

Note: Taken from Pages 172 and 173 of the Earthen Vessel for July 1, 1863 by Walter Banks.

INTERESTING SERVICE AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE

BOROUGH ROAD, LONDON.

On Wednesday evening, June 3rd, 1863, we were privileged to be present at a service of considerable interest held at the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road. The much-honored pastor of the flourishing church, meeting in that spacious place of worship, was then favored to administer the ordinance of Believer's Baptism to forty-six candidates. We found a large body of friends gathered on the occasion, and it was with considerable difficulty that we gained an entrance to the chapel. Precisely at seven o'clock, Mr. Wells took a seat at the head of the pool, surrounded by the brethren in office, the deacons. It is not often we see the Surrey Tabernacle pastor thus robed; but, really we thought, when he stood up, firmly and unflinchingly defending this New Testament ordinance, with the pool of water at his feet, and the immense body of eager spectators closely packed all around, we thought his tall, manly figure certainly lost nothing by being dressed in "a gown." We ask forgiveness for the thought, it came into our mind, we could not hinder it and although it is so very heterodox, we have dared to name it. The service commenced by Mr. Carr reading,

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform:
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm."

Which beautiful hymn of our favorite poet, Cowper, was sung with power and feeling. Mr. Wells sought for a blessing on the service in a prayer of much humbleness and fear. Again the body rose, and, led by Mr. Carr, sung,

"Jesus, and shall it ever be,
A mortal man ashamed of Thee?"
"Ashamed of Jesus! Sooner far
Let midnight blush to own a star!"

Mr. Wells then gave an address in defense of the ordinance he was about to administer; noticing, first, the proper mode of baptism; and, secondly, the proper subjects. When the Lord opened the eyes of the Ethiopian, he said, "Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" This ordinance represented the death and resurrection of Christ: the one essential act was that Christ must die; and the one essential act in this ordinance was immersion; and to speak of baptism, apart from immersion, would certainly be like speaking of the death of the Savior apart from that death. It is said Philip and the Eunuch went both down into the water. The apostle never says, Buried with Him in circumcision; but when he spoke of baptism, he did say, "Buried with Him in baptism." The signification of the ordinance is very important: it relates also to the work of the Holy Spirit; the apostle says, All the people of God are baptized into one body, by one Spirit, and are thereby

made partakers of that spirit. Respecting infant sprinkling, the most powerful argument that the advocates of that fallacy use is, the covenant the Lord made with Abraham, that he and all his seed were to come into that covenant by circumcision; and this idea is to be carried out in the new covenant, that is, as the children of Abraham, or the Jews, were to inherit the blessing of circumcision, so the children of Gentiles, or Christians, were to inherit the blessing by sprinkling. See the 12th chapter of Genesis, and there the Lord says, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This relates to that life that is eternal: the life that is perfected by the sacrificial work Jesus Christ: but this covenant had no more to do with the literal posterity of Abraham than the literal covenant had to do with the children of the Gentiles, it was a spiritual covenant. But there is in that same chapter another covenant which the Lord makes with Abraham, namely, the gift of the land of Canaan to Abraham and all his posterity; so that as the children of the Jews grew up, and obeyed the laws of that covenant, they were to be included in the benefits contained in that covenant, in having access to God, distinguishing them from other nations. But when our Lord came, so far from extending that covenant to the Gentiles, He entirely abolished it: for the apostle says, "All things are waxed old, and passed away." Thus, in the literal covenant, the literal children were included on certain conditions; but where the Lord blesses us with spiritual blessings, we have nothing to do with that old covenant at all. Here is where the error arises. The Jews apostatized from the principles of the old covenant, and to this day remain a scattered people. The conditions of the old covenant were to take Abraham's literal posterity from the land of Egypt, sustain them in the wilderness, and bring them to the land of Canaan. But the new covenant mission is to go into all the world, and make, sinners know where they are, and what a great salvation Christ hath wrought. The covenant made with Abraham was after the flesh, and a temporal covenant, and was abolished when the Savior appeared, who brought in the new and better covenant. In the ninth chapter of Romans, the apostle says, in the eighth verse, "They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed;" that is, they are brought to feel their need of Christ, and these are the only fit and proper subjects for this ordinance. Another argument used against baptism is the supposed impassibility of 8,000 being immersed in one day. Now. we have here this evening forty-six to baptize; we will add four more, and make it fifty. I will take the fifty, and let fifty-nine other ministers do the same that is, let Mr. A. take fifty, and Mr. B. fifty, and so on, till the 8,000 would be made up; and I would undertake to baptize my fifty in fifty minutes, and others could do the same; so that the 8,000 would be all baptized within less than one hour. I say, abide by the Word of God, that will clear away all your difficulties, and bring you safely through

The persons that are called to go through this ordinance are those that are brought to know their need of a Savior's precious blood; who have a hope in God's mercy, these are the characters to follow on here. As to being ashamed of it, where there is no sin there ought to be no shame. I should like to see everyone here baptized, baptized with the spirit of grace and supplication; for without death unto sin by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, without death to the world, without being brought into a saving acquaintance with Jesus Christ, we must be eternally lost. Let us never forget then that immersion is an essential mode to represent Christ's death: and may we be brought to see that Jesus Christ, in laying down His precious life for us, took away forever our curse and shame. Notice, then, first, the fact that John baptized our blessed Lord; and then the Savior commanded His disciples to baptize; and that Christians have, up to the present time, followed that

command, are proofs sufficient that the mode we follow is the only one, having the approval and sanction of heaven.

At the conclusion of the address, Mr. Wells “went down into the water.” and with much apparent ease and freedom baptized the forty-six candidates, speaking a few words to each one, noticing any circumstance connected with their life or experience which was remarkable. One of the candidates was Mr. Wells’s own medical attendant and sincere friend for many years;” two were Germans; some were relations of members; some strong in faith some weak. To each Mr. Wells addressed some suitable remarks, making the administration of the ordinance both interesting and very profitable. At the close, Mr. Wells said he felt quite able to baptize as many more; and he thought that was certainly a contradiction to the minister who asserted that no man could baptize more than twenty at one time. Forty-five minutes was the exact time occupied in baptizing the forty-six persons.

The doxology being sung, the service closed.