

THE TROUBLED SEA

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“They shall suck of the abundance of the seas.” Deuteronomy 33:19

THESE words are spoken of the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar. “Issachar is a strong ass, couching down between two burdens: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and he bowed his shoulder to bear, and he became a servant unto tribute;” the literal meaning of which is, that Issachar, seeing that a very fertile part of the land fell to him, was willing, as the Lord had so blessed him, to render a double share of tribute unto the house of the Lord: a double share, as it were, of tithe unto the Lord; and this is what is meant by bowing down between two burdens: they were very pleasant burdens to him, because he was blessed wherewith to bring this double share of tithe unto the house of the Lord. Called a strong ass: “ass,” standing as the symbol of agriculture; the land falling to Issachar, “and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant.” And so the believer sees, that that rest which is brought in by the Savior is good; it is a joyous rest, a holy rest, a heavenly rest, and an everlasting rest; and we see that a very pleasant land has fallen to us; the land of promise; the land of the gospel; and, as the Lord has given unto his people a double amount, that is, an abundance of joy, “everlasting joy shall be unto them,” the consequence is, that the Lord's people shall praise him, with an abundance of love to his name, and with an abundance of praise that no other people can praise him with. “He saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant, and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute;” He was willing, here is something voluntary, and it accords very nicely with the Savior's words, where he says “Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” I think these things then, spiritually, have a magnificent and a glorious meaning. And then Zebulun was to be a haven for ships, and his outgoing was to be the sea; expressive of his having all the advantages of the sea itself, and of foreign commerce. Here again, we have a gospel truth set before us. Take the apostle's words, which would somewhat explain it, “All things are yours whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.” I intended to have taken the other words of the text, “and of treasures hid in the sand,” but this I shall not be able to do this morning, as I find there is as much in the first clause, as time will allow me to set forth.

Now, in taking up the language of our text, I shall first notice, *the sea itself*, as a figure of what and where we are by nature. I shall secondly notice, *the abundance of the sea*, and how sure is the fulfilment of that Scripture, "The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto you." And I shall then, thirdly, and lastly notice, *the abundance of sustenance which is here implied*; "They shall suck of the abundance of the seas."

First: I notice then, first, THE SEA, as expressive of what and where we are, in our state by nature. It is said, that "The wicked are as the troubled sea, which cannot rest; whose waters cast up mire and dirt." "There is no peace, said my God, to the wicked." Now, "The wicked are as the troubled sea, which cannot rest." What is the idea there intended? There must be something very important intended in these words; "the troubled sea, that cannot rest;" there is something that keeps it in its restless state. What then would the sea do if it could? Why, the sea, if it could, would drown the world; it would destroy all the inhabitants of the world: it is so restless, it rolls about, and seeks to get loose on every side, east, west, north, and south, and to drown the world. And the sea is, in this, a figure of the ungodly, that would, if possible, drown and overwhelm God's truth, and swallow up God's truth; the wicked world, under Satan's delusions, would swallow up the Lord's people, and there would not be one left. Well might the Psalmist say, "Were it not the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, they would have swallowed us up quick." But then, if the Lord be on our side, the truth shall remain above water, and the people of God shall remain in that land of promise, which I shall presently have just slightly, as I go along, to touch upon. Thus, then the troubled state of the sea is expressive of our enmity against the truth, our enmity against God; and that is where we all are by nature; and that is the quintessence, the real essence of that which constitutes a man a sinner, which constitutes a man wicked. "There is no peace, said my God, to the wicked; they are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." And what has the world in all ages cast upon God's truth but mire and dirt? what has the world in all ages cast upon the people of God but mire and dirt? "Let our eye look upon Zion and let her be defiled." But the Lord will take care of his people. And I cannot forbear saying here, that we live in a day when the adversary, especially in a religious form, succeeds to a most wonderful extent in lowering the few ministers of real truth that we have; succeeds to a wonderful extent in fastening a kind of stigma upon every chapel in London and in the country where the truth is preached; so that men would rather run a hundred miles away from them than go near them; they look upon them as something so pestilential, so dangerous to society, that they would avoid them as they would something very awful; so that these waters still cast reproach upon the people of God. When I look at these, and then look at the considerable number of those who have professed the truth and then gone over to duty-faith schemes and systems, when I look at these things, I see very clearly where the poor people of God would soon be, and where the truth would soon be, were it not that the Lord is on their side; therefore, it matters not how bitter the world may be against them; how much reproach may be cast against them; how mighty the billows that may rise up against them; for "the Lord has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet, He rebukes the sea and makes it dry." Therefore, my hearer, if you are not of the wicked, but if you belong to the righteous, then you will be a lover of the truth, and not a hater of it. "There is no peace to the wicked;" but "They are like the troubled sea, that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Let us then look at this as expressive of the deadly enmity of the world against the truth. And hence you read in one place, that in order to overwhelm the church, and to overwhelm the truth, Satan "cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth,

