age. So the thief on the cross ; he was born of God, and died directly—two or three hours afterwards. Now he was a new-born babe ; but as he was in Christ, he was of full age. And this is true, of course, in thousands of other instances. What difficulty is there in understanding this ? See the remedy here ; that whatever our feelings may be, our doubts, fears, or darkness, it stands thus : the apostle Peter says, " Be sober"—do not be taken away from all confidence in redemption—" be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you ;" that is, for the favour that is to be brought unto you ; and what favour is that ? Why, the revelation to you of your completeness in Christ, of your eternal perfection in Christ. What necessity is there that that perfection cannot supply ? What wound is there that that perfection cannot heal ? What adversary is there that that perfection cannot conquer and swallow up ? " The child shall die an

hundred years old ; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed." Let a man live as long as he may, yet if he is not washed in the blood of Christ, if he is not a believer, he is accounted a sinner, and his long life cannot exempt him from the curse of heaven. "Nor an old man that hath not filled his days." Now I may this morning, perhaps, be speaking to some aged men—I hope not many, I hope not any, still it may be so,—and yet you have not lived to advantage. You are in years, and in the common course of nature your career must soon close ; and yet you have not lived long enough to be a believer in Jesus Christ ; you have not lived long enough to understand God's truth ; you have not lived long enough to acquire that that shall exempt you from the hell that is just before you ; you have not lived long enough to be acquainted with the infinite price paid for the redemption of poor sinners. So, then, the Lord will show you no mercy on the ground of age, or on the ground of anything good you suppose you have done ; cursed you must be if you die out of the faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please God ;" and " whatsoever is not of faith is sin." But I must not dwell upon this. Now here is the sameness of these people ; the Lord will not change them away. "And they shall build houses ;" they shall build up God's truth ; the great truths of the gospel are the houses they build up. Men are always throwing our houses down, and then we have to build them up again ; not that they can throw them down in reality ; but they say, We will go into that village, and into that town, and throw that election down ; we will throw that predestination down ; we will throw that doctrine of completeness in Christ down ; we will throw that doctrine of the immutability of God's counsel down. Well, if you throw these down, we shall build them up again,—we shall build them up before you throw them down. "They shall build houses, and inhabit them ; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit ; they shall not plant, and another eat ; for as the days of a tree"—Christ the tree of life—"are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands,"—namely, to all eternity ; the work of the hands of faith, receiving the truth, and building up themselves in their most holy faith. Now these scriptures show that while Ezekiel says they were the same that he saw by the river Chebar, the Lord had not parted with them, but had taken care of them, and would take care of them for ever. What a beautiful illustration of this sameness, the Lord continuing to take care of the same people, is the Saviour's return to his disciples ! You recollect what his words were in relation to his return to them after his resurrection. It is self-evident that he returned to the same disciples. While he might have found, on the ground of their weaknesses, fears, unbelief, reasons why he might have cast them off, yet he did not ; he returned to the same disciples, gathered them together, and they knew it was the same Jesus Christ. Saith the angel, I can tell you this, that "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven ;" it is the same Jesus Christ yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Now just hear what the Saviour saith upon it. "I will see you again," he said in his lifetime, and which he fulfilled after his resurrection, "and your hearts shall rejoice,"—which they did. "And your joy no man taketh from you." What is your joy ? Why, that glorious city to which these living creatures are wending their way. In the forty-third chapter you find them there. Who can take this city of God from us ? Your joy, what is it ? Why, the eternal Spirit of God. Your joy, what is it ? Why, the Christ of God ; and who can take Christ from you ? Your joy, what is it ? Why, God himself. "I will go unto God, my exceeding joy." Therefore when it is said, "Your joy no man taketh from you," we must sum up the whole of it thus ; let the emphasis lie upon the pronoun *your* :—*Your* God no man taketh from you. But the

man that has a false god, his god will be taken from him; the man that has a false Christ, his Christ will be taken from him; the man that has a false hope, his hope will be taken from him; the man who makes an ungodly world and the things thereof, or silver and gold, his god, his god will be taken from him. But your God no man taketh from you, and no man can take you from your God. "There is no separation from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

