

# Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

HOW TO DIE IN PEACE AND SAFETY.

## A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 25<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 1869,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”—Luke ii. 30.

It appears that Simeon had some reason to believe that his end was drawing near, that he began to consider the matter, and to tremble, not perhaps so much at death as at that which might follow; he seems to have been in a state of darkness of mind. But the Lord assureth us that he watcheth over his sheep night and day, every moment; and he favoured Simeon with the promise that he should not see death until he had seen the Lord's Christ. There is a wonderful difference between the people of God and other people in their death and in their apprehensions of death, the same as there is in their life. The man that is not convinced of his condition as a sinner before God, the man that does not know what is needful in order to enable him to overcome death and to enter into everlasting glory, that man, being blinded by the darkness in his own soul, and deluded by the prince of darkness, lives contentedly without any real religion, and he thinks a little creature-goodness will enable him to meet all there is to meet. Hence you read that “there are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm.” Oh, how many that have made a sort of profession of Christ die without any knowledge either of themselves or of the Lord Jesus Christ! Just look at it;—“There are no bands in their death; their strength,” their confidence, “is firm;” they see no reason to fear. Whereas the man taught of God knows what it is to see no reason to hope in himself; he sees and knows that hell must follow if he be not a regenerated man. And when we look around we see that some who call themselves ministers of the gospel will go to a poor dying creature, and give him a little bread and a little wine, and call it the sacrament, and thereby persuade him that all is well. Not so with the saints of God; not so with Simeon. Simeon well knew that nothing but God's great and eternal salvation could stand between him and the hell which he as a sinner deserved; that none but Christ could stand between him and the wrath to come; and nothing but the manifestation of this to his soul could satisfy him; he felt that he could not die without some manifestation of God's eternal mercy to him. Oh, it is one thing to talk of these things, and another thing to be brought into the experience and solemnities of the same! I hope I know something of fellowship with God, but in this affliction I have had not the least bright shining, no more fellowship with the Lord than as though I had

never known his name; and though I did not exactly feel I should die, yet at the same time I could not lay hold of anything that was past, I could see nothing in the present but darkness; I could see hardly anything but hell before me, and all the judgments of God as written in the Bible rose to my view, and presented the great God to me only as a God of judgment, only as a sin-avenging God. I was indeed wretched to the last degree; I felt as though my hope and my strength were perished from the Lord, and earnestly wished that I had never been born. Nor has the Lord yet manifested himself so to me that I do feel I could die. For the man that knows his real condition as a sinner, he cannot be deluded,—he must have reality, and nothing but reality will do. My confidence was gone, my hope was gone, and I thought next I should be gone; I could not get the least light anywhere, until my attention was called to the 17th of Exodus, where the people lost all confidence in God, and reproached Moses for bringing them out of Egypt, and said, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” And something seemed to say to me, though not with so much power as I could wish, but just power enough to keep my head above water, just power enough to restore a little hope to my soul,—something seemed to say, Now you see it is perfectly wrong to give up confidence in God. Do you not see from that 17th of Exodus that the people lost all confidence in God? do you not see that they were wrong in that? And I said, Yes, Lord, I do see they were wrong. Well, then, hope thou in God; do not give up your confidence in God. Ah, I said, Lord, that is very encouraging; but there is another question,—May I have confidence in God? may I hope in God? may I look to God? That is the language of the soul born of God; not that I could believe I was born of God when under soul trouble. Ah, says such an one, I would be second to none in my confidence in the truth and mercy of God; but may I indulge in that confidence? I would be second to none in my hope in the Lord; but may I hope and pray to the Lord? is my name set down in his eternal book? These are the heart searchings. And when brought down into affliction, not knowing which way matters will go, that makes the child of God prize religion. And so this affliction has made me prize the gospel; it has given me a fresh proof that “none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good.” My mind was naturally led to this beautiful circumstance;—I thought, Well, I feel just as Simeon did, a desire to see God’s salvation, a desire that he would manifest himself, and when he comes in it is astonishing how all our doubts and fears and despairings go out. And you see here how faithful the Lord was in fulfilling his promise that Simeon should not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ. The Lord watched over him, and he came by the Spirit into the temple, and he did see the Lord’s Christ, and took him in his arms. And then mark the emphasis that may be placed upon the word “Now” when he had the holy child in his arms, and evidently realizing the Lord’s presence spiritually as well as having the holy child in his arms literally,—see in what a sweet way he speaks. As though he should say, Lord, I am not afraid to mention thy name now; now, Lord, that thou hast thus manifested thyself to me—“Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.” This salvation has brought peace; this salvation has overflowed all the banks of my unbelief, and doubts, and troubles, and fears—“Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” And I felt—not that it was a new feeling—a desire that all of us may from time to time feel more and more a realization of real godliness, of real religion, each for himself, for when we come to die we shall need it. But there stands the promise; and whether we can believe the promise or not, there it is,—“I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice.”