and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth;” so that the woman was saved. Bishop Newton gives a very curious explanation of these words, which I will just give you, and then give that which is the scriptural meaning thereof. He explains it like this; he says that the waters cast out of the mouth of the dragon were the barbarous nations that came in upon Rome after Rome was Christianized; but then, so far from these barbarous tribes swallowing up Christianity, Christianity rather swallowed them up. That is the Bishop’s interpretation; and though he has written some right and excellent things, he appears to me to be most dreadfully out there as to the meaning of that passage. Now the simple Christian will see the meaning as easily as can be. “The earth helped the woman.” What earth? This world? I think not. The word “earth” there, my hearers, ought to have been rendered land, “the land helped the woman.” The woman was in the land of promise; arrayed in the light of the sun, walking in the light of the gospel, denoted by the moon being under her feet; anticipating the time when she should be crowned with the fulfilment of those bright and apostolic testimonies; a definite number for an indefinite; “Upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” The promise swallows up the flood; Aaron’s rod swallowed up all the others; and Christ has swallowed up death in victory; the promise will swallow up the flood, devil, and all, swallow up all our sins. The gospel is capable of swallowing up anything and everything that may be opposed to it. That is the earth that helped the woman; the new earth; the land of promise, where our sins are swallowed up; I had almost said, and I might as well say, that if it is a land that can swallow up our sins, it can swallow up everything that stands opposed to us; but will not swallow us up in a way of injury; no, it keeps us standing fast, standing fast upon that ground that can never give way. The Psalmist rejoiced in the contrast. There is an earth whose mountains may be carried into the midst of the sea; but then we stand upon a new earth; we stand upon the land of promise; so that we will not fear though the original, the old earth, be removed and cast into the sea; we will not fear for “there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God; God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved.” The sea then is expressive of our state by nature, of enmity against God. How gladly now would Popery swallow up the truth and the word of God! Again, there is no peace to such people; that is, they have not the peace of God. Let us ask whether we are severed from that troubled sea; whether we still belong to the wicked, or whether we have through grace ceased to belong to that class. What say you now to the truth of God? Take the completeness of the Savior’s work, would you have that swallowed up? No; say you, not for ten million worlds, if it could be done; because that same finished work has swallowed up all my sins; there I am reconciled to God; there I have peace with God; there I have access to God; there the blessed God is on my side; there I can live without fear; there is nothing against me; no condemnation, no accusation, no blame, no spot, no wrinkle, nor any such thing. Here we have peace, then; here is the contrast between the two. The one would swallow up the truth, the other would not part with it for millions of worlds. To the man that knows something of the perfection of God’s law, and that the great matter to be settled between God and the soul is a law matter; the whole of God’s law perceptively and penally; and who knows that these matters are by the work of Christ settled, to that man there is peace and access to God; and he thus stands out in contrast to those who would swallow up this truth. Again, the Lord speaks in terms most solemn of this matter of enmity against him, and of the dreadful breach that that enmity constitutes between us and him. The Lord speaks of this matter in the most solemn terms, he says, “What thing shall I take to witness for you? what thing shall I liken to you, O daughter of Jerusalem?” that is the apostate daughter of Jerusalem; expressive of our great apostacy in the first Adam, and expressive of where we all are by nature; “what thing shall I liken to you?” What language for the Lord to use, as though he should say, The state to which you are brought by your apostacy, the state in

