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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

NO PURGATORY, NO MILLENNIUM.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 14th FEBRUARY, 1869,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSLEY STREET.

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”—Revelation i. 3.

It is surprising, with such a preface as this, that the sentiment should so widely exist that it is almost a sin to attempt to understand the things that are contained in this book. Last Lord's day morning the chief part of our time was occupied in showing the structure of the book of Revelation, concluding with some remarks upon the book, that it directs us to the prophets, and that therefore this book of the Revelation ought to be read in the light of the prophets. I had hoped that the chief part of our sermon this morning would have been upon that subject; but there is something else that must be cleared up before we come to that. You will observe that out of the 20th chapter of this book is manufactured the doctrine of the millennium,—that the Lord Jesus Christ will come and reign upon the earth a thousand years. We have shown in the notes of time that that thousand years must be understood not literally, but mystically or figuratively, denoting a period of time the termination of which is known to the Lord alone. And yet out of that chapter they have formed the doctrine of an intermediate state of things between this and eternity. There is a striking contrastive analogy between the doctrine of purgatory and the doctrine of the millennium. I will therefore, in the first place, dispose of *those two intermediate states*, and then, secondly, as far as time permits, give you some samples of the truth of the proposition I have made, that *the book of Revelation should be read in the light of the prophets*.

First, then, to dispose of *these two intermediate states*—purgatory and the millennium. I will explain first what is meant by purgatory. It is well for us to understand something of our adversary. Every military man feels it is needful he should understand the position and strength, and, if possible, the schemes of his opponents; and if we do not somewhat understand what we speak against, we shall not speak with propriety. Now purgatory, according to the Catholic church, is this:—that there is an intermediate state of suffering between this and eternity, before they reach heaven, those that are saved. Purgatory signifies a place of puri-

fying by suffering; and according to the Catholic church it means this:—that there are some small sins which do not deserve eternal punishment, and therefore as most Christians die and do not repent of all of their sins, their small sins, there is therefore a purgatory into which they are to go, in order by suffering to be purged or purified from those small sins; that these small debts must be paid, and that they therefore go into this purgatory in order to pay off their debts. This is the doctrine of the Catholic church. They say, we cannot expect many to die without some faults about them,—and so they have provided this purgatory as a way in which whatever faults they have are to be atoned for, got rid of, and then they will be prepared for heaven. There are more than a hundred millions of people on earth that believe this doctrine. But how does this doctrine of purgatory, or of suffering so as to atone for what they call small sins, accord with the delightful truth that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin? If his blood does the work, what need justice to demand anything of the creature? How does this doctrine of purgatory accord with Solomon's Song,—“Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee”? And again, “Complete in him who is the head of all principality and power.” And again, “He hath perfected for ever all them that are sanctified,” and such like scriptures. Those who are taught of God see that everything is settled by the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, there is this mystery which the Catholic passes by,—that when the true Christian dies, he dies in the Lord. He does not die to go to heaven in his own character; for if he did, to heaven he could not go; that is, not in his own original character as a fallen creature, but he dies in the Lord; that is to say, this man that dies in the Lord has been made acquainted with his need of God's mercy, and of the substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ; and that by that substitutional work he, this believer, is justified from the wrath to come, delivered from the wrath to come, perfected for ever. By an acquaintance with this substitutional work, hereby every sin is blotted out, and the soul, being born of an incorruptible seed, that liveth and abideth for ever, the soul thus enters heaven by the atonement and righteousness of Christ, and by the indwelling of his Spirit; so that there it is as complete as God himself could make it. Let us, then, bless the Lord that it is not our lot to dream of human merit, for, as I shall presently show, both the doctrine of purgatory and the doctrine of the millennium, carry in them the doctrine of human merit. Let us bless the Lord that he has conformed us to that scripture in the 4th of Romans, “To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not,”—oh, my hearer, we can do no work that the law can accept, for “he that offendeth in one point is guilty of the whole;” and “cursed is he that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” Now, saith the apostle, “To him that worketh not,”—let us not notice the unhallowed conclusions that men have drawn from the testimony there borne;—Ah, say they, if we need not to work we may live just as we list; whereas the apostle means, to him that worketh not under the law, as that man does who thinks he can so conform himself to God's law as to work out a righteousness of his own. Now a man who is convinced that he cannot do that, a man who is convinced that that law must stand eternally good, but that the sinner can do nothing towards it,—“now to him that worketh not,” where is the remedy? “but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” And how does God justify the ungodly? The 5th of Romans shows that we are justified from ungodliness by the blood of Christ: “Being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him;” and we are justified from all condemnation by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. “To him that worketh not,” in this legal, slavish, Pharisaic, and law sense of the word, “but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