Now, in noticing the subject before us, I will first give a sample of the way in which the Old Testament saints departed this world. Secondly, I

will notice the formation of character that is sure to be brought about wherever there is a saving acquaintance with this salvation. Thirdly, the beautiful definition which Simeon gives of this salvation.

First, then, just a sample of how the *Old Testament saints departed this world*. And when we find them full of confidence and assurance, we must not for a moment understand that they were always in that state. I shall give some proofs of that as I go along. Let us see, then, first, where Jacob was when he died. He said, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk;" "the God which fed me all my life long until this day;" "the angel which redeemed me from all evil." Now Jacob here saw the Lord Jesus Christ as the messenger of the new covenant; as the angel of the everlasting covenant, and that nothing but that eternal redemption which Jesus Christ should in the fulness of time accomplish could save his soul. It was a redemption from all evil. Why, it is an unspeakable mercy for our eyes to be so opened as to see that we are so by nature under the curse of the law, under the law in its curse (and what the law saith it saith to them that are under the law), that nothing but the infinitely precious blood of Christ could take our sin away, take away the curse under which we are, and swallow up death in victory. Therefore, if we expect pardon, and everything indeed to give us that peace spoken of in connection with our text—"Let thy servant depart in peace"—it must be by the eternal redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ; he hath redeemed us from all evil. In my darkest moments, though I felt as though I had no hope, yet I could not but thank God that I had seen his salvation, his eternal redemption; that that redemption is stopped nowhere; it is again and again, as you are aware, called an eternal redemption. And you will see that Jacob had this view of it, that it was stopped nowhere—"The angel which redeemed me from all evil." When the Lord Jesus Christ took our sins, not all our sins put together could stop him; he still went on in his obedience; he still went on in his infinite sufferings. God alone knows, Christ alone knows, what the wrath of God is in the soul. We read that the Saviour did sweat great drops of blood, falling down to the ground. I was going to say, I should wonder if he had not. Oh, my hearer, the curse is an awful thing; the wrath of God is a dreadful thing; and yet it could not stop the Saviour; he went on suffering, suffering, agonizing, agonizing; and he could not be stopped until he had stopped every sin, till he had stopped every penalty, till he had conquered every foe. Will not all heaven be lighted up to eternity with that one wonderful sentence, "It is finished"? You, then, that are seeking to go to heaven, that are expecting the Lord to be with you while you live and when you die, if you expect it in this way you will not be disappointed. But if we seek it in any other way, seek any other remedy, then we shall be sure to be deceived. This, then, is where Jacob was, and we are assured of Jacob being in heaven. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are in heaven; and thank the Lord for giving us to see where Jacob died. But then, at the same time, there is something else we want; not only this redemption in the truth of it, but the Lord's presence thereby;—a few remarks upon that when we come to another part of our subject. Then Moses; see how he departed. Oh, that wonderful succession, as it were, of truths which he utters when he represents the Lord as the invisible helper. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky." We cannot see him; he is invisible; yet what a privilege it is to mourn after him, and to be following hard after him. I like the words very much we were singing just now, that "Still our souls would follow after thee." And though the Lord sometimes seems to say, There, go where you like, I will have no more to do with you, yet the soul is like the woman, pursuing and pursuing; and though Jesus deigns to give no reply, and if he does it is a