which you are by sin, by your direful enmity against me, your distance from me, your woeful condition, all this is such that the Lord himself approaches it with great solemnity and with great care, "What thing shall I take to witness for you; what thing shall I liken to you, O daughter of Jerusalem; what shall I equal to you?" The Lord looks about and he could find nothing but the greatest creature upon earth, for the sea is the greatest creature, it covers much more than two thirds of the land, the Lord takes the greatest creature on earth to set forth the direful and awful state of distance by sin and enmity which we by nature are in. "What shall I equal to you, that I may comfort you, O daughter of Zion; for your breach is great like the sea; who can heal you?" What I am now going to say, may appear extravagant to you, but it does not seem so to me; that you might just as well try by human power to annihilate the Atlantic, or the Pacific Ocean, as to try to do anything to fill up that infinite and eternal breach which sin has made between us and our Maker. He alone, my hearer, who created the world could do it; He who in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, Jesus Christ came into that mighty breach; and he alone could fill up that breach; he alone could divide those mighty waters; he alone, by paying the price of redemption, could make a way for the redeemed to pass over. Oh, what a great work did the Savior do then, to stand in such an awful breach as that, to fill up the breach, to put an end to it; and to confirm unto us that precious promise that "In that day the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun; and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days; in the day that the Lord binds up the breach of his people," (that was done at Calvary's cross) "and heal the stroke of their wound;" that is when the work was done, at Calvary's cross. Thus, then, the sea will set forth first, our dreadful enmity against God by nature; "There is no peace to the wicked;" as the sea is restless, and would drown the world if it could, so an ungodly world is restless and would drown the truth of God, and get rid of the people of God, but they cannot, that is what we all are by nature. And as the sea is great, as the sea is extensive, so the breach between us and God is such that none, but the Lord Jesus Christ could fill it up. Oh, what a view this gives of the dear Savior! and how paltry and contemptible it makes all human doings appear in matters of salvation. Oh, if the great God be your teacher, he will show you that your heart has never cast up, apart from grace considered, anything but mire and dirt; and that you are but a poor, filthy wretch in his sight; and he will make you feel, in addition to that, that the breach between you and God is as great as his holy law; and as great as the eternal indignation of that holy law, as great as the curse of that holy law; and you will fall back into entire self-despair and then the blessed Redeemer comes in, makes you clean by his blood, righteous by his righteousness, victorious by his victory, and brings you near to God; and then in comes a servant of God, and says, when looking at us in this condition of reconciliation to God; "I, John, saw a new heaven, and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; *and there was no more sea;*" no more enmity against God, no more distance from God, no more separation from him. Now, say you, this is not the meaning of your text. I know it is not; but I thought I would take up these two ideas of enmity against God, and distance from him; praying the Lord, if even there are here none but those who know the Lord, that he would stir up your pure minds to remember the greatness of the mercy that has brought you from what you were, and to remember the greatness of the dear Savior's work, who has filled up the breach, who has himself become our peace, so that there is no more enmity against the truth of God and the people of God; no more distance from God; one with Jesus; by eternal union one.

The second version I give, which will approach the meaning of my text, will be in reality another version of the same thing; that of the reconciliation of a poor sinner to God. Our text points forward

to the apostolic age. The tribes of Zebulun and Issachar inhabited Galilee; and you remember that most of the apostles were Galileans; and it is said in connection with our text of these tribes, "They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness;" and truly these things the apostles did by the Eternal Spirit of God: called poor sinners effectually to mount Zion; and there they offered the sacrifice of righteousness; that is, served God rightly, in contrast to heathenism and to the traditions of the Jews. The apostles, shall I say, by the Eternal Spirit of God, lead the people to mount Zion; and the apostle Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, says, "You are come unto mount Zion the Lord has sent us to call you to mount Zion; and he says in the same connection, "Let us have grace:" so then there is no serving God rightly without grace; it must be by faith, that it might be by grace; "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." You will see that this abundance of the sea, then, will refer us onward to the Gentile world, and the ingathering of souls out of that Gentile world, according to Isaiah 60, there this is the promise made to the church; "Then you shall see, and flow together, and your heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto you; the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto you." The abundance of the sea there, is explained by the dear Savior's parable, to which we must now advert, in order to give another version of reconciliation to God; where, the New Testament dispensation is likened to a net cast into the sea; "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So, shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just." Now, here is first this dispensation, cast as a net into the sea, gathering of every kind; and how true this is; but then the bad are to be cast away, and the good are to be taken care of. So then, it appears that a great many are gathered that are not good, that will be cast away. How are we to distinguish between the two? We read of the Hebrews that they had a law given by Moses, that whatever fish had not fins and scales, was reckoned unclean. But passing by that definition, we will come to a definition which will be in substance the same thing; that the bad would be reckoned those not eatable, and the good would be reckoned those that are eatable. So that the good then set forth the people of God, and the bad set forth those who are not the people of God. Now wherein, if we come to personal character, lies the difference here? Why, the one is poisonous, and the other is wholesome; the one still retains a poisonous mind towards God's truth. How many thousands there are in the gospel dispensation entangled somewhat in the net that has taken hold of their consciences; and they must be Christians of course in some shape or another; but at the same time, they still retain a poisonous mind against the truth; they are brought into a letter profession, but their minds are poisoned against God's truth. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil;" the children of the devil are the tares, that still have a poisonous hatred to God's truth; but the good seed are those that receive the truth in the love of it. This is the very essence of John's argument all through this 3rd chapter of his epistle. "He that commits sin is of the devil;" that is, the sin of enmity against the truth; for you cannot make that chapter stand good in any other way. Some people try to make out that what John says there, has a mere moral meaning; but it will not stand good that way; you must go deeper than that, the sin that John is speaking of there is not the general offshoot or the outward acts of sin, but the root of it. The sin of Cain as he shows us at the close of his argument, was murderous enmity against the truth; he hated Abel because of Abel's love to the truth; and therefore, Abel's works were righteous because they were works of faith; and he obtained witness that he was righteous. Cain's works were works of opposition to that way of justification; and therefore, they were evil. Now the wicked shall be taken from among the just, they are among them now as professors; still,

