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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE BEST HOME.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 11TH APRIL, 1869,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.”—
Psalm xxvi. 8.

EVERY Israelite that rightly understood the service of the ancient tabernacle and of the temple would see everything in that service to endear to him the everlasting God. There he would see the fire descend upon the sacrifice, while he himself escaped; there he would see his cause taken by the high priest into the holy of holies, and he, the Israelite, there presented by what the sacrifice had made him; there he would see that the throne was a throne of grace, that the seat there, where Jehovah was enthroned, was a mercy-seat; and that when the priest came out from the holy of holies, he brought nothing with him but blessing, typifying the great truth that unto them that look for the Saviour shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. This temple, of course, and its service were a type of the Saviour, and in Christ Jesus we realize all the meaning of that dispensation. David therefore loved the God that had loved him, and could say, “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord.” And David also saw that if the Lord had not loved him, he would not have thus been brought to love the Lord and to abide by him; for “blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee.” He therefore, upon the language of our text, founds a very solemn prayer,—“Gather not my soul with sinners.” Why not, David? You are a sinner, the same as other people. “Nor my life with men of blood,” which means deadly enemies to God’s truth, and consequently to God’s Christ, crucifiers of Christ, which we all by nature are. Why, then, should not David’s soul be gathered with sinners and with the Lord’s enemies? Because he loved the habitation of God’s house, as an evidence that he was exempted by the sacrificial service from his sinnership; and also to plead before the Lord the truth that David was happy only with the Lord, and with them that loved the Lord. And so the Lord saith, “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice;” that sacrifice meaning the sacrifice of Christ, and that covenant meaning the covenant to which that sacrifice belongs—the new covenant, established upon better promises than that of the old. So that David’s prayer would be answered. And it is in entire accordance with the language of John when he saith, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.”

I will this morning take carefully a threefold view of our subject. I notice, then, the house of God to mean, first, *the Christ of God*; secondly, *the church of God*; thirdly, *our respective places of worship*.

First, that it means *the Christ of God*. "I have loved the habitation of thy house;" that is, Christ Jesus. Let us see what it is that draws our affections to Christ, where God dwells. The first thing that drew our affections there, and the same thing that has kept our hearts there ever since, is the great truth that God is in Christ reconciling us unto himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us. Only think of it, that there is the sacrifice, Christ Jesus, who was made sin representatively for us, who was made a curse representatively for us. He was made sin sacrificially for us, made sin representatively for us; and if we have a grain of faith in him, not one of our original, heart, lip, or life sins is to be imputed to us. To this the Saviour refers when he says, "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed." He came into the world for this very purpose,—to save sinners. Thus God reconciles us to himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us, but having imputed them to Christ;—he has put them away, and hereby we come into the love of God, and love much, because much is forgiven. Just as it was in olden time temporally, so it is now spiritually;—as the people abode by the covenant and the temple of the Lord they had abundant harvests, abundant vintages, and the enemy all round was subdued;—"No man shall desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year;"—when they abode by the one God, by his covenant and his service, their land from end to end brought forth by handfuls, and they were indeed a happy people. Just so spiritually;—if we are kept close to Christ, we shall by him realize all that the word of the Lord has set before us. Hence that beautiful scripture,—*"They shall come and sing in the height of Zion."* Suppose we substitute the word "perfection" for the word "height" there, just to help us a little. *"They shall come and sing in the perfection of Zion."* Now Jesus Christ is the perfection of Zion; he hath by his one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified. *"And shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord;"*—mark that, *"to the goodness of the Lord."* Now you must distinguish, as the Scriptures do, between the justice of the Lord, or you must distinguish between where the Lord is just without being good, and where he is both just and good. But then I use the word "good" here in the benevolent, in the liberal, in the pardoning sense. Now God in his holy law, there he is just, there he is righteous; and, of course, as far as justice is good, he is good; but he is not good there in the merciful, or benevolent, liberal, or gracious sense of the word. He is just, and such is the sternness of God's law that not one jot nor tittle can fail; and he that offendeth in one point is guilty of the whole. And those that know this will be glad to flow to where the gospel goodness of the Lord is. You must look at the distinction between Sinai and Zion; between where God is simply just as the legislator, and where he is not only just, but also benevolent, gracious, and liberal,—namely, in Christ Jesus; for Jesus Christ died the just for the unjust, to bring us unto God; and Christ, by bringing in his mediatorial work, thereby makes the blessed God just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. So, then, keeping close to Christ, they shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord; that is where the goodness is,—by faith in Christ. If you live a good life, see in a good light, have a good righteousness, a good hope, and everything good, it must be by Christ Jesus. *"They shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat,"* meaning the bread of eternal life; *"and for wine,"* meaning the blessed testimonies of the gospel, testifying of the blood of the everlasting covenant; and that cheers our hearts;—*"and for oil,"* the grace of God, the flowing grace of God, that will keep our lamps burning; and for the

