

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE KEY OF DAVID.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 25TH, 1859, BY
MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"The key of David."—Revelation iii. 7.

LAST Lord's-day morning, we noticed the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which the Lord gave to Peter, and to all his apostles, and which he gives to all his people. I think we said enough then to prove that these keys were nothing else but the truths of the everlasting gospel; and what these apostles bound on earth was to be bound in heaven, and what they loosed on earth was to be loosed in heaven; which of course simply means this, that he that believeth hath everlasting life; and, therefore, when they saw faith in a people, and love to the saints, and love to God, they pronounced that as a people whom the Lord had set free; so that the apostles set these people free testimonially. - But people who lived and died in unbelief, and in enmity, those the apostles testimonially bound; and thus I think the one explains the other; so that whatever they bound on earth—that is, the character they declared to be bound—was bound in heaven; and an awful binding it was; bound in the chains of their sins, bound in the grasp of God's eternal law, and in His eternal wrath, and under all those terrible responsibilities which Christ alone could so meet as to survive; while on the other hand, those who are brought to know the Lord are made free by the Lord Jesus Christ; and these persons the apostles, not by any personal authority of their own, but simply by the testimony of God's blessed Word, carrying out that mission which they had received from heaven, thus loosed testimonially, thus set free; these being persons for whom the Saviour died.

I. I notice first, then, how the Saviour carries out the mission which is here implied; and perhaps I cannot begin better than by just contrasting the Saviour's mission with that of the man of sin. You read in the 9th chapter of this book, of a star falling from heaven; and to him, this star, was given the key of the bottomless pit. I believe nearly all the learned agree that that refers to Mahometanism; in that they may be right, or they

may be wrong ; but whether they are right or wrong, we are right in taking it to mean the man of sin ; because the man of sin is a mystic personage that will embody the qualities of every system of error ; it does not matter what system of error it is, what perversion of the Scripture it is ; whether it be the Mahometan perversion, or the Popish perversion, or any other perversion ; whatever the perversions of God's truth may be, the man of sin embodies the whole. And we read that this man of sin " opened the bottomless pit ; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace ; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit ;" just mark that ; " The sun and the air were darkened ;" this has been the object of the enemy in all ages, to hide the Sun of Righteousness from sinners. He cares not with what they are made acquainted if they are not made acquainted with the Sun of Righteousness. It was a smoke that darkened the sun and the air ; the sun of course will mean the Lord Jesus Christ. " There came out of the smoke locusts, and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power." Locusts are very destructive to vegetation, to trees, and to everything essential to our sustenance ; and hence, vast clouds of locusts sweeping over a country may produce famine, and even destroy a nation. So that these persons that came out of this smoke are compared to locusts ; very great in number, and very desolating. What are these locusts ? They are men that are converted to the smoke of hell, and think that smoke of hell to be the gospel of God ; they are men that are converted to the systems of men, to destructive perversions of the Scriptures ; they all pretend to have Scripture to bear them out. The man that is born of God can breathe comfortably nowhere but in the atmosphere of free grace truth ; he can breathe comfortably nowhere but in the sweet freedom of the gospel ; he can breathe comfortably nowhere but where there is no curse, where there is no wrath, where there is no death, where there is no condemnation ; and there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus Christ counteracts, then, all these abounding systems that have deceived, do deceive, and shall still deceive, thousands upon thousands. But mark the limitation of the mission, " And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree." Now the learned tell us that Mahomet gave command to his army not to hurt the grass, or the green thing, nor the tree ; and so the learned think they have got the meaning ; and away they run, put a feather in their cap, and are delighted to think they have discovered the meaning. Well, that is all very well as far as it goes ; but that appears to me to be a very poor concern. What would it be to me, suppose Mahomet did give that command ? that does not affect me at all ; I should not think there was anything in that worth looking at. What meaneth the latter part of the verse ? " But only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads ;" mark that, the seal of God. What is the seal of God ? Why, the truth

