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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

JUDGE FOR YOURSELF.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 28TH FEBRUARY, 1869,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“As he hath declared to his servants the prophets!”—Revelation x. 7.

LAST Lord's day morning we closed our discourse upon this text with some observations upon the universal dominion of the Saviour, as set forth in this chapter, where he appears, one foot upon the sea and the other foot upon the land; and if this cannot be understood literally, it must of necessity be understood representatively—that there is something represented by this position of the Saviour, and this something is his universal dominion, which the Old Testament saints foresaw; for the Old Testament prophets saw that there was one purpose to which everything else must be subservient, and that one purpose is the eternal salvation of sinners; whatever may take place must be subservient to that end. Therefore it is written concerning the Lord in this matter that “his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure;” and it is his pleasure to give an immovable and indestructible kingdom to his people.

In closing our remarks for the present upon this book of the Revelation, we have four things to notice. First, *the voice of the angel*; “he cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth.” Secondly, *the seven thunders which followed that voice*. Thirdly, *the termination of time*; “there shall be time no longer.” Fourthly, *the completion of the mystery of God*; when the seventh trumpet sounded, “the mystery of God shall be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”

First, *the voice of the angel*. This angel. Christ Jesus is said to be “a mighty angel,” and of course his voice is therefore a mighty voice. “He cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth.” Perhaps in order to understand this matter clearly, we may go back to the fifth chapter, when John says that there was none in heaven, or in earth, or under the earth among the righteous dead, that was able to carry out the predictions of the Old Testament, that was able to open the book, and to loose the seals; but that the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David, had

prevailed to open the book, to carry out the ancient predictions of the prophets. Now, in order to understand this, we must go again to the Old Testament, keeping up the proposition with which we set out,—that this book must be read in the light of the Old Testament prophets. How did the Lord Jesus Christ open the book? how did he carry out the meaning of the Holy Scriptures? You know what he himself saith,—that all things written of him or concerning him must be fulfilled, and that he went as it was written of him. Let us take three or four scriptures from the Old Testament to open up this matter, and we shall see it means, first, the work that he achieved, and then we shall see the irresistible power which this voice has had and still has with men. First, Jacob speaks of this very beautifully in his prediction, and he speaks of it, according to the ancient mode, in figurative language, no doubt pointing to the Saviour. “Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise;” we praise him because of his wonderful achievement, a word upon which we must have presently; “thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies,” to denote that all are at the Saviour’s entire command; “thy father’s children shall bow down before thee;” and this is fulfilled in our happy experience; we rejoice in bowing down before the Saviour; we rejoice in acknowledging that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. But let us come to his achievement as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. “Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up; he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?” This, of course, is highly poetical language, and perhaps to us may seem rather far-fetched; but the doctrine contained is simply this,—that the Lord Jesus Christ wrought victory over sin, that he hath conquered it, taken the life out of it, and put it eternally away, and in receiving him we receive that victory, and so we overcome in that, as well as in other respects, by the blood of the Lamb; and that he hath by his atoning death swallowed up death in victory, abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light; he hath bruised Satan’s head;—in a word, he has conquered everything that stood against us. That is one of the doctrines, and that opens the book; for you can understand both the Old and New Testament if you take with you the accomplished warfare, the victory which Christ hath wrought. The Israelite was to take with him through the wilderness the victory that God wrought in bringing him out of Egypt; that victory was to that Israelite a light to assure him that whatever he should need in the future would be granted; and it was a pledge also of the great things the Lord would yet do; and by his taking that victory with him he did thereby cleave unto the Lord his God, and got safely through the wilderness into the promised land. Just so now; we lay hold by faith of the Lord Jesus Christ in the victory he has wrought, and cleave to the Lord by that; never attempt to cleave to the Lord by anything else but by the work of Jesus Christ. There we may cleave to him; there no reason can be assigned why we should not cleave to him. This work of Jesus Christ throws a light upon everything. If we ask how the demands of justice were to be met, this work of Jesus Christ answers the question; and if we ask how the majesty of every iota of God’s law was to be maintained, this work of Christ answers the question; and if we ask how God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth, this wonderful work answers the question; and if we ask how it is the promises are yea and amen, and eternally certain, this work of Christ answers the question. He is the mediator, the testator of the better covenant, and he hath died, and thereby confirmed the promises. Thus by his mediatorial work he has put away all darkness, and has brought in light; so that in his light we read out everything that we need to understand for our present hope and eternal welfare; as the Saviour himself saith, “Learn of me;” and another scripture saith that “in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom

and knowledge." This, then, is one thing, and indeed the main thing, that opens the book. We shall never understand either the Old or New Testament aright if we once get away from the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must take that with us in everything. There is not an ordinance in God's house that does not set before us the same thing. The business of the minister is to show what Christ has done. Baptism sets forth the same thing—the death and resurrection of Christ; and again, the Lord's Supper sets forth the same thing—that he has put famine away, and brought in eternal plenty.

