

20 Bible Chapel 11-19-61
6-12-66

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

PAST AND FUTURE ADVENT.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 16TH, 1859, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."—Matthew xxv. 13.

THERE are in the Scriptures but two *personal* comings of Christ; the one was when he came to accomplish salvation; and the other when he shall come in the final consummation of all things. These are the only two personal comings of Christ that we have recorded in the Scriptures. And I think it is right that I should here say a word upon the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; just reminding you that Jesus Christ was God manifested in the flesh; that there was a work that this Person came to do that none but himself could do. There must, therefore, be something in the curse of the law that we have never yet seen; there must be something in sin that we have never yet seen; and there must be something in the sufferings and work of this wonderful Person infinitely beyond our present apprehension or comprehension; just the same as the joy and the eternal glory which he now possesses are unspeakable, and that which we have no adequate idea of, or knowledge of; for we know as yet nothing of the sufferings of Christ; and the judgments, all the judgments, that the Lord ministered to man previously to the coming of Christ, were but as so many passing events, they were but as so many passing clouds, in comparison of that thick darkness with which the heavens were clothed when Christ died; they were but as so many drops of that vast ocean that surrounded him when he came to achieve the eternal salvation of our souls; they were but as a few sparks that seemed to descend from the reservoir of God's eternal wrath, in comparison of that united force of wrath that concentrated itself upon this wondrous Person, the Lord Jesus-Christ. I believe that the flood which engulfed a whole world was as nothing in comparison of that flood into which Christ came, spoken of in the 69th Psalm, for let us remember that sin is compared to water, and that God's wrath also is compared to water; and

these two put together are spoken of as seas that meet; "I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." Let me again remind you, that this Person that met our sins as that eternal flood that must have carried us away to eternity, that that Person was God; that he could compass that flood, as in a garment, that he could hold those poison winds as in his fist; so that the flood that engulfed a whole world, solemn and awful as it was, was as nothing in comparison of the nature and greatness of that flood into which the Lord Jesus Christ came, when the waves and billows of God's wrath rolled over him; and if our sins are productive of so many miseries, physical, mental, social, and in a variety of ways, what must have been the penalty thereof? Happy is that man that is brought to see that while the world could not stand against such a temporal judgment, yet Christ stood against that, and bore up against that, which was in itself considered, an eternal judgment; for we must have been, as it were, drowned to all eternity in the briny and bitter waters of sin and God's eternal wrath. And so when the Lord burnt the cities of the plain; why, that fire reached only the body; it was temporal, and passed away. It was nothing, although it destroyed the cities of the plain, in comparison of the united fire that burst forth in the soul of Christ and against the Saviour from God's fiery, infallible, and eternal law. That law must cease to be, and God must lose his supremacy, before hell can be quenched; and yet an Almighty Saviour came into this. Again, let me remind you, for I feel very anxious to keep this fact before you, every step I take in this part this morning—that Christ was God. If you look only at his manhood, you will lose sight of the greatness of his work by thus losing sight of the greatness of his Person. Remember, we are told it was by an arm almighty, by an arm omnipotent, that he accomplished salvation. And when Pharaoh and his host were overturned in the Red Sea—when those two seas, or two parts of the sea, met and engulfed them, there was something awful in it; but that was only temporal; whereas the seas that must have engulfed us must have engulfed us to all eternity: not to take away our being, not to take away our sensibilities, but to involve us in all the intensity of that eternal wrath. This is the Wonderful Person that came thus, and stood in our law place. And when the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed up Dathan, Korah, and Abiram, there was something awful about that,—we shudder as we read it,—and yet that pit was nothing in comparison of the fathomless pit that opened its mouth, and yawned as it were for the Saviour; and the Saviour says in the Psalms, for he is evidently the speaker there, "Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me;" so that he came down into this pit. If, then, the whole world put together could not stand before a temporal judgment,—if the cities of the plain could not stand before a temporal judgment,—if Korah, Dathan and Abiram could not avert a temporal judgment,—if men were in-