of God. What! the truth of God the seal of God? Yes, sir; "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Faith in God's truth, sir; faith in God's Christ, faith in God's covenant; that is the seal. "It was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads." What then shall we understand by the grass? Why, the new born-babe, the little one, that is just beginning to grow out of the earth of self; just beginning to spring up in thought, in conviction, in desire; they are but little ones; but there is the promise: "They shall flourish as the grass of the earth." What a poor, weak, insignificant, defenceless sort of thing is a blade of grass; and yet that figure is none too strong to express the insignificance, and weakness, and nothingness which the little one feels. He says, ah, once I thought I had some holiness of my own, some righteousness and strength of my own, but now it is all gone; what a poor creature I am. What is thy desire now? Ah, my desire is, that the dew of heaven should drop upon me; my desire is that the Lord would rain mercy upon me; that the speech of mercy may come upon my soul, and distil as the dew; that I may grow thereby; and though I am but an insignificant blade of grass now, yet there is plenty of room to grow; there stands a tall cedar, and that was once but a little blade of grass; and that same grace that made that man a tall cedar can root me as deep in the truth, can make me grow as fast, and stand as fast, and weather the storm as well, and be triumphant as well. That is the grass that was not to hurt. And the green thing will mean the young man; and then the tree will mean the older Christian. You see Christians here are reckoned after three classes: the grass, the green herb, and the tree; something very similar to the little children, the young men, and the fathers; they were not to be hurt; no, the Lord will always take care of his people, and always has taken care of them. Well, but say you, a great many were put in prison, that did not hurt them; a great many were put to death, that did not hurt them; no; I will venture to say now if you could see the myriads of martyrs, and go to them one by one, and say, did not that hurt you? the answer would be, no, I have lost nothing by it; there stands God's truth; "All things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose." John seems to pause; ah, he said, is it possible that while Jesus Christ hath died, and risen from the dead; while he hath accomplished the warfare, established pardon, brought life and immortality to light; is it possible that Satan, that old serpent, should so make poor benighted men his agents to do his work as thus to pervert the Scriptures; and that this cloud, this smoke, should spread so widely that the number of the deceived should be like swarms of locusts? John seemed distressed; he watched the matter a little farther; and presently he saw how things were all right, not only from the command

that they were not to hurt the grass, nor the green herb, nor the tree; but he says, in the commencement of the 10th chapter, "I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven." He saw the star *fall* down; but the angel *came* down. Therefore the star that *fell* down will mean the apostacy; "there shall be a falling away," and so it has been in all ages, of persons who have climbed up into the doctrines of the gospel, and appeared very zealous for them; but having no experience of their need of them, not having come rightly by the truth; presently up springs something that in their estimation will answer their purpose rather better than these doctrines; and by degrees, down they go; and when you take one step, it is very difficult to say where you will stop; depend upon it there is something amazingly bewitching in error. The star, then, will mean the apostacy; it is a figure, a representation, a symbol, made use of to indicate the apostacy. It fell down; ah, what threw it down? What throws them down? Error throws them down; when that error is clothed with a vast amount of creature excellency, and especially when it becomes fashionable, all the world will then wonder after the beast. It *fell* down. But the mighty angel *came* down. That is one of Christ's characters, that of an angel; the messenger of the covenant; he *came* down. This does not refer to his coming down to die for us; but to his coming down now in the gospel; his very character as a messenger means his coming down in the gospel. Am I this morning, then, speaking to any who are very low? Well, it does not matter how low you are; you may seem to yourself to be down at the very gates of death, the very brink of despair; as though really everything was so against you that there was no hope for you. But Jesus has by his death gone down deeper than hell; and the gospel can lawfully go down as deep as Christ's death has gone; so that if it were possible, I believe it with all my soul; I have no Scripture upon the point, because the event cannot take place; but if one for whom Christ died could go into hell, and sink to the very bottom of hell—if indeed it have a bottom—the Lord Jesus Christ would reach that soul there, and bring it up, and bring it triumphantly into everlasting glory. His death is deeper than hell; and, therefore, just so low as he went down in his sufferings, just so low can he, and does he, come down in the gospel; and just so high as his perfect work entitled him to rise, just so high shall the gospel, and the grace of God by that gospel, carry us, there to dwell for ever. He came down to stop this smoke; came down to counteract it, and so he does, too. Let a sinner be sunken down so low that nothing but mercy of unfathomable depth can reach him; let him be sunken so low that nothing but the outstretched arm of Omnipotence can pick him up; let him be sunken so low and into such a pit of despair that nothing but the blood of the everlasting covenant can reach him—depend upon it, that is the man that will never find rest until he has found the Lord Jesus Christ; this is the man that shall not be deceived nor deluded, he shall know the truth, and the truth shall make him free. Then it is said of the Saviour that he was "clothed with a cloud." There is no difficulty about that. He is clothed with a cloud of darkness to this day to his enemies, and he is clothed with a cloud of light to this day to his friends. The literal cloud is only a figure of the gospel, and the same gospel by which he enlightens his people, brings them out of bondage, brings them, as it were, through the Red Sea and the wilderness into the promised land. By the same gospel he confuses his enemies; they are confused, and in order to make matters clear, that is, clear to themselves, not to us, "Well," say they, "there are two classes of Scriptures, there are two