Thus, then, if I am approved, accepted, and complete in Christ, this is enough to convince us that there is no suffering called for hereafter. And besides, the apostle Paul saith that "the last enemy is death;" but the Catholic ought to say the last enemy is purgatory. But the apostle saith "the last enemy is death;" that enemy is within sight, that enemy is already beaten, its sting is taken away; death in its power to condemn is abolished, and life and immortality brought to light. So, then, the doctrine of purgatory sets aside the perfection of Christ, the immutability of God, and the testimony of God's blessed word. If there should be a Catholic here this morning, I hope he will read his Bible, and think upon these things; and not only read the Bible, but just ask himself, What Bible authority is there for me to believe that the Pope is Peter's successor? The late Cardinal Wiseman, I think, was as sober, as industrious, as learned, laborious, and thoughtful a man as that church ever had; yet in his writings, when he comes to the question of the Pope being the successor of Peter, he fails there most dreadfully. He is obliged to form his bridge simply by assumptions, and to believe such a doctrine as apostolic succession, which of course does not exist; the apostles had no successors; it is mere human assumption.

I will now quote two scriptures that are brought forward to prove this purgatory. First, the 5th of Matthew, which is a favourite scripture of theirs: "Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." They say this prison is purgatory, and that you must suffer there till you have paid off your small debts;—mind, they are only small debts; they admit that Jesus Christ paid the great debts, but we must go there to pay the small debts. Now I myself feel persuaded, and I should think you do too, that the prison there spoken of is intended to represent the prison of hell, is intended to represent that place in which we read of one lifting up his eyes, and desiring a drop of water to mitigate the tortures he was enduring. This is the prison; and if a sinner die without a surety, he is cast into the prison of hell; and if he is not to come out until he has paid the uttermost farthing, then there can be no deliverance, for no man can redeem his own soul; no man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him. This is a favourite scripture of theirs. Let us look at it, and see what it means. It is a very instructive and a very beautiful scripture. "Agree with thine adversary;" the adversary there of course means the law of God; that is the adversary that comes and says, "Pay that thou owest." And happy is every man whose eyes are far enough opened to see that the law of God can be nothing to you as a sinner considered but a fiery law, nothing but the ministration of death, condemnation, anguish, bitterness, tribulation, and everlasting woe. There is the adversary. And when this adversary, the law, spoke at Mount Sinai, the people were right in calling for a mediator, saying, "Let not this voice speak to us any more," for they could not endure that which was commanded. Now there is not a man or woman under the heavens that will rightly appreciate Jesus Christ till they find out how far the law is their adversary. When they find out that the law of God can be nothing to them as sinners considered but an adversary, then they will be upon the search for a remedy. "Lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge," and you all know that God is the Judge, the Judge of all, "and the judge deliver thee to the officer," and the officer, you all know, is the justice of God, "and thou be cast into prison," the prison of hell. The Saviour saith, "Agree with thine adversary quickly." How am I to do so? The answer is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Ah, "to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." And "do we through faith

make void the law? We establish the law." We turn this adversary into a friend; for as the law never had and never will have anything against Christ, so the law never had then and never will have anything against them that are in Christ. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus the Lord." Here comes the secret, then; Dr. Watts well says,—

"The best obedience of my hands,
Dares not appear before Thy throne
But faith can answer thy demands
By pleading what my Lord has done."

That settles the matter; that brings mercy and truth together; that buries the law in the ark of the covenant; that sends the law into eternal silence, and there is nothing left to speak to thee but the still, dove-like voice of the glorious gospel of the blessed God. As the dove peacefully brought the olive leaf, so does the gospel bring the olive leaf of peace, and sweet assurance that all is well. That is the way in which I understand we are to agree with the adversary, by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ; and here God is our Judge, where even by the piercing eye of God, as the poet says, no blemish shall be found. God himself judges Christ,—no fault; judges the church as she is in Christ,—no fault. "So speak and so do as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