Now, this voice of what Christ has done was to be a mighty voice; it was to have wonderful power with men. Amos speaks of it very beautifully in his 3rd chapter, in entire accordance with what is here said:—"The lion hath roared: who will not fear?" He explains what he means in the same verse:—"The Lord God hath spoken; who can but prophesy?" "The lion hath roared." And I suppose the most tremendous voice that hell ever heard—the most tremendous words that were ever uttered; tremendous to the adversary—were those words of the Saviour on the cross, when he said, "It is finished." Ah, said Satan, having so many servants as I have had—I have had ecclesiastical power, and secular power, and every possible power. I have slandered him, belied him, fabricated all sorts of lies against him, daringly and in every way, to rob him if possible of his reputation. I have done everything I possibly could, and yet, in spite of it all, there he is safe at the end of his wondrous work. "It is finished." Here, then, "the lion hath roared: who will not fear?" And as the prophet explains it, "the Lord hath spoken: who can but prophesy?" Now, this voice of the Angel of the Covenant has a wonderful power with the people of God; we will give an instance or two of it presently. It was in the strength of this word, this voice, that the martyrs endured what they did. They felt that there was something so majestic in the testimony of its being finished, that they could not move from it. But we will take your property away. If it must be so; even then I cannot give up what Christ has done. But we will take your liberty away. It must be so; I cannot give up what Christ has done. We will torture you, put you to all sorts of torture, and we will lay all sorts of things to your charge. I cannot help it; I cannot give up this wonderful testimony of what Christ has done. Therefore it means not only that he has achieved the victory, but that the voice has an overwhelming power with the people of God. It sways them wonderfully; they may give up anything and everything, but cannot give up that. Go now to the 4th of Acts, 19th and 20th verses; when they had summoned some of the Apostles before them, what was the answer of the Apostles? Entirely answering to what Amos saith upon this subject; they there say to their adversaries—"Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot"—let the consequence be what it may—"but speak the things which we have seen and heard." "The lion hath roared: who will not fear? The Lord hath spoken: who can but prophesy?" Here, then, is a victory wrought; and this goes forth with a power that awakens the dead, governs the people of God; and there is not a Christian under the heavens, that is brought far enough out to know the truth, that is not wonderfully governed by the same testimony; for while it is as the voice of a lion, we rejoice therein: the louder the better for us; because the voice is not against us, but for us. If it were a voice against us, then the lion's roar would seem something rather to alarm and to distress us; but the voice is for us. He said, "It is finished;" and he said that for us—the warfare is accomplished for us; and as it saith in Isaiah, "He shall swallow up death in victory;" and "He shall take away the rebuke of his people from off all the earth." Then again, Joel, foreseeing and looking to this mighty voice—the finished work of Christ—speaketh thus: "The Lord shall roar out of Zion, and

utter his voice from Jerusalem;" and he did so when he said, "It is finished," as well as doing so on the day of Pentecost. "The heavens and the earth shall shake;" not the literal heavens—not the literal sun, and moon, and stars—not the globe literally that we inhabit; for when it is said, "the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood," the sun and moon there simply represent the Jewish government, and Jewish nation; and the sun being turned into darkness is to denote the darkness to which that nation should come; and the moon into blood, to denote that that nation should ecclesiastically and nationally die. "The heavens and the earth shall shake;" that is, the Jewish heavens and the Jewish earth, they shall tremble, and cease to be; "but the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel." The Jews put their confidence in their sacrifices, in their traditions, and in their temple; they put their confidence in God in the wrong way; but Christians are brought to know the Lord, and he will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. Thus, then, this lion's roar is still to go on down to the end of time. Every sermon must more or less be based upon and expressive of the achievement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything is there: there is no life, no light, no blessing, no liberty, without this wonderful finished work of Christ.

