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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SETTLED WORD.

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A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 4TH JULY, 1869,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSLEY STREET.

"For I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them."—Jeremiah xxxiii. 26.

AFTER the sermons of the last two Lord's day mornings I think it may be as well to have this morning some remarks upon the certainty of the final perseverance of the people of God. I shall, therefore, this morning say that which I meant to have said in connection with the words that have been for the last two Lord's day mornings our text.

There is one very important consideration, and that is, when we speak it must be according to the analogy of faith; for where the apostle saith, "He that ministereth, let him do it according to the proportion of faith," the original word is the word from which we get our English word "analogy;" therefore it may with great propriety be so rendered; "Let him speak according to the analogy of faith;" that is, there is a certain order of things from which no interpretation must deviate; and any interpretation that deviates from that order of things must be wrong. There are a great many orders of things in the Holy Scriptures, but there is only one order of things by which we are saved; and that order of things is so frequently presented in its uniqueness, beauty, and harmony, that we cannot, if rightly taught, fail to understand it. The prophets were content to preach God's truth, the apostles were content to preach God's truth, and the Saviour was content to speak God's truth, and there left it, without imputing that power to the creature which some do, and without impugning God's sovereignty, without creating self-contradictions in God's blessed word. I have this morning to deal with that which must be dear to us all—namely, the certainty of God's blessed truth. I have to point out, in the first place, *how the Lord causeth the captivity of the people to return*; then, in the next place, *how he deals with them when they are returned*—that he deals with them in the multitude of his mercies. "I will cause their captivity to return, I will have mercy upon them."

Now if we take the latter part of the 31st chapter, as well as the latter part of this chapter, there are five beautiful representations of the certainty of God's truth; and we are made to return from our captivity by being brought into the truths there set forth. The first is that of unity, in order to show the certainty and indissolubility of that unity to God by Christ Jesus, of which Jesus Christ himself is the centre. And so the Lord speaketh of the ordinances of heaven and of earth,—He says, "If
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these depart from me, then the seed of Israel shall cease from being a nation before me for ever." Observe the certainty here; the stability of the starry heavens, of those ordinances which he hath appointed, and their harmony and unity, are made use of to set forth the certainty of which Christ is the centre. Then the captivity is turned by our being brought into that unity; and how are we brought into it? Well, there is one word we can never do without in a subject of this kind, and that is the word *faith*. Also when the Lord saith, "If those ordinances of heaven and earth depart from me, then Israel shall cease from being a nation before me for ever;" the Israel there must not be understood to mean the literal Israel, because they have ceased to be a nation; but it must be understood of the spiritual Israel, it is the spiritual Israel that will never cease to be a nation before the Lord. David recognised this difference; in the 46th Psalm he distinguishes between God in and by Christ Jesus as being our strength, and his being the strength of the Jews conditionally, in that conditional covenant, and David, in the light of prophecy, sees the Jewish nation carried into the common sea of the world, and made one with the world; so that that nation was by the Roman armies thrown into the world, and became a part of the world; and the Jewish nation no longer exists as a nation, and will never again be reorganised, because they will never be needed. They are, as all the world are, in bondage; they belong now not to Zion, but to Sinai; not to that world above, but to this world; not to that world of glory which is to come, but to the lower world. They are, like all the world, under the law. David saw the difference between that spiritual Israel that never could be dissolved, and that literal Israel that should be dissolved; therefore he saith, "God is our refuge and strength." We must take those words as explained by Jesus Christ; that Jesus Christ is the power of God, Jesus Christ is our strength, he is the centre of unity. Can he give way in his perfection? can his righteousness fail? can his atonement fail? can he in any way fail? Now, David saith, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." There is nothing for the Lord to wait for; he is always present with his people. He often went his way and left the old covenant people, and left them to repent or not to repent, left them to cry to him or not to cry to him; and when under the pressure of great trouble they did so cry to God. But he is always with his own people—a present help in trouble. The sins of the old covenant people were an hindrance to God, but the sins of the new covenant people are no hindrance to him; they hinder the people, but they do not hinder God; because Christ hath atoned for their sin, put it away and brought in everlasting righteousness. So that all cause or reason of absence and disunion is taken away. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." But we live in a day when we have such a world of Pharisees that it is almost dangerous to preach the gospel in a way that suits a sinner that is taught of the Holy Ghost what he is as a sinner. Such an one cries out for more gospel than any man in our day is able to preach. Just mark the distinction, then, between the literal and spiritual nation. "God is our refuge and strength," that is, in and by Christ Jesus; a very present help in trouble." If your sins hinder you in a thousand ways you are not to dream they can hinder him. The blood of Jesus Christ pleads your cause, his righteousness pleads your cause; God's own promise to you and to all that believe pleads your cause; God has made the promise, and the promise is yea and amen. It is the sweetest life any man can live to live this life of faith in the Son of God, that loved you and gave himself for you, put himself into your place, and brought you up to stand with him. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed;" that is not a mere piece of poetry, a mere piece of rhetoric, a mere piece of oratorical flourish; those are words that must be understood simply and solemnly; for the Jewish earth was removed;