One more scripture they bring, and it is this,—the Catholics or Catholicism; let us deal with the *ism*, lest people should think I have an unkind feeling. The minister is the last man in the world that ought ever to have an unkind feeling; his feeling ought to be for the souls of all men, and to speak out honestly that which he hopes will be useful. The other scripture I will name which they quote to justify the doctrine of purgatory is that in the 19th of Job: "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me." Now they say Job, though he was perfect before he lost his property and his family, committed some small sins after that, in cursing the day of his birth, and answering his friends very abruptly, and ran into some small debts after that; and therefore he entreats his friends to remember him when he is in purgatory, and to have pity upon him. But in the same chapter the Lord, as though foreknowing, as of course he did, what use would be made of Job's words, has given us the remedy, for a little further on Job says, "I know that my Redeemer liveth;" that settles everything; so I shall not need the pity of my friends when I am taken from this scene of things; "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth," which he did. The latter day here means the latter day of the Old Testament age, called by the apostle (Heb. ix. 26) the end of the world—that is, the end of the Jewish world. "And though after my skin"—for that is gone by disease; he did not know then, perhaps, that it would be restored again, which it was—"worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." You see what a beautiful oneness there is between Abraham and Job. Abraham saw the Saviour's day and rejoiced; he saw it, and was glad. Job saw the Saviour's day, and saw it was a day of eternal redemption; not only redeeming the soul from hell, but the body from the grave. Job looks forward, therefore, in the light of eternal redemption to the resurrection at the last day. You will at once see, then, that the doctrine of purgatory carries in it the doctrine of human merit, and you will see how the scriptures sweep all that away, to our delight and to God's glory.

Now we come to the millennium: what is it? They tell us that there is to be a thousand years' intermediate glory, to reward the martyrs for their extraordinary suffering. As they suffered so much, the Lord therefore, to give them that extra honour which belongs to them, hath appointed an intermediate thousand years for "the souls of them that were beheaded."

Taking it all literally, to enjoy this millennium, that is to be the reward for their extraordinary sufferings. Now all this appears very feasible, but of course it will not bear the test. It carries in it human merit, just the same as purgatory, only in another way. The one suffers, to atone for the small sins; and the other is rewarded for extraordinary works, or worth. I think, in order to put an end to that point, we had better bring a man who was great in the things of God—no prophet or apostle perhaps ever greater; he was a great labourer, he was a great sufferer. Let us hear his testimony upon this matter, whether he anticipated any difference between the saints of God. Even when he was old, after labouring and suffering as he had, what does this great man say in his epistles? Why, he says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." I know that does not come to the point exactly, but still it is a help. Let us hear another testimony of this great man. Does he not despise the idea of merit? does he not despise the idea that he deserves anything for anything he has done in a way of merit? Let us hear his language. "I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was given me." Let us clench the nail with these words, "By the grace of God I am what I am." And I am sure the apostle Paul, being now in heaven, would use the same words, with an additional clause. He would now have two clauses, two sentences instead of one, and they would be these: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and by the grace of God I am where I am." Where is your human merit? where is the reward? Then, again, infants, the thief on the cross, all are to be one at last. And think you there will be any envy in heaven? No. If there be any discord, if there be any strife, if there be any feeling there, it will only be the feeling very nicely described by the great Erskine. The striving there, I was going to say, will be which shall be least, and which shall glorify God most. The language of each there is,—

"I defy
That you should owe more praise than I;
For mine, of all the saved by grace,
Was the most dreadful, desperate case."

And again,—

"'Tis mine to sound his praise with loudest bell,
He saved me from the lowest hell."

I believe the whole company of martyrs would scout the idea of human merit, and of God allotting to them a kind of intermediate reward, to make up, as it were, some deficiency there might be in the ultimate reward. Thus, then, in the doctrine of purgatory and in that of the millennium there is something analogous; they both carry in them the doctrine of human merit.

But let us look at the Holy Scriptures as to what comes next after time. How did the apostles view our departure from this world? Is there a single syllable in all the epistles or all the prophets about an intermediate state? What does the apostle say? "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" where is your intermediate state?—"while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." No prophet or apostle ever dreamt of anything but eternity as soon as ever time is ended. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have"—a thousand years' extra reward, an intermediate space, to show how much superior we are to the rest of the people of God? Oh, my hearer, that does not square with the grace of God, the atonement of Christ, or the covenant of grace. No; he says, "We have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And then he says, "In this we groan, earnestly desiring