discouraging one, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,"—you are not one of the sheep, you are anything but a sheep; and if he reply again, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it unto dogs,"—True, Lord, there is no term too degrading for me. Ah, these discouragements when we are in the dark and cast down will roll like an avalanche after avalanche upon the soul, and sink it down almost unnumbered fathoms, and it will become distressed beyond description. But bless the Lord, there is a limit; such a one never was lost yet, but while in that state they cannot believe that they shall be saved. Thus, then, Jacob saw and realized God's salvation. So of Moses. See what a representation he gives of the Lord: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Now we shall not get the proper meaning or the gospel of that scripture unless we view the Lord Jesus Christ as there especially referred to—that the eternal God by Jesus Christ is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. The everlasting arms there have special reference to Christ; he came and put himself under all our burdens, under all our cares. "And he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee," which he certainly did, "and shall say, Destroy them;" and as he has destroyed the penalty, and destroyed the sting of death, so the enemy itself by and by; our sin itself must cease to be. So that Moses did know in this way that God was his refuge by Christ Jesus. The Saviour said of Moses, "He wrote of me;" and therefore we have the Saviour's own authority for concluding that Moses knew the Lord Jesus Christ; yea, he esteemed the reproach of Christ more than all the treasures of Egypt. Then again, as nothing short of this would do for Jacob and for Moses, so nothing short of the same thing would do for David, though he was a man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. "He that ruleth over men must be just;" and that means Jesus Christ, who died the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." Thus David saw this mediation of Christ, that it passed off all the clouds of tribulation. He does not mean himself;—he says, "Although my house be not so with God;" I cannot look upon my house as upon God's; I can look upon all God's family as being set right; I can look at all his children as being ultimately everything that he has willed and desired them to be;—not so with my house;—"yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow;"—not in the enjoyment of it. Just let us stop here for a moment, for though we have gone over this ground so often, these are truths you will always want. "This is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." But perhaps I had better bring a scripture to shew how the Lord makes a covenant with his people; and that will throw a little light perhaps upon this. Now, in Isaiah you have these words,—“This is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my spirit that is upon thee,” that is upon Christ,—“and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.” Thus you will see that by Christ Jesus God has entered into this covenant engagement that his truth shall never leave them, that his promise shall never leave them, thereby meaning that he will never leave them. Now David, viewing this covenant made with him by Jesus Christ, says, “This is all my salvation.” Then what do we want with the Pope, what do we want with the Puseyite, what do we want with human ceremony, what do we want with the creature at all? “This is all my salvation;”—all my salvation in God's everlasting covenant. Why, my hearers, I cannot convince you of the truth of it, though hundreds of you know it,—I cannot convince you of

the truth of it that are not convinced of it; but it is to the real Christian a self-evident truth that man has no more hand in reality in his own eternal salvation than he had in creating the world. The world was created independent of man;—"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them." I have any hand in my salvation? Why, I have had hard thoughts, and rebellion, and unbelief enough in this affliction to send my soul to the lowest hell; and if I could hinder my own salvation and damn my own soul through the evils that are in me I should have done it long ago. Talk of man having any hand in it! All that man can do is to damn himself, destroy himself, ruin himself, run from snare to snare, from curse to curse, from delusion to delusion, heap upon himself wrath after wrath. This is all man can do; and I make no hesitation in saying that if God saves the soul he saves the soul in spite of the man himself,—I say, in spite of the man himself. If the Lord himself did not come triumphantly in, tread down these mountains and hills, and take us up by the omnipotency of his power, crush the serpent's head, and deliver our souls, not a soul could be saved. And this David knew, "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow." Oh ye saints of God, look at your individual independence of the creature, of doing of every kind, except that of receiving God's covenant; and if you receive that, hereby you become the children of God, sons and heirs of God, manifestly so, joint heirs with Christ.

Was David always in that state of mind? Let us follow him a little further. We are speaking now of what we shall want to die by. There are some that attend our place that I love, and that have been thorough friends to the cause; and yet sometimes in secret I have thought of them; I have this time;—I have thought, Now there is not that conviction of their state that I could wish; there is not that hunger after a manifestation of God's mercy that I could wish; and I have felt a spirit of prayer for such that God would stir them up, so that they should not rest in any delusion whatever, but that they may know the truth in that vitality and reality which alone can make them free. But let us look at David under two other circumstances. First, one scripture in accordance with what I have just named. "The Lord is my shepherd." Ah, when you can say that, you can say anything. I could not say that the other day at all, and I can say it only in a way of hope now,—I will be honest. "The Lord is my shepherd." Why, if I can say that, that Christ is my shepherd, that he gave his life for me, that I am in his hands, and that I have eternal life surely by him, why I can say anything then. "I shall not want;"—of course you will not. Why, David, if I could say the first clause, I could say all the rest. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul;"—of course he does. I get into dreadful darkness and bondage sometimes, into a wretched condition, but he comes in all the soothing of his loving-kindness, and restores me to liberty and health, consolation and comfort. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Ah, that was because he could say, "The Lord is my shepherd." Was David always in that state of mind? I think not. Just follow him from the 23rd up to the 39th Psalm, and he seems to be somewhere near where I have been, and where some of you almost always are. You cannot help it; all I can do is to pray for you. You had better be there than be careless, than be deluded, than trust in creature-doings. Ah, my hearer, anything in life, so that we may have a happy death, and come to that end which is peace. Follow David up, then, to the 39th Psalm. "O spare me." How different! Where is the covenant,