“and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;” which they were; that is, I understand the sea there figuratively to mean this world; and in the 60th of Isaiah this world is called a sea;—“the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee.” Now that cannot mean the fish of the sea literally; it must be taken figuratively, to denote that vast numbers of sinners should be by the gospel net drawn out of the sea of this world, and brought to God: so the Jewish earth, the Jewish nation, was thus moved; its mountains, all its establishments, were carried into the sea; and the Roman armies were the floods of the ungodly, they were the waters that roared and were troubled until they had made the Jewish nation one with the sea of this world. But, saith David, “there is a river,” proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, “the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, and that right early.” Then again, you will observe that these same people never can be dissolved, because Christ, yea, God himself, is the strength thereof. The idea of a nation conveys that of organization or unity; so here is an order of things into which they are brought; and Isaiah saith, “A little one shall become a thousand,” alluding to the handful of disciples in the Saviour’s day, “and a small one a strong nation; the Lord will hasten it in his time; a strong nation, not an earthly, but an heavenly nation; hence saith Peter, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” But to make this matter clear, let us take the words of the apostle Paul in the 1st of Ephesians, where he saith, “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times,”—let me once more emphatically say that the fulness of times has come, that it was the fulness of times when Christ came; for “in the fulness of time God sent forth his son.” Some people quote that Scripture, that by and by all things shall be gathered together in Christ, even in him; well, but when, Christ came he came according to prediction,—“unto him shall the gathering of the people be,” and they were gathered to him, and they have been gathered to him ever since, and will be down to the end of time. Now the Lord saith, If these ordinances of heaven and earth depart from me, then indeed there may be some danger of those that are brought into this unity ceasing to be what they are. But let us look at Isaiah’s words again, they shall be a strong nation, Jesus Christ is their strength. And the people that are brought into this indissoluble unity, that are brought really to know their need of it, see that, unless the love of God were immutable, it would be of no use to them; unless the work of Christ were perfect, and they perfect for all time and for all eternity by that work, that work could not reach their case, that except the Lord, who has brought them into this unity, rest in his love, and keep in the same mind, carry on the work and be with them, the gospel would be of no use to them. It is, therefore, the indissoluble character of this gospel that so adapts it to our dire, our experimental, personal, and daily necessities. And as this unity is never to be dissolved, have you not felt in your own soul a wonderful tenacity, a wonderful, adhering to this unity? It is in this safety, this sure standing, that the people of God have from age to age endured what they have endured. When we can thus see that God has loved us, and loved us for ever, that Christ has saved us, and saved us for ever, that the Lord has united us to himself, and united us to himself for ever, that there is no possibility of severation,—this truth is dearer to the real Christian than gold, yea, than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. This is one representation the Lord gives of our safety,—this unity to him by his love to us, by the perfect work of Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit giving us to know these things. This turns our captivity, because, in this unity, we are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. And surely you are well enough versed in the doctrine of joint-heirship to know that the heirship of Christ must be

invalidated before the heirship of the people can be invalidated; that there must be some plan there before the people can be exposed 'to the least danger. For myself, I have enough to endure; and if in addition to all my burdens and cares I had to put up with an uncertain gospel, I solemnly declare I would never preach again, because I am quite sure that not a soul could be saved.