they hate the truth. Who are the just? The just is the man that is justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I could easily, did time permit, show that this Scripture in its spiritual meaning began its conspicuous fulfilment in the apostolic age; I could easily go into the epistles, and show what that was to which sinners were in that day vitally converted. Where shall I go to give you a specimen? I will refer you to a chapter where the apostle does not trouble himself with earthly affairs, does not trouble himself with any of the disorders of the church or of the world; does not trouble himself with anything but that which concerned their eternal welfare; I mean Ephesians 1; that is that to which they were in that age converted. And how many are there now-a-days vitally converted to the order of that chapter, the great truths contained in that chapter? how many are there now to whom eternal election is a living and delightful truth? how many are there now that rejoice that their adoption is according to God's predestinating favor? how many that rejoice in their acceptance purely in the Beloved, apart from all creature doings? how many that rejoice in the blessed truth that the inheritance is already obtained in him, and that we are predestinated thereto? The net then cast into the sea takes a great many. The good man is a lover of the truth; the bad man is a hater of the truth. "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love me? Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you." Is it so with you, my hearer? Can you say that you love God's truth? If so, that settles the matter. Oh, but I have done so and so, and so and so. Nothing to do with that; you love me, and if you love me, that is a proof that I love you, and the matter is settled. Oh, but say you this is presumption. Is it? Do you know how the 13th chapter of John ends? No, I have forgotten. Well, then, I will tell you: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the cock shall not crow till you have denied me three times." That is how that chapter ends. Now do you know how the next chapter, the 14th, begins? Oh, say you, I have forgotten. Well then, I will tell you, "*Let not your heart be troubled*; you believe in God, believe also in me. In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you;" (for you Peter that shall deny me;) "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am there you may be also;" even you, Peter, that shall deny me.

"Love like Jesus none can measure;
Nor can its dimensions know,
'Tis a boundless, endless river,
And its waters freely flow."

Bless the Lord for such a gospel, you that have not yet been brought to feel your need of it, depend upon it, when the Lord shall humble you down, and bring you to feel your destitution, you will then begin to feel your need; and though, like Nicodemus, you may at first be ashamed or afraid to come boldly out, for fear of the Jews, yet by and bye, when you are thoroughly starved out, for depend upon it necessity is a powerful thing, you will come, out and openly avow your love for that truth which before you in your blindness and ignorance hated.

Thus, then I have given the two separate versions of this matter, the sea; expressive first of our enmity against and distance from God, and then the gospel not taking some men out of the sea of the world, and converting them morally and mentally, but not spiritually, and taking others, and converting them spiritually and truly.

I have one more idea, and then I shall close; and that is *the nourishment here indicated*; “They shall suck of the abundance of the seas;” that is they shall draw to themselves great abundance, have plenty of everything. This will mean the happiness and blessedness of the people that are thus gathered in. I will show you the word of the Lord upon this in conclusion, their happiness and blessedness. Isaiah 66, “Rejoice you with Jerusalem,” (this new Jerusalem,) “all you that love her, rejoice for joy with her, all you that mourn for her;” who sit down by the rivers of Babylon, and hang your harps upon the willows, and mourn when you remember Jerusalem, because you cannot be there, the soul afar off in captivity, yet, “if I forget you, O Jerusalem let my right hand forget its cunning;” if I do not remember Jerusalem, this new covenant order of things, if I do not make it my chief joy, for what in the whole range of existence is there to equal it? Well, what next? Why, “That you may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations;” There the new Jerusalem is spoken of as a mother, and we as children; and we shall be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations, everlasting consolation, consolation that shall swallow up all our tribulation; “that you may milk out and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus says the Lord, I will extend peace to her like a river; and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream; then shall you suck, you shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And when you see this your heart shall rejoice.” That is the best rejoicing, friends, isn’t it? your heart rejoicing. The apostle speaks of some that glory in appearance, but not in heart; with a simpering and smiling countenance, a wonderfully pious pretension to be very loving, very kind; while there is a dagger at the same time by the side that would slay that very man towards whom they profess that pious feeling. The devil is the devil, let him appear in what shape or form he may. But when you see what the Lord has done, your heart shall rejoice., Oh, when the Lord takes the heaviness away from the heart, the load away from the heart, the grief away from the heart, the heart then is set free. Ah, say you, my heart is free now, my heart is happy now, my heart rejoices now. “When you see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb; and the hand of the Lord shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies.”