David? I don't know. I thought you said the Lord was your shepherd. I did say so; but I have so many trials, and infirmities, and enemies, and adverse circumstances, that I am afraid to speak now as I have spoken. "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more." I feel, Lord, as though I could not meet death, as though I could not die; I feel I shall die in despair if I die as I am. And it does appear that the Lord heard his prayer, for it quietly saith that "David died in a good old age, full of days," not nights,—his nights were gone;—"and riches," not poverty; "and honour," not dishonour; Christ had taken away his dishonour. And thus he died in a good old age, because it was in the way of Christ's righteousness, in the way of faith; as David lived in the faith, so he died in the faith, full of days, and riches, and honour. Thus I have given you a concise sample of the way in which the Old Testament saints met death. Will anything short do for us? I might come to the New Testament, and show the same thing; but I will come now more to our text.

Simeon, then, means the same thing when he says, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation;" I will, in this part, take concisely a two-fold view of these words. First, I have seen that thy salvation can save me; I have seen that thy grace is sufficient for me; I have seen the infinite efficacy of the blood of Christ; I have seen the infinite amplitude of thy mercy;—I have seen that thy salvation can save me. And this, if I may so call it, was an essential article of faith to all that came to Christ when he was here below. "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" was a question sometimes put; and a requisite at all times, because it would be absurd to ask for anything essential to our eternal welfare if we did not believe the Saviour was able to do it. You know the first feeling of those that came to him was that he was able to open the eyes of the blind, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, and to do do anything and everything that was needful to be done. So, then, I have seen that thy salvation is great, deeper than hell, high as heaven, broader than the sea, and longer than the earth;—I see that thou canst save me. Now I saw this. Ah, say some, why had you not taken the other step, and said he would save you? Ah, that is the point, there is the difficulty. How many am I speaking to this morning that have been, and are, and will be cleaving to the Lord simply in the faith of God's ability, and yet, for a thousand worlds you cannot yet with assurance say that he will save you;—you can no more take that step out of the position you are in into the assurance that he will, than you can create a world. It is all very well to say in a sleepy sort of way, "I am a poor helpless creature;" but when you come into trouble, and need the help, that is where your helplessness is felt. It was so with me the other day, a week ago yesterday. I thought, Well, if this does not stop—and my life is now coming to an end—I do not feel I could die. Everything was hidden from me. Yet, bless the Lord, I would rather be in that state, than be careless and prayerless. I have often trembled at the words I have just now quoted,—"They have no bands in their death; their strength is firm; they are not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men;" and, as another scripture says, "Like sheep they are laid in the grave." All passes off quietly; but it is by the strong man, Satan, keeping the palace, and keeping the soul ignorant of its need of God's great salvation. Here, then, Simeon had seen the all-sufficiency of God's salvation. Now I will not speak by any means discouragingly to you, if I can help it; I am now speaking experimental, Bible, solemn facts, realised by the people of God. All the people of God are a tried people more or less; it is hereby they live, and in all these things is the life of their spirit; and God will work all things for their good. So, if you are cleaving to him, you will seek his presence, seek his Spirit, and be content with nothing short of the manifestation to you personally of his eternal-loved eternal power, that

you may feel that the Lord is indeed with you; and if he does not answer you as soon as you could wish, still all these desires and prayers of yours will be treasured up by him, and will be answered in his own time in a better way than you yourself perhaps have looked for the answer. Thus, then, here is a solemn concern for eternity, and a solemn conviction that nothing but the grace of God, nothing but a vital acquaintance with this eternal redemption, with this eternal covenant, with this eternal God as thus revealed, can carry us with safety through that solemn hour. And what are all the comforts of this life if you have no assurance or hope of eternal life? You have your food and raiment, bless God for it; and if the Lord is with you in your business, and blesses your industry, be thankful for it; but all the things connected with this life are transient, they must soon pass away. "The heavens shall pass away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment; but my salvation shall be for ever, my righteousness," saith the Lord, "shall not be abolished."