to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven." You observe, here is a house in heaven—"eternal in the heavens," not made with hands; and then here is a house from heaven; so that here are two. Now the house in heaven, not made with hands, of course means heaven itself; that eternal glory into which the soul enters the selfsame moment that it leaves the body. "Absent from the body," is laid down not as a circumstantial or exceptional case, but is laid down as an unexceptionable law to all the people of God—"Absent from the body, present with the Lord." Then here is a house from heaven. What house is that? "Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked." You know what the house is from heaven that is to clothe us. Mark, it is called a clothing. And there is great beauty in the two; it is called a clothing, and it is called a house. That clothing from heaven is Christ. "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." "That I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, but having that righteousness which is of God by faith." He therefore is the house from heaven, and being clothed in Christ we shall be accepted. And why is he called a house as well as clothing? Why, friends, we shall live in him to all eternity. You will live in his love, in his perfection, in his rights, in his inheritance, as joint-heirs with him; and you will live in all the relations he bears; you will live in all his worth and worthiness, and in his eternal power. So, then, where is purgatory, and where is the millennium? I myself must *in toto* deny the existence of either. The prophets and apostles looked for eternity next, and eternity does come next. See, then, how beautiful the Scriptures are, how clear they are upon the delightful truth that our acceptance with God is entirely in Christ, without any work, or merit, or anything of the kind. The Lord places his people at an infinite distance from all thought of human merit. He says, which certainly could not be true if there were anything meritorious in the creature, "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee." Ah, go to Simon's house, consult the woman at the Saviour's feet—how she would spurn human merit! Go to the woman that touched the hem of his garment; go to the thief on the cross, go to others—nay, Christian, go to yourself—the prodigal came to himself, and those who are taught of God come to themselves; and so far from having anything of their own to come before God with in a way of boasting, they loathe themselves in their own sight; and even at the last day, when the Saviour shall tell them of the good they have done, it seems they can hardly believe it. "When saw we thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or sick, or naked, or any of these things?" Lord, I have been a poor, unbelieving, rebelling, murmuring creature all the way, and often wondered to find thy mercies drop into my soul, making thyself glorious in mine eyes; I have often stood amazed at thine interposing hand leading me out of this trouble, and that, and the other; working this deliverance and the other, at times when I expected some judgment would cut me down and send me to hell. Oh, how many experiences there are on the way that do indeed authorize each Christian to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am!"

I have not made these remarks because I am suspicious of any of you falling into these errors; but I do think it is profitable sometimes to look at those delusions by which our fellow-creatures have been deluded, and by which a great many are now deluded; for we see that the Puseyites are getting hold of the women. If you went to their churches at about eight o'clock in the morning you would see women go to what they call confession. I must confess that to me is the greatest mystery of all—how a woman that has any respect for herself individually can go and furnish those men with secrets that ought to be known to none but herself and her husband. I will not say, of course, that these gentlemen, when they

get together in private, tell each other what such a young lady said, and what such a married woman said; I will not suggest the dirty jokes that in private they have over what is confessed to them. But I must say it is a great mystery to me how any civilized, chaste, refined, educated, professedly Christian woman, married or single, can submit to such an ordeal. I cannot make it out. And the husbands, what must they be? Why, they cannot be men; they must be mere things. I know if a wife of mine went to a priest, she might stop there; for I would not have her back again. No, I would say, you have gone and confessed; and if the priest is to be your ruler and guide and protector, you may stop there, for I will not have you again. Therefore I say, though these errors seem to us a long way off now, yet they are creeping on. They get hold of the women, and the women get hold of the men, and get hold of the children. The adversary is creeping along as fast as he can; and I think it is right, therefore, that every Protestant should be acquainted with the movements of the enemy, and should know the weapons with which to meet him. It is a good thing to be mighty in the Scriptures, for the word of the Lord to dwell richly in you. Neither millenniumism nor purgatorianism accord, then, with the Scriptures; both are wrong. The Lord enable us to reject the two, and to stand in the sunlight of the dear Redeemer, and to rejoice in his sweet testimony, "Thou art all fair, there is no spot in thee." So much, then, for disposing of these two intermediate states.