young of the flock, and of the herd; and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all." So, then, in the love of God, in the Christ of God, in the Spirit of God, in the promise of God, we have an end to all our troubles. Whatever your present afflictions, or trials, or sighings, or castings down, there is a way in which we are to look at the end of them all. "God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces." If we would prosper, then, it must be by cleaving to the house of the Lord,—that is, to the Christ of God, for in him all fulness dwells. And if the Scriptures yield us any consolation, if the Scriptures heal, comfort, instruct, and delight us, it must be because they testify of Christ. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets," he showed that they all testified of him. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth;" for there, in Christ, it is indeed glory to God in the highest; there it is peace on earth, and good will to men; the Lord has nothing but good will towards those that have a good will towards him. If we have a good will towards him, and are brought down to his feet, that is an evidence that he hath a good will towards us.

I will just set before you, and then close this part, some of the privileges which David understood and realized in this matter of love to Christ; and love to God in Christ Jesus, where everything to poor sinners is endearing, where the Lord constitutes us all that which is pleasing in his sight. David in the next psalm says, "In this will I be confident." Ah, what a sweet thing a well founded confidence is! "Cast not away your confidence." If you once lose your confidence in Christ, you become careless directly; but all the time your confidence in the ability of his atonement and righteousness, all the time your confidence in his sameness—the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, all the time your confidence in his mediatorial work remains unshaken, you will never be rejected. The confidences that the Lord rejects are those that are wrongly founded, where a man is an enemy to Christ. Hence you see the confidence of the Pharisee was not in Christ, but in his own doings; therefore that man's confidence deceived him. The confidence of the Pharisees of old was that they were righteous, and so they despised others; but then their confidence was of the wrong kind, and wrongly founded, and consequently was rejected. But the poor sinner that has no confidence but Christ, Christ is his stronghold. Let your confidence be there. David had this confidence, and what was the effect of it? Just the same effect it will have upon us, if we have the same living confidence. He says, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord." You know writers upon beauty say that it consists in the adaptability of things; and if beauty consists in the suitability and adaptability of things, oh, then, how adapted to our necessity is the mercy of God in Christ! how adapted to our necessities are the promises of God in Christ, the provisions of God in Christ, the ultimate ends which the Lord has in view concerning all those who are thus brought to dwell in Christ!—"To behold the beauty of the Lord." Where can we see beauty that so enraptures us? But then it is not only seeing the beauty, it is having the beauty put upon us. The Lord beautifies the meek with salvation; he beautifies them in his own mediatorial work. "And to enquire in his temple." There is a great deal in Christ we have not yet seen;—we may go on inquiring. Remember, he is God as well as man, and there are mysteries both innumerable and unfathomable in Christ Jesus the Lord. Yea, saith David, "that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;" because he knew that "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord;" and we cannot die in the Lord unless we first live in the Lord. And then David supposes that while he is in this position, in this confidence in the

Lord, trouble comes;—and trouble will come;—"Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward;" and "in the world ye shall have tribulation." How will the Lord deal with you, then, if you are lovers of Christ? Why, says David, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion"—in his royal pavilion; he shall hide me under his shadow, the shadow of his royalty; and though I stand as a creature in the world exposed to blasts, storms, afflictions, losses, and trials, and weep, and sigh, and groan, and stagger, yet as I stand there, everything belonging to me there remains untouched by any affliction or trouble I may meet in the world. "In the secret of his tabernacle," where the mercy-seat is, "shall he hide me." And if that is not enough,—to hide you under the shadow of his royal authority, in the secret of his tabernacle, where the mercy-seat is, he shall do something more,—he shall set me upon a rock." And however you are driven about in yourself, yet as you stand in Christ, there your heart is fixed, your standing fixed. "He shall set me upon a rock;"—he is indeed the Rock of Ages. And now, saith David, seeing I am thus favoured, "Now shall mine head be lifted up," if it is not yet, if my enemies have dominion at present, for "a troop may overcome Gad, but he shall overcome at the last;" "Now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy." Oh, he has brought me, reconciled me, forgiven me, and has made himself my dwelling-place. "O Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." "Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." Ah, he has done all this for me, and then, in his own time, "My head shall be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy," when he shall put an end to my sorrow; "I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord." Here, then, is the habitation, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." No plague shall come nigh thy dwelling; no evil shall befall thee there; there he that seeketh thy life seeketh his life; with him thou art in safeguard. Safety is of the Lord.