Secondly, *the seven thunders which followed this voice.* First, what do these thunders represent? If they represent what I think they do, then they have a fourfold meaning. There is, no doubt, a reference here to Mount Sinai, the thunders of the law. First, these seven thunders represent what the Saviour had undergone. Now, Moses said, So terrible was the sight at Sinai, that they did exceedingly fear and quake. The Lord Jesus Christ had to undergo the substance of this. We see the solemn circumstances, the earthquakes and the shocks that took place, even physically, when the Saviour died. So then, I say, they would, in the first place, represent what he had undergone. Of course the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ are to a very great extent hidden from us—we cannot enter into their full depths; but I only say this, if the ministration of the law at Sinai were so terrible that the people could not endure that which was commanded, what must have been the ministration of the penalty of the law upon the person of the Lord Jesus Christ? I shall not attempt to go out of my depth here; I only just say that Jesus Christ was and is God and man in one person, and therefore had to compass what none but such a person could compass. You will at once perceive that the number seven is intended to represent completeness. And it is a terrible subject to speak upon, but it is an awful truth, that there is a completeness of condemnation in the law of God. There is nothing there but condemnation. There was nothing in that law for Christ, as he stood in our place, but condemnation: that law exacting of him the obedience which he rendered; and thus he became, as I have lately said, a curse representatively; because all the penalties of the law were embodied in him. This, I think, is one thing intended by the seven thunders. Secondly, I think they are intended to represent the complete destruction of the Jewish nation. That nation is destroyed, and destroyed for ever, never to be a nation again; and I defy any man under the heavens to find in the whole range of the Gospel, or of the New Covenant, a single promise to the Jews as a nation, or a single promise to any other people as a nation. There is not in the whole range of the Gospel one promise to the Jews as a nation, and there never was. The promises to them were Old Covenant promises, not New Covenant promises. There is not a promise in all the New Covenant to any people as a nation. When that nation was destroyed, God had done for ever with nationalities, and the Lord now commences a new course:—now it is the world at large that is loved; now it is that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world; now it is that the Holy

Spirit shall convince the world of sin. All these three scriptures, of course, mean a world within a world. When it is said, "God loved the world," it means a world of people,—a people out of all kindreds, nations, and tongues; for where he has loved, there he draws them by that love with which he has loved them. And when Christ is said to be the propitiation for our sins,—and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world—that we must take to mean also a people among all nations. And when the Holy Spirit is spoken of as convincing the world of sin, that of course must be taken in the same way. It would be nothing else but self-delusion to take it in any other way. What is the good of insisting that the great God has loved freely, sovereignly, and eternally, every individual of the human race? Why, if he had done so, not one could be lost. It is nothing but delusion to hold the notion that Jesus Christ is the propitiation for the sins of every one of the human race. If so, not one could be lost; all must be sheep, and not one could perish; for his sheep must in the Lord's time hear his voice, and follow him, and shall have eternal life. And then to hold that the Holy Spirit was to convince every individual of the population of the globe of sin, is that true? Does the Holy Spirit do so? You know he does not. And yet I make no hesitation in saying, what I have often said before, that the eternal Spirit of God could as easily convince the whole population of the globe—supposing it to be, as some say it is now, about twelve hundred millions of souls;—he could as easily convince the whole of them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, as he could convince one; for the Holy Spirit is both omnipresent and omnipotent. But does he do so? He does not. He, as the heavenly wind, bloweth where he listeth, and giveth unto every man severally as he will. These seven thunders, then, are expressive of the destruction of the Jewish nation; God had done with nations for ever, gave the mission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Let us not throw our time away in disputing about mere doctrine apart from experience; let us ask ourselves two or three questions. First, Is the everlasting love of God attractive to us? Does it draw us to God? If so, we shall see that if his love were not free, firm, unchangeable, never could it have been fixed upon us. Then let us see whether what Christ has done be attractive to us. Now does Jesus Christ say, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw this nation, that, and the other." No; "I will draw all men unto me." There you must see that the meaning is, he draws all classes, and all sorts of characters of men to him. Let it be our question not so much about the doctrine—God forbid I should make light for a moment of the doctrine, because I know that false doctrine inspires the mind with enmity against God; nevertheless, while we speak of doctrine, do not let us leave out the solemn and essential vitalities of religion. So, then, while Jesus saith, "I will draw all men unto me," let us ask, Am I one that is drawn? Do I see something in his adaptability to my woeful and necessitous condition as a sinner that makes me glad to fly to him for refuge? Is he thus attractive to me? And while the Holy Spirit shall convince of sin, am I one of that world whom he doth convince? And of righteousness;—of sin, in order that I might believe in Christ; of righteousness, because the Saviour hath, on the ground of the work he has wrought, ascended up on high; and of judgment, because the prince of this world is finally judged. Thirdly, I think these seven thunders represent the work of the Holy Spirit. There is a completeness, as we have said, in the condemnation. When I was made first concerned for eternal things, of course I did not know it was the Lord that made me concerned; and I thought that to a very great extent I stood condemned before the Lord, but how far condemned I did not know. I considered that there were several good things about me, and that I had avoided doing and saying what a great many other people had done and said, therefore I was not after all quite