gospels, one that makes it the duty of all men savingly to believe, and the other that gives faith. This seems a contradiction, the advocates of that system acknowledge; but they say, these two lines will ultimately meet in heaven, though I believe that one goes to hell. They are on the dark side of the cloud, my hearers, that is where it is; it confused the Egyptians. You must be on the free grace side, and know that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. I tell you this, if your difference from the world be that of mere reformation, there is no difference between you and the world essentially; there is a difference between you and the profane world; you are reformed, and so far so good, That is the duty of every man, but that is not the difference the Lord makes. No, it goes far, far beyond that. The difference that he makes is to quicken the soul into life, to bring the sinner acquainted with the loathsome condition of his nature, that he is utterly corrupted and unclean, and that nothing can save him but the superabounding grace of God; and thus he is brought on the free grace side, the bright side of the gospel, and in that light there is a way out of Egypt, out of bondage, out from every trouble. This is the way through the wilderness, through Jordan; this is the way home to everlasting glory. That counteracts the smoke, the light of the cloud. "And a rainbow was upon his head." Bless his precious name! You know what that means. This is a type of the covenant of peace, a rainbow upon his head. The Lord comes and says to a poor sinner, "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my loving-kindness shall not depart from thee." And then, to show the delight that Christ has in the eternal salvation of a sinner, it is said that his face was, as it were, the sun;" and then, to denote the luminousness of his steps, it is added, "And his feet were as pillars of fire." I will not go on farther with that 10th of Revelation, though it would much delight me to do so. If, then, we take the sun to mean Christ, and the atmosphere to mean the truth—for the truths of the gospel are so spoken of: "Be not tossed about with every wind of doctrine;" the wind and the atmosphere are one and the same thing, the atmosphere will mean the air itself, and the wind will mean the action of that same air;—if, therefore, the truths of the gospel are compared to the atmosphere, and if Satan can darken these two, first the sun, then poison people's minds against God's truth, he has gained his point; but if the Lord hath revealed to us Christ Jesus in his perfection, then Satan shall not be able to poison us against God's truth, but we shall hold fast that truth. Oh, then, give me Christ, a sun without a spot; give me the bracing, give me the healthful, give me the, shall I say, exciting? give me the delightful, give me the pleasing atmosphere of God's eternal truth: give me these two, and I shall then find with God all I need while I live, and when time shall be no more. The mission of the Saviour, then, counteracts this smoke; nothing like keeping close to him. One more word here; we live in a day when this piece of craft is abroad. I was not so well acquainted with it till a man the other day overtook me who was once a minister, and he made this remark to me: "It does not matter so much what a man preaches, so that he preaches Christ." I was struck with that remark. I said, "You do not mean that it does not matter what kind of Christ is preached, what kind of representation is made of him?" "Well, I don't know about that." Now, what is that but sheer delusion? What can I know about Christ apart from his truth? Let a man be without God's truth and without God's Spirit, what can such a man know about Christ? So now the adversary is not content to hide from us the fact, that Christ's work is