The second representation the Lord gives of our safety is a defiant one. "Thus saith the Lord, If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord." Now here are two infinities. To measure the heaven above would be to measure infinity—space from the very nature of it is infinite, or "the foundations of the earth searched out beneath;" why, space in that as well as every other direction is of necessity infinite;—"then I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done." This is the truth we need, but this is a truth that you dare not speak out in the present day without being reviled, by some even that you hope well of; you must make out that there is a little something somewhere. Well, the Lord speaks defiantly; if impossibilities can be done,—if you can measure infinity above and below, which of course is impossible for any finite creature to do,—then will I cast them off. Now, in the first place, why did the Lord love us at all? and did he know before he loved us at all as much about us as he does now? Why did the Lord choose us at all? and did he know when he made choice of us whether that choice would turn out a happy choice or not? He knew it would; but he knew he would have to make it a happy choice. And when the Saviour took our sins, did he know as much about us then as he does now. And when the Holy Spirit graciously wrought a concern in our souls, convinced us of our state, and turned our faces towards Zion, did he know as much about us then as he does now? You know the answer. And if the Lord were to cast you off to-day, I will tell you what the consequence would be; the consequence would be your eyes would at once become blinded to the beauty of Christ; your heart would at once become callous to eternal things, and you would become a bitter enemy, filled with deadly hate to the truth of God, to the people and ways of God. But, instead of that, here you are, seeing as much beauty in Jesus as you ever saw; here you are, listening with as much earnestness in your heart and soul to the truth as you ever had; here you are, still desiring to see his glory, still desiring to walk with him, still seeking the manifestations of his favour, still desiring to be visited with his salvation; that you may see the good of his chosen, that you may rejoice in the gladness of his nation, and glory with his inheritance. What is all this? It is a proof that he has not cast you off. I watch the hand of the Lord with me as a Christian and as a minister, and the great evidence that I look at is, Does the Lord keep up in my soul a desire for him? Does the Lord keep up in my soul a love to him, a decision for him? Then, when I come to my position as a minister, Does the Lord unfold from time to time his holy word? When I am reading it in private, does some particular part open up to me sometimes with savour and power? Do I go with that message; are the people encouraged; is the Lord with me? or have I nothing to say? If so, then the Lord has cast me off as a minister. But I have never been there yet. I am very much shut up sometimes, seem as though I had not a word to say, and ready to exclaim, in the language of the poet,—

"All things of feeling show some sign,
But this unfeeling heart of mine."

I suffer a martyrdom from that, and so does every child of God,—from the hardness of his heart, the darkness and deadness of his mind. But still, at the same time, as Mr. Hart says, upon this part of our experience—

"Though the cup seems filled with gall,
There's something secret sweetens all."

So that our prayer is, "Leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation." Well, he says, I will not; I did not take you for any good you have done, and I will not refuse you for any evil about you. Therefore it is that Mr. Hart thinks the Lord said to him—"Thy good works cannot save thee, thy sins cannot damn thee; all is of grace from first to last." Therefore whoever may cast us off, the Lord will not cast us off; whoever may turn their backs upon us, the Lord will not turn his back upon us; whoever may change their minds concerning us, the Lord will not change his mind, whoever may withdraw their kindness from us, he will not withdraw his kindness, and whoever may cease to be our friends, he will not cease to be our friend. "In a little wrath," only apparent wrath, "I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy upon thee." Ah, how often have we realised the truth of those words, that,—

"Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

How often has he turned adverse circumstances, and our very rebellions weaknesses, infirmities, and faults, how often has he turned them into helps, and has come in upon our souls just as the good Samaritan came to the man that had fallen among thieves, and dealt with us as the good Samaritan dealt with that man; and we sometimes stand amazed, and are ready to ask, whatever can we say or do to glorify such a God as this, to serve such a God as this? Why, I sometimes feel as though, if I had it in my power and you had it in your power, I could preach all day and all night, and go on until I drew my last breath. We may indeed say,—

"For such love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break."

Who forgives our sins like our God, and who covers our faults like our God? who passes by the transgressions of the remnant of his heritage like our God? who sympathises with us under all our circumstances like our God? who thinks so highly of us as does our God? "How precious are thy thoughts, O God, unto me." And the Lord says, in a kind of answer to this confidence, "I know," you are right, I know the thoughts I "think towards you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Here then we have a God in every sense for us, in no sense against us; and the more we understand and know him in these vast and eternal settlements, the more we shall delight in his holy ways, and glory in his holy name. "Delight thyself in the Lord"—but then it must be after this order—"and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

"God," saith the apostle Paul, "never cast away his people." Well, but, Paul, the Jews were his people, and he hath cast them away, never to receive them again, not as a distinct people; every Jew that will ever be received will be received in the same way as the Gentiles, by Christ Jesus. "God never cast away his people whom he foreknew;" that is it. But it is said of the Jews that they are to obtain mercy through our mercy. I will tell you only one thing the Jew says,—Your Scriptures, says the Jew, say that we Jews are to obtain mercy through your mercy; but what minister can I go to that is really a merciful minister? What people can I go to that are really a merciful people? Where can I go to to find mercy preached? Why, you Christians, where will you find a people more full of tyranny, reviling, slandering, reproaching, hating each other? Your mercy, indeed! And therefore your Scriptures must be wrong. Your Scriptures say that we Jews are to obtain mercy through your mercy; why, you Christians have not obtained mercy enough to be merciful to one another, and your ministers preach more of hell than heaven, more of condemnation than salvation, more wrath than love, more of threatening than of promise. We obtain mercy through your mercy!