so bad as some. Thus I went dreaming on for a time, and I thought with what little good I could rake up in the past, and what little good I could acquire, and what little good I could do,—that then I and Jesus Christ together, I and God's mercy and grace together, should somehow or another settle matters, and I should hobble off to heaven, and get there at last somehow or another. Such were my dreams when I was first concerned for eternal things. But by and by the Lord brought me to where he brought the prodigal: it is said of the prodigal, that "he came to himself," and the Lord brought me home to myself, and I found out what a wretched thing self was; and then I found out that the law was spiritual, I was carnal, sold under sin; I found then that I was condemned altogether, that every particle of my goodness was as the morning cloud and the early dew—that it passed away, and that therefore I stood altogether unclean, altogether a leper; that nothing but condemnation belonged to me, that my comeliness was turned into corruption, that all my righteousnesses were as filthy rags, that I did fade as a leaf, and that mine iniquities, as it were, carried me away. Thus I became completely condemned, and the consequence was, I could not stop among the Wesleyans any longer, not because I disliked the people, but because I wanted a better gospel, and then I got among the duty-faith people; I could not stop there, not because I have any accusation whatever to bring against the people, but I wanted a better gospel; and when in the 54th of Isaiah I found that better gospel, then I found rest; then the thunders ceased to roar, when I found out that delightful truth that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Then I got to the end of the law, to the end of these thunders; then I got away from Sinai to where the still small voice was. And so these thunders are sealed up, and the things they uttered are not written against me, nor are they to be written against any that are found in Christ Jesus the Lord.

The fourth thing represented by these thunders is, I think, the ultimate destiny of the wicked. Perhaps this is the chief thing meant. John was commanded to seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and not to write them. The reason of this is not assigned, and therefore, in offering a thought upon it, I will do so with all diffidence, and all care; for I cannot know any more than you can, nor you any more than I can, where the Lord hath not revealed; but still it is right we should search into these things, and get the meaning, as far as we possibly can. Now there is some reason, no doubt, why these things were sealed up, and I should think the reason was that they were already written, that they were already largely written in the Old Testament, in the Evangelists, and in the Epistles, and therefore it was needful now that they should be closed. Do not write any more, John; there is quite enough written upon this. Hence in the last chapter of Daniel, when the Lord gave him a vision, Daniel was to seal up the words until the time of the end. That did not mean that the things were really hidden from Daniel in substance as to what they were; but being already written, they needed not then to be written in detail again. So John is commanded to seal them up, and let them remain as described in the Old Testament, and other parts of the New Testament. Now just one word more upon these seven thunders,—upon that which is not very pleasing, but we must have the unpleasant as well as the pleasant. You will observe, then, that here are seven thunders. Now if these thunders represent the judgments that shall come for ever upon the wicked, then they represent in that respect two things. First, a completeness of condemnation;—the body and soul reunited at the resurrection, and cast into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. There is a completeness, then, in this condemnation, and there is a completeness in its duration, for it is ever-