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capable of averting these temporal judgments, how much less can man do anything towards the eternal salvation of his soul? Now, my hearer, if thou art brought somewhat to see, then, into the greatness of that work which Christ came to accomplish,—that he has rolled back the flood that would have rolled thee away in terror to eternity; and that he has quenched the fire that would have burnt into thy soul, as Kent expresses is, as a hell of never-abating despair; and that he has closed the mouth of that pit that would have swallowed thee up; and now, instead of the flood carrying thee away, thou art brought near to God; instead of there being a fire to burn thee, there is not a spark left; and the flood is gone, and the dry land appears. “And I,” saith John the divine, “saw no more sea.” No; it is gone, and gone for ever; and John saw no fire, no heat; everything was calm, everything was blest; and as for earthquakes and pits, these are no more—all is solid ground, all is solid rock, all is solid truth; so that instead of our being thus carried away, we stand and “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” He came down to achieve this great work, and we cannot have too much confidence in what he has done. He is not only, as we sometimes say, the end of the law preceptively, but the end of the law penally. We cannot dwell too much upon this; we cannot live near to God in any other way; we cannot think too highly of the Saviour in this great matter; that none but such a Person could have stood in the gap; that none but such a Person could accomplish this work. Perhaps even while I am speaking, the enemy will tempt you in this matter; many of the people of God have been very much tempted upon this matter, and have said, How could Jesus Christ encompass in his person in six hours an eternity of woe? How could Jesus Christ in apparently so small a compass concentrate that curse that must have involved all his people to a never-ending eternity? How could he do that? Why, friends, because he was infinite. It did not come into so small a compass as you would imagine; the curse of the law was broad enough for an incarnate God to span, broad enough for an incarnate God to reach; and the flood was mighty enough to need an incarnate God to roll it away; and the fire was intense enough to need the strength of omnipotence, and I had almost said, all the excellencies of his Divine Person, of his complex Person, to quench that fire. I am persuaded of it, that we know but very little of this great mystery of what Christ hath suffered. I have often said, and I will just repeat the remark here, that if the value of the beasts on Jewish altars slain during the many centuries that that dispensation existed, could be calculated, what a vast amount of money it would come to, the worth of them all; and yet one drop—perhaps that is not speaking exactly scripturally, but I do it from the want of a better way of illustrating what I want to illustrate—one drop, as it were, of the Saviour’s blood infinitely exceeds in value all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars

slain. Ah, my hearers, the God that gave us this Christ is a God of infinite and eternal love; Christ loved us in oneness with the Father, with an omnipotent and eternal love; the Holy Spirit of God in this matter is especially spoken of also in his eternity. Hence, it is said that, "He offered himself without spot to God through the eternal Spirit." It is a remarkable thing, that the eternity of the Three Divine Persons should be so carefully set before us in this great matter of the death of Christ. So that through the eternal Spirit, or the Holy Spirit in his eternity, he offered himself without spot to God; and hath hereby obtained eternal redemption; hath hereby become the author of eternal salvation; hath hereby become the minister of eternal life; hath hereby confirmed and established an eternal kingdom; hath hereby entered into eternal repose. The apostle, reading out the deep councils of the blessed God in the light of this great salvation; and seeing everything here that the vilest sinner can need; might well say of himself, and of his brethren, "We look not at things which are seen; for in the whole range of the universe among things that are seen we cannot find that that is competent, sufficient, or able to save our souls from hell, or bring us to God; "Therefore, we look not at the things that are seen and temporal, but at the things that are not seen and eternal;" and they are worthy to be eternal; the salvation that he hath wrought is worthy to remain for ever; the righteousness that he hath brought in is worthy to remain for ever; the price that he hath paid, which was nothing short of his infinite self, is worthy to be remembered for ever. Never will the myriads for whom this price was paid; never will the myriads who are redeemed from the curse, and from hell, and redeemed to God; never will they forget the infinity of the price by which they enjoy their present standing; and until that price can be invalidated, their standing can never be shaken; and that price can never be invalidated, until the person of Christ himself ceases to be what he is; and he is God over all, blessed for evermore. Ah then, my hearer, as Cowper some where has the idea in one of his poems, Christ hath after all done a greater work than men suppose he hath done; he hath achieved greater things than men suppose he hath achieved; and he hath done it by an exercise of greater power, and by a depth of greater suffering, infinitely greater than men suppose he has. But, my hearers, it was not the mere bodily death of Christ; this was the perfection merely of his human love; it was the atoning character of his death that brought his whole person into exercise; therein lay the greatness of his love, as God and man. "Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." Now then, if I am right in what I am saying this morning, that Jesus Christ thus took our hell; and that he met and put an end to that which none but such a Person could put an end to; I ask you this morning in the name of that same Saviour,