perfect, that he is the risen Sun, risen to go down no more; but he must also take the truth from us. "It does not matter what a man preaches, so that he preaches Christ." You cannot preach Christ scripturally without the truth; you know you cannot do it. The Jews had a try at this, typically, in times of old; they tried to make the land prosperous without the mercy-seat, without the temple, cared nought for the temple; the consequence was, the land would yield nothing. And on the other hand, there was a time when they tried to make the temple do without anything else, and that would not do; they must have the two together. The land would yield nothing without the mercy-seat; and the mercy-seat certainly would not yield them harvests or pasturage without the land. So the truth will bring us nothing without Christ, and Christ will bring us nothing without the truth; you must have the two together. He hath the key of David. There is hardly anything I can think of that more establishes what I am now saying, than the language of our text. You all know how exactly a key must fit a lock in order to make use of it; you know, when you have lost the right key to a house, or room, or box, or anything else, what a number of keys you try, but they won't do; it must be one that fits the lock. And so, my hearers, God's truth is the key; and if you take anything but the golden key of free grace, you will never get into the mysteries of the Most High, never get into his store-house, never get into his treasury, never get into his kingdom. There is but one key that will unlock the Kingdom of God, and that key is the free grace key of God's eternal truth. The Lord gave this key to Abraham, when he gave him the promise; he gave this key to Jacob, and Jacob, twenty years afterwards, made use of that key when he feared Esau's coming. Now I will use this key: the Lord gave me a promise that he would preserve me, and do me good; now I will use the key, that will keep the enemy out, keep Esau out, and give me security.

Now the Saviour is represented as exercising this power in the Old Testament, in a very attractive and pleasing way. He is set forth in the greatness of his sympathy, set forth in the certainty of the freedom which he gives, and in the certainty of its continuation. He is set forth in the greatness of his sympathy: "I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle; and I will commit thy government into his hand." Now this being clothed with the robe has a meaning. Never let us forget, that when there is a representation given of Christ, that it bears reference to the people. He appears there in type. Eliakim was a type of Christ; the Lord said of Eliakim, "I will clothe him with thy robe;" he appears thus clothed to denote that it would be his business to clothe all his brethren; that is the idea. They are all brought to him, as the prodigal son was, from necessity, glad to renounce their own righteousness, and to receive Christ's righteousness as the robe in which they are to appear. "And I will strengthen him with thy girdle." That girdle will mean God's truth; and that certainly has strengthened us many times, and will strengthen us again; it is a girdle that will never come to nought. "And I will commit thy government into his hand." What kind of government is it? It is a government of grace; grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life. "And he," in thus accepting his brethren, "he," in thus strengthening them by his truth, "he," in thus governing, "shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah." A father; that would denote his great and his eternal love: his sympathy, his compassion, and care, and responsibility. Every father feels that he stands, as a father, in a responsible position in relation to his children. Where is the Christian