why, your scriptures, must be wrong. That is their idea; I shall not say whether it is right or wrong, any further than to say that there is some truth in their remarks, but still we hope there will be a few houses of mercy kept open up and down the land, and a few ministers who are not afraid to preach the realities and truths of the Gospel; still it does seem that the minister and people who dwell chiefly by the river of mercy, and whose very motto is, "Streams of mercy, *never failing*, call for songs of loudest praise," and the most likely to be useful, both to the Gentile and to the Jew. Dr. Hawker, when sixty years old, said, "I am now sixty years old; there are sixty years gone of my sins and God's grace." Very few would dare to say that now, lest they should get an evil name, but it is a solemn fact; and good old Jacob said, few and evil had been the days of his life. Why, I mix sins enough with all the sermons I preach to damn me to all eternity, and sin enough in my meditations on God's word to sink my soul to everlasting perdition; I have not a single thing to plead before God but his own grace, his own promise, his own mercy, his own oath, his own immutability. I care not if all the world were against me if I can recognise the great truth that God is for me; "If God be for us who can be against us?" Do you think his love is that paltry frothy kind of thing called love that turns into hatred? Do you think his love is that sort of stuff that loses all its solidity and intensity, and becomes a namby-pamby nothing? Not so with our God; his love is a living love, living in its intensity, in its immensity, in its conquests, in its glories; and the dear Redeemer, at the last great day, when he shall present his people without blame before the throne of God, will say, What do you think about his love now, now that you yourselves are perfect before him in love? Thus, then, here is a unity that can never be dissolved, because Christ is the centre and God himself the strength of that unity; secondly, here is the defiance; if you can measure infinity, Then I will cast off the seed of Israel for all that they have done. Well, say you, who are the seed of Israel? Why, the man that is brought to believe what God has said, and to receive it in the love of it. Do you believe what the Lord has said,—that he will not cast off the seed of Israel? Ah, saith the poor sinner, I should have no hope at all without that. Then thou art an Israelite indeed, if thou understandest this truth and canst receive it, and love such a God as this, and not turn round and join with the Devil, and call this Antinomianism, call it dangerous. If you do that, you prove your oneness with the Devil,—the accuser of the brethren, and those brethren that he accused had no means of overcoming him but by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. But if you believe in this testimony, and bless God for such a revelation of himself, then thou art an Israelite indeed; for if thou wert not an Israelite, this would not be revealed to thee and thou wouldst not know thy need of the same. I say, if you receive these testimonies in the love of them, you are an Israelite. Yes, says one, but we have only your word for that. Very well, then, you shall have the Lord's word for it: "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel." What does that mean? Why, if you know your need of that immutability and receive it, you are an heir of promise. Well, but, say you, I doubt and fear as to that. Well, I cannot help that; that will not disinherit you; you don't disbelieve God's truth? No, but I am afraid I do not belong to him. That is your infirmity; and when the Lord gives you a little wine of the kingdom, you will be as strong as a giant refreshed with new wine, and you will rise and tread under foot the lion, the dragon, and the adder, and will say with the good mother in Israel, "O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength."

We will have a word now upon the certainty of the coming of Christ. "Thus saith the Lord, If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their

season;—and I am not aware that any one has attempted this;—I can't say; men do pretend to very great things, but I don't know that any one has attempted this yet. It is true they do tell us that the earth goes about the sixty thousandth part of a second less distance in the twelve months now than it used to do; and that in thirty-six thousand million years' time the days will be pretty well a month long; so that there is something going wrong somewhere; that is what astronomers say. But I have a little more faith in the Lord than in man; so I will take it for granted that our philosophers have made a little mistake, and that the Lord can make no mistake at all; but if it be so that the earth is annually losing ground, it is only in accordance with its destined course. Now the Lord saith, "If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers." This combination of the royalty and priesthood of Christ is very beautiful; the son to reign,—there is the royalty; "the Levites the priests, my ministers;" there is the priesthood. Why are they combined? For a reason that I am afraid we do not recognise the full blessedness of. I say for a reason, but I should rather say for two reasons; first, because his priesthood has legally, righteously, completely, and finally put away sin; and, secondly, because as King he reigns by his priesthood.