But, secondly, their being the same implies that they do not change. They have not changed. In all the dispensations where man has failed, it has never been from any change on the Lord's part. All the calamities that have come, have come not by the Lord changing, but by man changing. It was not the Lord that changed in paradise, it was Adam that changed,—that brought the calamity. It was not the Lord that changed in the Jewish covenant; it was the people that changed, and which the Lord himself, speaking after the manner of man, expresses astonishment at. "Wonder, O heavens; and be astonished, O earth." You may well be astonished; for who ever heard of such a thing as a nation changing their God? Why, these idolatrous nations, they have abode by their gods; but my people, my national people, they have changed me away for those which are no gods; and hewed out to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Why, the people were mad, to throw away God's covenant, to dig down his altars, and to slay his prophets. The people changed, and brought all these calamities upon themselves. But here, in the new covenant, the people themselves change not. They cannot do what Adam did; they cannot do what the Israelites did. Adam and Eve turned infidels, disbelieved God, and believed Satan; the Jews turned infidels, and disbelieved God's truth, turned their back upon the same. But the Christian cannot thus change. Let us try the matter. First, they are born of an incorruptible seed, that liveth and abideth for ever; and therefore they must live in that that entirely accords with that of which they are born. Mere professors change in a very delusive, deceptive way; they themselves are not aware of the deception. It generally begins under a great pretension to holiness. I do not think our minister preaches quite practically enough; I will seek some one that preaches a little more practically. And so, by degrees, they would rather go and sit down and hear themselves preached, and their doings preached, than they would hear Christ preached, than they would hear the mysteries of eternity preached. The minister tells them the wonderful good works which, if they have not done, they ought to have done; as to the reality of doing them, that is another thing; but the minister preaches up what they ought to do, and brings forward several precepts, legalizing, and sometimes secularizing them; and thus, in this feasible way, they get rid of vital godliness, of the truth. These professors are very pleased; they like to hear themselves talked about. They would rather hear hell, and damnation, and themselves preached, than they would hear the riches of God's grace preached. But these living creatures remained unchanged. Look at their position, on the south side, the gospel side of the altar; they had not changed. So the real Christian,—why, the farther he goes on, the more he finds out of his own heart. I like to go down sometimes into a description of what we are, but we dare not define, it would not be profitable altogether, what we are; but, as the Lord liveth, there is not a vice spoken of in the Holy Scriptures (though there are many spoken of there you have never seen in your nature, and I trust you never will,—and if you preach upon corruption definitely, you will put into the people's heads that which may bring up some of the worst elements in the old nature),—there is not an evil spoken of in the Scriptures which we have not the elements of in our nature. The Lord shows us so much of ourselves as leads us to reject all confidence in self, and to preserve us

from changing, so that the atonement of Christ grows in our estimation; if the yea and amen settlements of eternity in our eternal welfare were acceptable to us a few years ago, they are more so now. This is what is called in the Scriptures taking root downward, bearing fruit upward. So, then, it is no thanks to them that they do not change, for how can they change? He that hath begun the good work carries it on, and will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. And what does every day's experience do? It demonstrates on the one hand what a poor creature you are, and on the other it demonstrates the faithfulness of a covenant God, and the perfection you have in Christ. These are the secrets of your being thus preserved. It is a great thing to remain unchanged in these matters, for what, after all, can be a remedy for us but the remedy our God hath provided? One of the great things that will wonderfully keep us in the truth of God is the weightiness of the feeling that this life is nothing in value, in comparison of the eternal life we have in Christ; and that all the advantages and friendships of the world, however many and great they may be, by the kind providence of God, when set by the side of eternal things are only shadows, and we ourselves are shadows as creatures on the earth, for we fly away, we are gone, and the place thereof shall know us no more. But these eternal things are not shadows; the Lord making us feel the weightiness of these matters, we shall not trifle with them, but abide by the truth as it is in Jesus.

Then the third thing meant by the sameness is that here is not the slightest sign of old age; no grey hairs, no wrinkles, no dim sight, no deaf ear—not the slightest sign of old age; as young as ever. I am just as young now as I was forty years ago, in that sense of the word. And I have often thought, and I have no doubt you have thought the same, that the words of Caleb will apply here, "As my strength was forty years ago, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in." There is no decay here; the incorruptible seed is the same, our righteousness the same, our innocency as we stand in Christ is the same, and our vigour the same; God was our strength at the beginning, and he is our strength now; Christ is our youth; "From the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth;" that is, the morning of the resurrection; Christ thus rose from the dead; he can never grow old. And so here there is no sign of decay. Hear what the apostle saith, "The outward man decayeth, but the inward man is renewed day by day." What an infinite mercy this is, that while that which is not of much value must decay and pass away—nay, when I said that which is not of much value, I ought to have said, compared with what it is to be. Why are our bodies to decay? why are we to fade away? Why, in order that we may be better; in order to do us good. You all know what a wonderful preparation death is for the resurrection. As our sinnership was a preparation for salvation, so our death is a preparation for a glorious resurrection, when eternal youth must reign. Well, then, let us not murmur at the death of the body, seeing it is not unto final death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified, by triumphantly raising us from the dead, and presenting us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