and in the presence of a heart searching God, what human doing, what human thought, what human invention, would you bring to attempt to connect with this wondrous work of an incarnate God? Why, it is by what he himself has done that he is to shine forth to eternity as the mighty Conqueror; it is by what he himself has done that his people are to shine forth to eternity; it is by what he himself has done that the Father is to be glorified; it is from what he himself has done that his people derive every reason to praise God, and serve God, and cleave to him for ever. Am I speaking this morning to some poor creature who has been tumbling about all his life-time; and has staggered here this morning to hear what this man has to say; under an idea that there is no salvation for such a sinner as you are? Ah, if I am speaking to such a one, let me tell thee, thou art merely a creature; but he that died to redeem is the Creator; thou occupiest only a point, but he who hath redemption occupies infinity; thou art but as of yesterday, but he who redeems is from eternity; thou art but to remain for a few years in this world, but he who redeems has in himself absolute eternity; all things from eternity to eternity were present with him as God, even when his sacred hands, human hands, were nailed to the cross. The Lord might well say, "I will send them a great Saviour." May the Lord lead thee, poor sinner; to this gospel river; and although it may reach at first as it were only to the ankles, it will soon rise to the knees, and soon to the loins; and you will be able to swim in it, your sins gone, and gone for ever; and you will be happy even on earth in the realization of pardoning mercy, more happy than language can describe.

Thus then his personal coming was to achieve this great work. The Old Testament saints longed and thirsted for his coming; it was revealed to them that he should come; and he did come; and never returned on high till he had beaten the enemy as small as dust, and scattered him as the fan scattereth the chaff on the summer threshing floor. Some one who thinks his sins are as hills and mountains of brass, insurmountable obstacles to his salvation; but the minister brings the fan of the gospel, and they all crumble to dust and chaff and away they go. Where is the great secret of these sins, that appear like mountains of brass; thus becoming dust and chaff? It is because Christ has taken the strength out of them; for the strength of sin is the law; but Christ is the end of the law; and he has taken the strength out of sin; and now let the word of mercy come, it will break your sins even to pieces, sweep them away like chaff; your soul will be brought into oneness with the Saviour; and you will feel that you will never be able to love to praise, to serve and adore him enough. You will say, Ah, now I get a little into the secret, "She loveth much because much is forgiven her."

Second, the future coming of Christ. Out of the several ends that will be answered in his second personal coming I notice four. First, he will

come to receive his people to himself. That is one object of his coming. And how lovely the Scriptures are upon the great circumstance of his receiving his people to himself at the last. There is not one of you, I am sure, that has not dwelt upon it with pleasure. It will stand thus. "He shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God, and we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." Why, if he were to come now, before I have done my sermon, you would not have time to be afraid, those of you that love the Lord; but who is to describe the feelings of the few that would be left in the pews afterwards, that see the heavens on fire? He would not take one that did not belong to him; and he would not leave one that did belong to him; no, he knows them perfectly well, those that are on the earth. Therefore we should have no time to be afraid; it would be in the twinkling of an eye. You go to rest, perhaps, after a hard day of toil, and fall asleep; just as you fall asleep he comes; and you are in the air with him, like him, before you have time to ask where you are; "in a moment; in the twinkling of an eye." As there was an exercise of absolute omnipotence by the Saviour in your redemption, there shall be an exercise of absolute omnipotence by the same person in the translation of the body from mortality to immortality, from earth to heaven. Then as to those that are in their graves, in the sea, in the distant parts of the earth; this globe, with its 26,000 miles of circumference, will be a mere mustard seed in his hand; it will dissolve before him, and yield up every particle of the dust of his saints in the twinkling of an eye; the dead shall be raised in a moment; the number shall be complete; there stands God's testimony; it shall be so. And yet this Person tried to save some, and could not; some are in hell for whom he died, and he could not save them! Ah, that is not our Jesus Christ; the getting the soul to heaven after he has redeemed it is mere little finger work in comparison of the great work of atonement and mediation. Then shall the Saviour see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; then will commence the entire unity of all that were given to him in the counsels of eternity, before time commenced its rugged and mysterious course. You will not have to appear that day before the judgment seat of Christ; no; you will appear one with him, you that are his; you will be with him in judgment. Ah, say you, I do not think that is so. What, know you not that we shall judge fallen angels; know you not that we, in oneness with the great Judge, shall judge the world; not the world judge the saints, but the saints shall judge the world. I shall have no accounts to settle at that day; there will be no account for him to settle with me, nor I with him; it is done; I am nothing and he is everything; the work is done; I have nothing to do but live and die, and wait the resurrection day; when I shall see him exactly in his own likeness; he shall

change my vile body in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and fashion it like unto his glorious body. The second object of his coming will be to minister judgment to the lost. There is the flood awaiting, there is the pit, there is the fire; and there is that burning sword between God and man; and by that flood, by that fire, by that pit, by that sword, the lost shall be banished for ever from his presence. Oh, what a fearful destiny has sin entailed! What shall we say, those of us that have a hope of his mercy, to that infinite grace that has taken us up from the dust and from the dung-hill, and brought us to know the way of escape from the wrath to come?