lasting punishment, everlasting banishment from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Oh, what a cursed, blighted, limited existence is ours, apart from the grace of God! Better, far better, ten million times, twice told, better for us if we had never been born, if we are born only to live in this world a few years, and struggle with all sorts of things, a life that has in it ninety-nine trials to one real comfort;—just a few years, and then, because of that sin which, being against an infinite God, is infinite in its demerit, to be cast into the lake of fire, where the breath of the Lord, in the eternity of his indignation, doth kindle it as a stream of brimstone. Ah, we may well be earnest in prayer, in preaching and hearing the gospel! Oh, how little is everything else when set by the side of the great matter of the ultimate destiny of the never-dying, precious soul! But then all this is nothing to the natural man. The natural man is like the leviathan;—darts are counted by him as stubble; we may sling, as it were, the stones of truth, but he feels them not; and his scales of unbelief, and blindness, and hardness, are so close together that no air can come between them. He who made him, says Job, can approach unto him; and so it is now. He alone who made us can approach unto us, and take from us this Satanic armour, strip us, lay us down at his feet, and make us feel what poor, naked, and exposed creatures we are. Complete condemnation. Ah, happy the man that knows something of this in his own experience! I just now said that you are under a complete condemnation;—and then, looking forward to the wrath that is to come, to be enabled to set the dear Saviour over against both;—over against what you are as a sinner, and over against the wrath to come. He delivers you from what you are in yourself, and from the wrath to come. There is one more thought;—the seven thunders are also to denote perpetuity; as many thunders as there are days in the week. And so with the lost soul; there is no intermission. If we are in trouble here, we always have a sort of hope that we shall get out of it; if we are in pain, we run to our physician, and get a remedy;—or whatever may be our trouble, there is always a sort of feeling that there is a remedy somewhere; something to mitigate it. But there, if I may for the sake of representation speak of eternity as having days,—not one calm day, not one fine day; the thunders will never, never, never cease to roll; the fire will never, never cease to burn. And yet that great salvation wrought by the Saviour is despised in the world; and if it be fearlessly, solemnly, and affectionately preached, those who preach it, as well as what they preach, are all despised together; just showing that Satan is indeed the god of this world. Such, then, I take to be the meaning of the seven thunders; they are sealed up, as it were, in the word now, and are not perceived by men, except by regenerated men;—they perceive them, and flee from them, to find a place in that Zion where there is nothing fiery, but where the Lord, in contrast to the fire, is unto them “a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby;” but all is paradisiacal, and all is peaceful.

I now hasten to notice *the termination of time*;—“and swear by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer.” Now the question comes first, Why did the Saviour swear by God’s eternity? Because this termination, or this change of time, concerned God’s eternity. What was the time that was to be no longer? Not mundane time, not literal time. I scarcely need remind you that these words are a quotation from the last chapter of Daniel, where the angel lifts up his hands to heaven, and swears by him that liveth for ever that the time shall not be yet; it shall be for a time, times, and half a time,—*the division of times*. Now it concerns God’s eternity. Christ did away

with temporal time, and has brought in eternal time. Say you, How is that? Well, you admit, do you not, that the priesthood of that dispensation was temporal? Very well; Christ has done away with that, and brought in an eternal priesthood. You admit that the royalty of that dispensation was temporal? Very well; Christ has done away with that, and brought in eternal royalty, for "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever." And that temple also in itself was earthly and temporal; you admit that? Very well, then; Christ has done away with that, and has brought in a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Also you admit that the land of Canaan was earthly and temporal? Very well; Christ has done away with that, and brought in an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Thus Christ swears by the eternity of God, because this change from Jewish to Christian time concerned eternity, and concerned the eternal welfare of his people. Then he swears "by him who created heaven, and the things that therein are." Why did he do this? Because this change from the typical and shadowy to the substantial and eternal concerned everything in heaven. All the prophets looked forward to this time. I would venture to imagine when Moses and Elias came down to the Mount of Transfiguration, and spake of the decease that the Saviour should accomplish at Jerusalem, every spirit in heaven saying, Ah, if that wonderful person now on the earth does not bring in an eternal priesthood, eternal royalty, eternal mansions—if he does not establish an eternal kingdom—if he does not set aside Jewish time, that that shall be no longer, and establish eternal time, not a soul can remain in heaven. Their continuing there depended upon his undoing the temporal, and establishing the eternal. Then also the angel swears "by him who created the earth, and the things that therein are;" because it concerns all things upon the earth. There is not a Christian upon the face of the earth that this change of things does not concern; there is not a circumstance upon the earth that this change of things does not concern. I am persuaded that hardly any of us have paid that attention to this change from Jewish to Christian time, from time terminable to time interminable, that would be very instructive to us. And yet there is no scope for the human mind anywhere that can surpass that presented by the mysteries of the Bible; and besides, it is salvation—it is eternal life and glory—to know these mysteries. Here, in a higher sense than anywhere else, knowledge is power. And then it is added,— "And the sea, and the things which are therein." There are, no doubt, many of our brethren that have been slumbering in the bottom of the sea for hundreds of years; and among the eighty thousand merchantmen that England has on the sea now in ships, I hope there is a sprinkle that love the Lord, and look to him, and that do literally see and understand somewhat his wonders in the deep, and contemplate the majesty and greatness of God while they sail over the vast oceans of the world. Therefore he swears by the sea also, because this change of things concerned the sea.

Now, in conclusion, to show that I am right, I will bring in a few scriptures. 4th of Galatians: "When the fulness of the time was come"—fulness means completeness, that is, when the time was completed—"God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Here, then, when the old temporal time was completed, Jesus Christ appeared, declared it should be no longer, and established his own time—namely, eternal time. 1st of Ephesians: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times," and again once in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.