Then, fourthly, their faces being the same denotes that they look with the same satisfaction that they ever did upon God's truth. There is a great deal in the face, you know. When people change, you can generally tell it in the face; they are sure to show it some way or another. And hence a mere put-on smile, that does not come from the heart, one sees through it. So when people try to put on a frown, and do not really mean it, there is a something about it that enables you to discover it is not real. Well, their faces were the same; they looked with the same approbation upon God's truth that they had always done; they were still standing under that scripture, "Blessed is he that is not

offended in me." Now some of you can set your seal to this. You can truly say that you never in your lifetime looked upon Jesus Christ with more approbation, more admiration, than you do now; you can truly say that you never looked upon God in covenant with more approbation and more admiration. Ah! then, if you can say this, then you ought not, I was going to say, to doubt and fear again. You do not know how much importance the Lord attaches to such approbation of him; not that it merits anything, for it does not; but the Lord is pleased to attach great importance to it; to give great reward, as it were, and to show great favour, on the ground of the humble expression of approbation of him. Why, he that shall give even a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, if your approbation go as far as that, it shall in no wise lose its reward; and if you receive a prophet because he is a prophet of my truth, why, you receive me in that; if you receive a righteous man, a man justified by faith, because he is a believing man, a receiver of Christ, why, in so doing you receive me. Little did the woman think when she received Elijah into the house whom she was receiving. She did not then know that she was receiving the everlasting and blessed God. But the child died; the child was raised from the dead, and before Elijah departed it was demonstrated that she had indeed received the Lord. What a mercy is it, then, to be able to come before God and to say, O God, thou knowest that my soul does admire thee in that covenant that is ordered in all things and sure! What a beautiful instance was David of this! You could never lower David's God. David always would exalt the rock of his salvation. When David went into the provinces around, where there were false gods—I should like to have been there—he dashed them to atoms, burnt the wretches; away with them! Well, but, David, won't you carry them home for curiosities? What! carry the devil's furniture, and keep it as a curiosity? No. Burn them, grind them to powder; away with them! Nothing could stand before him; it mattered not what it was. And David's approbation of his God remained immovable to the last; and just as he is going into Jordan, to cross to the other side, he looks back and says, Now, brethren, "he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation and all my desire, though he make it not to grow." So he lived and died a thorough *hyper*. I rejoice in being a *hyper*; I bind it to me as a badge of honour; never be ashamed of belonging to that people that are raised up from the dust and the dunghill, and made to sit together in the lofty settlements of eternity with Christ Jesus the Lord.

Then also their faces being the same implies that their circumstances were the same. Let this be our comfort amidst the woes and calamities of life. I hardly know where to begin upon this part. David gives a little hint. He says, "I have been young, and now am old;" and therefore you may attach a corresponding importance to my testimony; "yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread;" that is, not spiritually. He himself had begged bread literally, you know, and Lazarus desired the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. You must take the word spiritually; so that you will never be in such circumstances as to need to go somewhere else for bread; there will always be in your Father's house bread enough and to spare. And as to the river, there is no drought there; the streams of salvation never run dry. And as to clothing, all the clothing is durable. And as to health, there is no sickness; "the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick." And as to the light, their sun shall never go down. In a word, there is infallibility there: heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, all things are yours. So that however adverse things may be with the body, or in the world, in eternal things the people must prosper. And so the pleasure of the Lord did in the Saviour's humiliation, and does in his exaltation, prosper in his blessed hands. Their faces were

the same, "their appearances and themselves." See the correspondence here between their appearances and themselves. In the world ten thousand things appear very different from what they are in reality; but not so with these living creatures. They appeared to be living creatures, and they were so; they appeared to be free from sin and they were so; they appeared to be righteous, and they were so; they appeared to be happy, and they were so; they appeared to move like lightning, and they did so. Whatever, therefore, their appearances, that they were. Bless the Lord for this, then, that there is a sweet reality in the religion of the Son of God. Our appearance after the flesh, and in the circumstances of this world, is one thing; but our appearance spiritually is another thing. There the world seeth us not; "the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." Thus, then, we have this fivefold sameness.