I now hasten to notice, secondly, *the formation of character by this salvation*. Now Simeon had seen this salvation before, but he had not seen it as his own before; at least, I assume he had not; at any rate, you can distinguish between the two,—can you not? You can see the adaptability of the salvation,—that is one thing, and a blessed thing to see, for he that thus seeth the Son and believeth on him shall be saved. The light is now as the light of the moon; but when you see it as your own salvation, it will be as the light of the sun, it will be as the light of seven days, when the Lord maketh up the breach that is in your soul, healeth the stroke of your wound, and fills every crevice, as it were, by his mercy; and that mercy overflowing all the banks of trouble, and bringing you into fellowship with him, then it is you rejoice that he hath indeed showed you light. Let us, then, in conclusion just glance at the formation of character by this salvation. First, justification. Simeon was a just man. Salvation and righteousness are very often convertible terms,—mean the same thing; as in the 1st verse of the 62nd of Isaiah—"For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth." Thus you will see that Christ's righteousness and salvation mean one and the same thing. Therefore, if you have rightly seen this salvation, what is the result? Why, you believe in Christ's righteousness; you believe if you are justified before God, it must be by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is the just man; for "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." It forms you; it brings you into reconciliation with God by Christ's righteousness; and you will stand in your character different from every person under heaven that is not thus reconciled to God. When you come to the religious spirit of the world, if I may use such an apparently paradoxical expression, you will find that your spirit of reconciliation to God and their spirit are not the same. When you come into connection with a ceremonial religion, or a Pharisaic religion, you will find the character of your spirit and their spirit is not the same; yours is a free grace spirit, theirs is not. Therefore if we have savingly seen this salvation it will reconcile us to God, and we become friends of God. Abraham, when he became a righteous man, was the friend of God; he believed in God, and was called the friend of God. The second feature of this character is that of devotion—just and devout. It is an impossibility to be reconciled to God without being devoted to him.

"Here's my heart, Lord, take it, seal it,  
Seal it from thy courts above."

All devotion without faith, without justification, is false devotion, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin, and without faith it is impossible to please God; but if we have this faith, and are thus justified by faith,

then we serve God by Christ Jesus, offering up spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. These are they whose services are accepted, not as forming part of their salvation, but as evidences that they belong to the Lord, that they are his friends—they will not change him away for another God. The third feature in his character was that of waiting for the consolation of Israel. Why, my hearer, a few days, and when you come on your dying bed, what consolation will you have to wait for then? If your hope be not in God, if you have not a hope in his salvation, in his goodness, in the promise of eternal glory by Christ Jesus, why, you will say, What have I to wait for? My health is gone, my life is just expiring, and I shall be presently in the grave; I have nothing to wait for, I have nothing to hope for; it is all dead, it is all gone, it is all ended. But let the eternal God come in and say, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love;" look at the consolation that will give you. I have redeemed thee, thou art mine, I am thy God, and thou shalt be with me. Your heart and your flesh are failing, but I am the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever. Looking for the consolation of Israel. Happy, happy people to have a fountain to look to that can never run dry, a sun to look to that will never go down, a tree which is immortal, will never cease to yield fruit; yea, a scene of things that will never, never fail. Waiting, looking. He had not yet realized what our text saith; he had not yet realized God's salvation as his own in the way of enjoyment as he could wish; he was waiting. And so a great part of our experience consists of waiting; and if we are waiting in the belief of the truth, we are waiting in the right way, and that consolation is sure to come. "And the Holy Ghost was upon him." Whether he knew it at the time I do not know. "And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Being justified and devoted to God, and waiting for the consolation of Israel, the Holy Ghost was upon him. I wonder if you and I dare to come to that conclusion. Am I thus justified, thus devoted to God, and thus waiting? Then the Holy Ghost is upon me. "And he came by the Spirit into the temple." I trust we do too. Have you not sometimes felt a great reluctance to go, thought it was no use to go. You have said, Well, I will go again, but I have gone so often I am afraid it is no use. The Holy Spirit has prevailed, and you came to the temple of the Lord; and though you have not seen Jesus literally, you have spiritually; you have taken him in your arms spiritually, in a sense; you have realised encouragement, peace, and joy; and you have said, Well, that part of the sermon took notice of me, and that part of the sermon described me, and I know the minister knew nothing at all about me; therefore I do think it is a word from the Lord; I am so glad I came. And how glad was Simeon that there was the temple of God to go to among so many synagogues of Satan. So now there is here and there a temple to go to where the poor, miserable sinner will hear that mercy set forth without which we cannot be saved. So, then, there is the character—justified, devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was upon him. Now, Simeon, as though the Lord should say, I know what you want. Yes, Lord, I want to see thee as my God. Very well, then, you shall; you will not mind seeing death after that. No, I shall not indeed; I can then say, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." If he gives peace, who then can make trouble. He that is our God, then, is the God of salvation. The definition that Simeon gives of this salvation is that it is a light to lighten (ingather) the Gentiles, and all Israel's eternal glory.