The third end for which he will come will be to burn the universe; the earth, and the works therein, the heavens, all shall be burned up; all pass eternally away. There is something in that very wonderful. People tell us the earth is to be purified for Christ's people to live in; where do they get that from? They do not get it from the Bible certainly; not a word in the Bible about it. The earth is to be burnt up; not purified. But some say Christ hath died for the earth, and redeemed it. I never knew that the earth was sold, or needed redeeming; it is man that sins, not the earth; the earth belongs to Christ by creation, and all worlds belong to him; and he, the same Person that created them, as a vesture shall he fold them up; they are compared to an old worn-out garment; and they shall be changed; and as Job says, "the heavens shall be no more; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."

The fourth end for which he will come will be to settle down with his people at home, in all the adaptations of blessedness, in all the socialities of new covenant relationship.

Then again, the other comings of Christ are of different kinds. There was his judicial coming, to minister judgment to Jerusalem, as a nation that rejected and despised him when it was their duty to have received him, and submitted to his dispensation, and they might have been preserved to this day. As to receiving him savingly, that is another thing altogether; but because it is not in the power of natural men to receive Christ savingly, it does not follow that the natural man has not rationality; it does not follow that as a reasonable being he is not to respect, and regard, and fear his Maker, and make use of the powers he has, as far as he can in the service of his Maker. Then there was his coming spiritually at Pentecost, and his coming spiritually ever since. He comes spiritually now every time we assemble in his name, whether we see him or not; "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them; not personally, but spiritually, by his Spirit, and by his omnipresence, and by the Father's purpose and pleasure; comes entirely on the ground of grace, grace which he has for us, and grace which he has wrought in us; because it is by grace alone we can truly meet in his name.

I think our text may refer also to a dying hour. "Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh," to take us home to glory. What is written over the gates of death? What is the writing? The writing is this, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still." Pass through this gate in an unconverted state, you must remain so for ever. "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." Pass through this gate in an unsanctified, unwashed, unregenerate state; you are filthy for ever; and you will be as miserable as you are sinful, as wretched as you are unjust and unrighteous. But there is something else written over the gate. "He that is righteous let him be righteous still." As death cannot make the one righteous that is unrighteous, so it cannot make the man unrighteous that is righteous; as death cannot cleanse the one that is filthy, so it cannot defile the one that is holy. "He that is holy," one with Jesus, washed in his blood, "let him be holy still;" death, you shall not defile him. No; we can pass through the valley with the righteousness of Christ. Christ our sanctification; and the soul comes into the presence of the blessed God in all the beauty and perfection of the righteousness and holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are some other points which I must merely glance at in conclusion. The first is, watch and see that your soul is not broken up, and thieves get in and take the truth away from you; do not let the thief in. If the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up." Error is always trying to get in; duty-faith and free-will are always trying to get in; but do not allow them to enter. If once you let the thief in, he will break up the house, depend upon it, and rob you of God's truth; you will be robbed as the Galatians were, and as some of the people of God have been; though not fatally. And you know, thieves come in the night. So in darkness of soul, in adverse circumstances; ah, say the duty-faith people, you had better let our doctrines in; you cannot get on in the world as you are; things go against you, and always will while you are so high in doctrine; it is a judgment of God against you; lower your standard, be a little more moderate; admit duty-faith; be a little more pious, and then you will get on better in the world; go to where I do; where you will get very much respected; and as soon as people know you go there, they will come to your shop directly. Ah, when the night of affliction, the night of soul darkness, the night of adversity comes, the enemy will try to step in; we know not when he may come; but when he comes, let us hold fast the truth, keep the door shut. Watch also to live near to the Lord, to profit by his truth, and that he will daily renew within us a right spirit; and watch also our opportunity to "do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith," lest the day overtake us and come upon us as a thief, and we not ready to depart.