I notice, secondly, *their uprightness in the faith*, "they went every one straight forward." Now the question naturally would arise, What were they going to? And of course the answer would be, They were going to the city of God. Abraham saw a city which had foundations; and Jesus Christ, and the promises of the gospel by him, were the way to that city; for Abraham saw the Saviour's day; so the Saviour to Abraham became the way to that city. Now how can I come short of the city? It is the atonement of Christ that is the way by which I am to come into the city; and if I am to come there by the atonement of Christ, how can I come short? I cannot come short by sin, because the atonement of Christ put sin away. I am to come into the city by the righteousness of Jesus Christ; and how can I come short? I cannot come short for want of righteousness, for his righteousness is always the same. And again, we are to come into the city by the power of God;—"kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Now we read in the 43rd chapter of this book of these living creatures being in the city of God; and it is said that the glory of God came "from the way of the east," or the sun rising; in allusion, of course, to Jesus Christ, who is the way by which the glory—in other words, the salvation of God is revealed to man. "And his voice was like a noise of many waters; and the earth shined with his glory." These waters represent the many blessings of the gospel. When Elijah had offered sacrifice, there was the sound of abundance of rain. Therefore when it is said, "His voice was like the noise of many waters," it means in contrast to Sinai; in contrast to that to which the rich man in hell came. The blessings of the gospel, or the mercies of the gospel, are innumerable. As our necessities, and infirmities, and even faults abound, his mercies also abound. "Where sin abounded," the apostle saith (and it is stronger language than I should dare to have used if he had not himself used it), "grace did much more abound." And as abundance of rain followed the sacrifice of Elijah, so these many mercies follow upon the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ; it is by him that these mercies go on multiplying and multiplying until the temple is full of the glory of the Lord. "And the earth shined with his glory;" that is, the new earth; and the people are brought into the light, and they understand these eternal things. Now no man can go straight forward if he is not perfectly settled in his mind as to the end he has in view. Heaven is the ultimate end we have in view; but then we have intermediate ends in view—several. First, we want to serve the Lord ourselves; we want from day to day to realize his mercy; and our prayer is with the apostle that we may have grace whereby to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, we receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved. Another end is the good of our families. Ah, the parent agonizingly prays from time to time that grace may in the Lord's own time reign in the hearts of his children. Another end we have in view is the good of our fellow-creatures around us. You have built this place for yourselves, but not

merely for yourselves. I am sure you desire, as our brethren sometimes express at our Monday evening prayer meetings, that the kind providence of God may bring poor creatures here that know nothing of his name, and may in mercy open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and become living creatures, and go every one straight forward. Another end is the good of our country; for I am sure there is nothing so good a security to any country as the real people of God. And I believe the Lord has more Christians in this country than he has in any other in the world. There are tens of thousands of professors in America; but vital godliness there is at a very much lower ebb than in England. Almost all the professors there are dreadfully Pharisaic, and the truth of God is almost universally there repudiated. I know some large towns in America where there is not one man to be found in all the town that even professes the real truth of God. So that we do stand very much before the United States in this respect. I sometimes am led in my own soul to pray that the Lord would raise up some men to overturn the rubbish which they now follow, and to preach that vital godliness that brings a sinner low into the dust, exalts God's truth, makes the creature nothing and God everything. Now to gain the intermediate ends we have in view we must go every one straight forward; we must never turn aside from God's blessed truth. And our path, too, must be upright; we are going to heaven, and so we must ever be looking upwards;—just the reverse of what the captain said to the passenger when they were about starting on a voyage. The passenger said, "How long before you start?" "Well," the captain said, "as soon as the fog clears off." "Why," said the passenger, "we can see the stars clear enough." "Yes," said the captain, "that's very true, but we are not going that way." Well, now, I say we are going that way; all the saints must go that way; they shall rise with wings as eagles. We can see the stars; we can see the Bright and Morning Star; and we will not stop till human fogs clear off, but be on our way; and we can see prophetic stars, we can see the light of heaven. Now this going straight forward is beautifully explained in the Scriptures. You could not go straight forward if there were not a straight way for you to go. The old Romans, as Italian travellers know, used to delight in making straight roads; we have some specimens of the same in our own country. Now the Lord says, For my people I will have a straight road, and so in the 31st of Jeremiah it is written, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them; I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." Jesus Christ is that straight way; he has made everything straight; he has not left one crook, he has not left one rough way, not one valley, not one mountain; he has made everything straight. Take the 11th of the Hebrews again; see how they all saw the straight way, and died in the faith. Therefore let us still go on with the delightful truth that "it is by faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." Can anything be more solemn, more awful, than the warnings we have in God's word against turning aside from his truth? Adam and Eve turned aside from God's truth; did it do? The antediluvians turned aside from Noah's testimony; did it do? The Israelites turned aside and adopted the golden calf; but did it do? When they came into the promised land they even went so far as to set up the beastly image of Baal—the drunken wretch; they themselves, of course, wished to be like their master; did it do? By and by they set up human tradition in the place of God's truth; but did it do? By and by says the devil, I cannot deny Christianity, my business now must be to pervert it; and so the infamous system of Popery was set up; but did it do? Has not that religion been a curse to man wherever it has existed?