Secondly, I notice that *the house of God means the church of God*. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth," in that sense also. And this brings me to a part which I feel very keenly, and which lies upon my mind very deeply; and therefore if I speak a little, as it were, unusually upon this part, and upon the third part, you must not be surprised. Now in the first place, if we love the church, we shall feel deeply concerned for the welfare of that church, and for its prosperity; we shall feel deeply concerned for the progress of the gospel in the ingathering of others. And this brings me to acknowledge that this is a subject that has weighed upon my mind very much lately. There have not been lately among us those instances of conversion, those hungerings and thirstings, there has not been that coming forward and wishing to join the church, and to honour the King of Zion, and to attend to his ordinances. These things weigh very deeply on my mind. May the Lord enable us to understand this matter, and stir us up increasingly to a spirit of prayer and supplication to him. Oh, I speak the words of truth and soberness when I say I would rather die to-day than live to see the time when the Surrey Tabernacle should fall from its first love, when the Surrey Tabernacle should become lukewarm, and only be fit to be spued out of the Saviour's mouth; when the Surrey Tabernacle should sink into mere mechanical formality; when the minister should come and be content if he can preach, and the people be content if they can hear. I would rather die to-day very much than live to see such a state of things as this. And yet such a state of things will come if the Lord is not with me, and if he is not with you. He does sometimes hide his face from the minister and from the people, just to remind us how dark, how dead, everything is in his absence:—

"There's not a drop of real joy
Without thy presence, Lord."

I have thought very much lately of the words of the apostle in the last chapter of Ephesians, where he says (for if we love the church we shall feel real concern for it, and especially that part of it with which the Lord in his providence and mercy has united us), "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." We cannot be too strong in the Lord, we cannot have too much love to him, we cannot have too much decision for him, we cannot have too much fellowship with him, we cannot be too much delighted with him, we cannot be too much taken up with him, we cannot drink too deeply into his spirit, we cannot partake too largely of his love, his grace, his presence, or his power. Therefore, saith the apostle, "put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil;" and all the wiles of the devil are summed up in few words; they are all summed up in this, to keep us away from the Lord, to stop the mouth of prayer, to carnalize the mind, and to keep us away from the service of the Lord, away from the house of the Lord, and away from any interest in the prosperity of the house of the Lord; though the Lord saith, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee." Satan does not like to see a people walking near to the Lord. Not only does Satan in his wiles labour to prevent the light of the gospel shining into the mind of the natural man, but he does not like it to shine too much into our minds, lest it should so spiritualize us, and increase our love and zeal, and we should be so taken up with the Lord, that we should not only be ourselves blessed, but be a very great blessing to hundreds and thousands of others as well. Hence Satan does not like to see us busy enjoying that scripture, "There shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters;" that is, by the lofty settlements and transactions of the eternal God, "in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall;" and we know what day of great slaughter that was;—the day of greatest slaughter that ever was or that ever will be, was when sin was slain, when Satan was virtually slain, when death itself was slain. "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun;"—not the moon literally, but the light of the glorious gospel of God by this work of Christ shall shine with increasing light; "and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days;" that is, Christ shall shine to you sevenfold brighter than ever; "in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." Satan labours to keep us away from these things. We must, in order to prosper, have the spirit of earnestness, giving the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should," though not fatally, yet to our disadvantage, "let them slip." "For," saith the apostle, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood;" we are not contending for worldly pre-eminence, worldly titles, worldly riches, or anything pertaining to the flesh; "but against principalities," that is, organized hostilities against God's truth; "against powers," the powers of sin and error; "against the rulers of the darkness of this world," that is, against false prophets, that delude so many thousands of people; "against spiritual wickedness in high places." As you are aware, we live in a day, even in our own favoured land, when men put themselves above God's truth, usurp authority over the consciences of others, and most blasphemously pretend to forgive sins, and to transubstantiate a bit of bread, and a drop of wine, into the body, and blood, and soul, and divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have to stand out against these. This is what the apostle had to stand against, and the people too; but we will come closer presently. Now the apostle tells us of the armour by which we are to succeed, and tells us how to use this armour. "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." You can say of Christ's victory what you cannot say of any earthly