who does not pray for his children, who does not watch over his children, who does not long before God for the salvation of his children, who does not tremble and fear for his children when they go out into the world? And if ye, being evil, thus know how to feel for your children, how much more shall this wonderful Person, whose love as far surpasses our's as his personal powers surpass our personal powers. "He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David—(there it is)—will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open," let us out of bondage into liberty. When this door is shut here, and that door is shut there, and you seem shut out every where, he will open the doors for you; he has all the doors at command, all the keys at command; the keys of hell as well as the keys of heaven; he shall open. Little did Elijah think that a door would be opened to him to be fed by ravens; little did the widow of Zarepta think that a door would be opened to her, by which her cruse of oil and barrel of meal should continue until the Lord should terminate the famine, and send plenty. And so spiritually, for we have both the ideas, he will open, and none can shut. Although some of you are easy and comfortable in circumstances, and going on saving money as fast as you can tell it, yet the most of us are poor people, poor hard-working people, cannot help thinking sometimes whether we shall have any thing to eat tomorrow, and we go hobbling on, as it were, in that sort of way; and yet, after all, this is a great blessing, for it brings us to acknowledge what poor creatures we are, and to cry to the Lord, and look to the Lord. Here, then, is the key of David. Think of your love to your husband, to your wife, to your children, to your brothers, to your sisters, and then remember that the love you bear to them is as nothing in comparison to the love that Christ bears to you. Could you open the door by which your children would progress to every perfection, and walk in those paths that should be to their good, and to God's glory, would you not do so if you could? Well, then, while there is a lack of power on your part, there is no lack of power with Christ; all power belongeth unto him: "he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." Then also, "I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place," so that he may be depended upon: what you find him to-day you will find him for ever. "And he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house." They *shall* do it. How true that is. If there is one thing in which the Christian has a stronger feeling than another, I am sure it is that of crowning the Saviour Lord of all. I am sure there will not be one throughout the hosts of the redeemed that will feel a moment's hesitation upon that matter. "They shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity," vessels of mercy; these small vessels of mercy, little ones, all hang upon him; there they are eternally safe.

But I see your time is nearly gone, and I have said hardly anything. I have not said exactly that which I wished to say, or rather I have not said it in that clear way I wished to say it. My object this morning was to point out to you in the first place the awfulness of being the subjects of delusion on the one hand, and the blessedness of knowing and being guided by the truth on the other hand; and I have gained these two ends, perhaps not very clearly. Instead of going on further with this account of the Saviour in this matter, I must come to a conclusion by just reminding you that our text calls the truth "the key of David." Now, I do think that here is special reference to faith. David had that key of faith, that led him

into the position of power in which he was so conspicuous. This, then, is the chief reason, at least the only one I must touch upon, why it is called the key of David. Here is the bear; never mind, faith in the Lord will enable me to take that bear by the beard, and pluck the lamb out of his mouth. Here is the lion; never mind, faith in the Lord will enable me to take the lion by the beard, and pluck the lamb out of his mouth. Here is the Goliath; never mind, I have the key of faith, and the Lord will be with me; a smooth stone out of the brook, a thing that not a man in all the armies of Israel or the Philistines would think of. Put on this armour. No, I cannot go in this; God's armour is simply a stone out of the brook. Goliath shall fall, his own sword shall take off his head, and David shall prevail. Saul hunted David about; ah, but David carried the key with him. God has given me the promise that he will give me the throne, and Saul cannot slay me. I will abide by the truth, and leave the matter with the Lord. Yet there were times when David faltered, just to show that David, like the rest of us, was a poor weak creature, left to himself somewhat. Ah, I shall fall one day by the hand of Saul. No, you shall not, David: where is your key? Forgotten it, lost sight of it? "As the Lord liveth, there is but a step between me and death." Ah yes, David, there is. But these were only exceptions; and so it is with us now. David, therefore, had the key; and he had not to use carnal weapons. If he had taken the deadly key of the sword, and slain Saul, that was not the way: no. I will keep the key, I will live by faith, and then, when I come to the throne, I shall feel that God has brought me there, and that I have a right to be there. Again, David had the key of faith in relation to God's everlasting covenant. See how he uses this key in a dying hour. "He hath made with me an everlasting agreement, ordered in all things, and sure; this is all my salvation, and all my desire." But I apprehend there is another reason why the gospel is called the key of David, which you get from the 16th Psalm. You are aware that the 16th Psalm is the key by which Peter, on the day of Pentecost, was enabled to unlock, shall I say, the hearts of thousands, and to unlock the kingdom of the grace of God, and thousands stepped in.

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