Now I must say a few words towards showing the truth of the proposition that *the book of the Revelation should be read in the light of the prophets*. All I can do this morning is to take only the first item out of the nine or ten that are as clear in my mind as the sun at noonday. I have had the book of Revelation almost by heart for these twenty years; I love the book, I have enjoyed it; I have many times met the Lord there; I glory in it; and wonder that, while the book opens with declaring that "blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein,"—that men, notwithstanding this declaration of the Most High, should reckon it almost a sin to read it. I will give you one sample of the truth of the proposition that the book of the Revelation should be read, not in the light of learned men's writings;—not that I have anything to say against the labours of learned men. I feel a very great respect for that excellent scholar and gentleman Dr. Cumming. He has met the Catholics in a very masterly, gentlemanly, and proper way; so he has the Puseyites. They have not an argument nor a doctrine which that learned man has not refuted. But at the same time his labours, like those of others, if the Lord is not pleased to open the eyes of them that hear, no good is done. The Saviour himself spoke to thousands, and those thousands went away, and walked no more with him; and the apostles preached to thousands that turned away and saw not the light nor the truth. It is not the work of the minister, it is the work of God; for let the minister labour as he may, no man can receive anything except it be given him from above. The book of the Revelation, then, we say, should be read by the light of the prophets. The first thing I take is the sealed book; and if I can find a sealed book in the Old Testament, and if I can find that the contents of that sealed book in the Old Testament exactly accord with the opening of the book in Revelation, then you will feel that I am right. I find a sealed book in the 29th of Isaiah: "The vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed." Now, friends, you have nothing to do but go to the New Testament, and look at the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Christ, and contrast their ministry with the traditions of the elders, and you will see that the Bible was to the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees a sealed book. There, then, is the sealed book, sealed as with seven seals

—completely hidden from them. They knew not the true mysteries of the Old Testament. Why, saith Christ, “Abraham saw my day;”—they could not believe it. “Moses spake of me and wrote of me;”—they could not believe it. “All the prophets bare testimony of me;”—they could not believe it. Ah, men trifle with doctrine, but that tradition that they held blinded them to the truth, and inspired them with enmity against the truth of God, the Christ of God, and the Spirit of God; and the Saviour said unto them, “Ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” I say that every doctrine a man holds will have its power, its effect, its inspiration; and if it be a doctrine that inspires me with enmity against the truth, that doctrine will work like leaven, and my mind will become by degrees poisoned against God’s truth, and if grace prevent not, my soul be damned at last. Now we get a sealed book in the 29th of Isaiah; how do you open it? “In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book;”—there it is, you see; and you will see how very beautifully the 7th of the Revelation, wherein you have the sealed book opened, answers to the closing paragraph of the 29th of Isaiah. “In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book;” that is, the book of the gospel. Oh, that has been our happy lot; we have heard the words of the book, the Lamb’s book of life. “And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness;”—so we do, Lord; many of us can say, “Whereas I was blind, now I see;”—see what a sinner I am, and see that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. “The meek also”—ah, this hearing and this seeing brings about meekness; when a man hears the word in a way that convinces him, and sees his condition, he is meekened down directly. Ah, he says, now it is not whether I will have mercy, but whether mercy will have me; it is not whether I will have Christ, but whether Christ will have me; it is not whether I will go to heaven, but whether God will take me there; and so far from human merit, each one that is there will say, “By the grace of God I am here; it is wonderful that I am here at all.” “The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord.” Well, then, is the Lord breaking some of you down? Have you heart-rendings, afflictions, and troubles? Are you so broken down as to be brought almost to despair? What is this for? It is to prepare you for some conspicuous revelation to you of his eternal love and mercy; for “the meek”—but the meekness must go first—“shall increase their joy in the Lord; and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” How true that is! If anything under heaven is true of any man, I was going to say, it is of me, for a poorer creature does not exist than I am; and yet I do rejoice in the Holy One of Israel, unspeakably so. Mark, not merely “the Holy One,” but “the Holy One of Israel;” that is, he has put away Israel’s sin, and presents Israel to God without blemish, spot, or wrinkle, unblameable, unreprieveable. Poor sinners shall glory in this sin-bearer, shall glory in the Holy One of Israel. “For the terrible one is brought to nought;” and to make short of it, in the same paragraph you have the victory wrought by the Saviour. Now what of all this? “Thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham;”—I am dealing here with the book, and see how beautifully the 7th of Revelation answers to it;—“Thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham;” how did the Lord redeem Abraham? The same as he redeemed all the rest. Abraham saw the Saviour’s day, and Job says, “My Redeemer liveth.” Job could say to Abraham, and Abraham could say to Job,—Job, how did you get to heaven? Oh, by my Redeemer. Abraham, how did you get here? Oh, by the same Redeemer. They would not be strangers. “Thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed;”—mark that; in that same paragraph the terrible one is brought to nought; that is, sin, and death, and the devil, and everything that stood against us.