victory. England has gained many victories over other nations, but that is no proof that she will be victorious next time. But the Lord Jesus Christ has obtained one victory that insures all after victories; his victory is of that kind that it goes into all after conflicts, all after trials; and the Saviour steps in when you are conquered by sin, by circumstances, by doubts, by fears, by afflictions, and he says to these evils,—I conquered you eighteen hundred years ago; I conquered you then legally, and by the same victory I will conquer you now actually. So that the apostle might well say, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Then also we are to "take the helmet of salvation;" as it saith in another place, "for an helmet the hope of salvation;" and that is the best hope. The hope of salvation is manifold:—the hope that the Lord will keep you, save you, and deliver you from this, and that, and the other. Is there one among you that cannot look back into your history, and see, both spiritually and temporally, many victories which the Lord hath wrought; and keeping you in the hope of his salvation? And so it will go on until the last enemy is destroyed. "And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;" that sword that turns every way. Now if we love the church of God, what are we to do? Why, says the apostle, "Praying always with all prayer." I wonder if you do sometimes think, Well, now, how are we going on at the Surrey Tabernacle? Is our minister favoured in any humble measure with the mantle of Elijah, with the spirit of John the Baptist, with the spirit of prophets and apostles? Is our minister favoured in any humble measure with the Spirit of God? And are there broken hearts? Are we from time to time profited? And do we sometimes wish, instead of his leaving off, he would speak half an hour longer? Or, on the other hand, is the minister become so dull, so cold, so insipid, so uninteresting, that we are always glad when he leaves off, ready to jump up and run out of the chapel as soon as ever he leaves off, without stopping for the last hymn? Well, if that be the feeling, then I still say I will not despair. May the Lord pour upon us the spirit of grace and of supplication, that we may pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit for all saints. If we love the church, we shall not like to see the church a dead church. God keep us alive more and more. I can say spiritually, as my strength of faith, and love, and zeal, and decision was forty years ago, to go out and come in, so it is now, at least in my feeling and desire. I cannot bear the thought, as I have said before, of going down. Now, saith the apostle, "watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel;"—that is, when I speak to sinners, God enable me so to speak to that man as to make him feel he is a sinner; when I speak to saints, God enable me so to speak as to make that man feel that he is a saint; that when I speak of God's grace, I may so speak of it as for the people to feel that it is the grace of God; that when I speak God's eternal truth, new covenant truth, I may speak in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power; so that you may know what manner of man is in your midst; for the word shall come not in word only, but in power and demonstration of the Spirit, and you shall bear testimony that it takes your burden away, lightens your heart, encourages you, and makes you look up to heaven with gladsome eyes and a thankful heart, and say, Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do? what great things thou hast done for me! Ah, it is poor work when the hearer goes away and says, Well, I am no better for the sermon. Not that preaching consists in mere information,—I do not mean that. Scientific and other lectures consist of mere information, and the eloquence of the man may entertain the people. But the preaching of the gospel is another thing altogether. We want sinners to be converted to God, transgressors to learn his ways; we want the lambs to be taken up and carried in the

Shepherd's bosom ; we want the sheep to be fed ; we want the people to be delighted ; we want them to say, We have heard good things to-day ; we never saw it in this free grace fashion before. The Lord increase us in this spirit of grace, supplication, and prayer. We have a goodly sprinkle all over England, and many of them removed into foreign parts, that still love the Surrey Tabernacle and its minister and its people, and continue, wherever they are, to bless you in the name of the Lord. So, then, "that therein I may speak boldly." "Be not afraid of their faces, lest I confound thee before them." I do not apprehend that means anything in the shape of impudence or abuse. I think the greatest respect that I can pay to you is due to you ; and I carry with me the consciousness that you are worthy of a better minister than I have ever been or ever shall be to you ; and I hope when I am taken away you will be favoured with a star of the first magnitude, that the place will be crowded, that sinners will be converted, saints rejoice, and you be glad, not that I am gone, but that a better has taken my place. "I have loved the habitation of thy house." Can you be content to see the place dilapidated, out of repair, out of order ? Why, the ancient kings of Judah, those that were right-minded men, the very first thing they did when they ascended the throne was to repair, to open, and cleanse the house of the Lord, and to establish his service ; the consequence was, the Lord blessed them, and all was well. "I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." This has been his house, his honour has dwelt here, and great is the honour he has put upon us.