" Grace reigns to pardon crimson sins,
And melt the hardest hearts;
And from the work it once begins,
It never more departs."

Now Aaron's priesthood could not make a king of him; he did not rise an inch by his priesthood. But Christ's priesthood made a king of him; by that priesthood he reigns, and that same priesthood has made kings of all the people; they are kings and priests unto God; by Christ's priesthood they reign. By the infinite efficacy of his priesthood he reigns over the people; and therefore whatever certainty there is in that priesthood, there is the same certainty in his royalty. The Lord has given us a beautiful representation of this combination. The Lord says, I will take a man, and I will hide from you his ancestry and his descendants, and he shall appear on the page of Holy Writ as having no ancestry and no descendants; that he might thus stand in that unique form to represent the eternity of Christ; and that that same person should be king and priest in one person,—king of righteousness, after that, king of peace;—he was priest of the Most High God. So Christ is a priest on his throne to make that throne a throne of grace. What is it makes the throne of grace? Christ's priesthood is there, that is the reason; for it is by that priesthood mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other. Here, again, is the turn of our captivity. And see how certain it is. Jesus Christ did come at the appointed time, and in the appointed way, and he certainly did reign over everything; and it certainly was by his priesthood that he said, what he did not say by any other character he sustained, "It is finished." It was then by his sacrificial power, that sin was thus ended. Now he rises from the dead, ascends to his throne, and reigns; his truth must prevail. Hence the song of heaven,—"The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." And eternity alone can show to what glory the Saviour has by his priesthood arrived, and to which all his true followers shall also surely come.

Again, the Lord also gave the prophet Jeremiah to understand the certainty of the people being multiplied. "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured; so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me." And in the apostolic age it was so; what multitudes were then brought in! But then it saith, "and multiply the Levites." "Levite" signifies

joined, and they are joined by faith; and the Levites lived near to the Lord, and in the service of the Lord, and lived upon the sacrifices. So true Christians are brought by Christ thus spiritually to eat his sacrificial flesh, spiritually to drink, as it were, his precious blood. Oh, what multitudes there were in those times! We bless the Lord for the numbers we have now, but it is a solemn mystery that we have not more; still we have a goodly number. And I will not here point out one thing that stands wonderfully in the way of ministers preaching with freedom;—that I will not now meddle with, though it has laid upon my mind a long time. I thank the Lord I am in that happy position that I am entirely free from that hindrance;—I am not aware that I have any external hindrance at all,—not the slightest; and therefore if I am not devoted to God, why, who should be? I have everything under heaven to encourage me. Therefore, I hope, you will not think I am speaking of myself. But some men labour under great and terrible disadvantages in preaching the gospel; their souls hampered, their speech fettered; and when they attempt to speak out in public what they have thought in private, they meet with such things from one and the other that they are completely gagged. I can see a good deal of this about the country, and shall write about it some day perhaps. I shall catch it if I do, I suppose; but I have got so thick-skinned, through being flogged so often, that I really scarcely feel it now. Why, say they, that fellow doesn't know when he is hit. The fact is, I have got used to it, and don't mind it so much.

But, lastly, we have the declaration of our text; I must pass by the fifth representation of the certainty. "I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them." He not only brings them out of Egypt, but deals mercifully with them. Ah, say you, he did not deal mercifully with the people in the wilderness. Yes, he did, with every one that believed. "Thus saith the Lord, The people that escaped the sword" of the angel of death, "found favour in the wilderness, even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. He dealt exceedingly kindly with all them that believed. When many turned infidels, turned round and worshipped golden calves, and went back again to Egypt; that is another thing; but all them that believed the Lord dealt kindly with,—gave them their daily bread, the purest water from the solid rock;—there he was, always with them, to shade them in the day, to lighten and warm them by night; there he was to guide them and guard them;—not an Amalekite or an Amorite could hurt them. "Ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you unto this day." Oh, my hearer, do not think the Lord is angry; do not think he will deal otherwise than mercifully with you. He has brought you to know his name, not to make sport of you; he has not taken you into his service to make a slave of you, to slight you and act unkindly to you. Under the Old Testament dispensation, when a servant said, "I love my master, and it is well with me," and consented to become by certain ceremonies, the servant of that master for the remainder of his life,—that master perhaps might afterwards change, and treat his servant unkindly. But not so with our God; he not only wins, but keeps our hearts by his grace to the last.

May the Lord lead us more and more into these things, that we may glorify him more and more for his mercy. Amen.