And now, most likely for the last time while I live, I have a few words to say to you about the subject in hand this morning. First, then, you as a people hardly recognise your own position. You would be surprised what a good effect in this and in other countries your example has had upon the churches. They often point to you in what you have done, and especially having done it through love to the truth, as examples of what the blessed truth of God can do, and they are proud of you, and of course it makes me proud of you as well. In this way you have had very great influence. And ministers that have been almost browbeaten by some pompous, puffed-up nothings that may be among them, have said to me, I am so glad that you and your people have stood so boldly out in the truth, and have prospered ; it has been such an argument, such a help to me. Then I must also state that our weekly penny sermon,—it is wonderful the influence that it has had and still has. A farmer came to me the other day in the country : "My brother, I lent him one of your sermons, he read it, and it cut him down, made him a new man. He came to hear you, and he said he could have heard you all day, he was so happy he did not know what to do ; he would have walked any distance to hear you, and always came to hear you when he could." Now that is only a very solitary instance in comparison of many I could name. And I think I ought to say something else here ; I told you we should have a little unusual deviation this morning. I cannot speak too highly in the praise of our excellent reporter. We are very much indebted to him for taking the sermons with such ability, with such accuracy, and delivering them to me with such punctuality. Whenever I have to make a correction, it is never his mistake that I have to correct, but mine. His reports never give me any trouble, but a very great deal of pleasure. Whereas some of my speeches that are reported about the country, a pretty mess they are ;—turned upside down, inside out, and you can make neither one thing nor the other out of them ;—like a report of one of my speeches that was sent to me some time ago,—why, I said, this is no more like my speech than night is like day. So, then, our reporter has been in this sense our honourable and excellent servant for many years, and we trust the Lord will still strengthen, encourage, and enable him to go on.

And now for another subject which weighs upon my mind, though not nearly so heavily as the fear of becoming lukewarm. You know what my feeling is,—that I want to see this place an entire freehold for the ninety-nine years, less the little time we have been here. Friends said to me long ago, ought not something to be allowed out of the funds of the chapel to Mr. Wells's widow when he is gone? I said, No, certainly not; I should be very sorry to leave any encumbrance to the church, I want to leave you free;—and the time must come, and not very, very distant now, when I must leave you, though I trust but a little time, and then I shall spend a never-ending eternity with you. I have wept with you here, and rejoiced too, and I trust I shall rejoice with you there. I do not doubt you, though I sometimes doubt myself. And as to my wife and family, another minister will by and by take my place, his wife and family will take the place of my wife and family, and my widow and family must then vanish as though you saw them not, “as a dim candle dies at noon;” and you will have yourselves to look to, you will have the cause to look to, but above all, you will have the Lord to look to. Now it has weighed so deeply on my mind that this place should before I die be made free;—you do not know how anxious I am that that should be done. Oh, my hearer, the Lord has blessed us; do not let us enter into any little quibbles, any little prejudices, clear off the debt on the house, and the income therefrom will pay the ground rent of the chapel, and so you will be free and safe. Only suppose, now, that one thousand out of the two thousand persons that attend this place were each to give sixpence a week;—look at that;—you would never miss it; and then, if we should not have collectors enough, there are plenty of ladies. I am sure, among us who would very gladly come in to help us. Your shrewd, calculating minds will at once see that that would bring in £100 a month; no one would miss it, and then even before next Good Friday you would be entirely free; and then you would consider what you would do for the future; and whatever you should consider to be for the adornment of the doctrine of God our Saviour, I would heartily join with you. I shall never ask while I exist another favour of this kind of you. I have always appealed to you, and I cannot believe now that my appeal will be in vain. Do then, all of you that can, give sixpence a week; pray do;—do not pass the collectors; throw away little prejudices, and let me view you in the same light that I always have,—as men and women of superior minds, above all little prejudices. Now all of you come to-night, and give your names to the collectors, let me hear that the collectors are not numerous enough, that we want some more, and that it is all melting away like a snowball. And as soon as ever that is done, then I shall feel that my mission in that respect is completed, I shall feel then that I am entirely free, and that you are free; and then whatever you wish to have, I will go cordially with you in it. Not a single penny of that which comes in will be devoted to anything but the doing away with this debt, and making the place entirely free. I myself am doing, as the deacons know, and I will do to the end, all I possibly can. So that in this sense also I want to see you love the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwelleth.

Now, friends, do not be angry with me if I have done wrong this morning. Do as you have done before,—forgive me. But I cannot close without one remark, and it is this. Ever since I have been in the ministry I have felt the necessity of having deacons that are the deacons not of parties, but of the people; and I can truly say that such is the spirit of your respected deacons now. Because, when they are the deacons of the people, I can always appeal to the people. I am not doing this this morning from any instructions,—it is quite unawares to the deacons: I have not consulted them. Because there are certain rights which the pulpit has that somehow or another I can never give up.