

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A FRIEND INDEED.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 11TH, 1860, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"So will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." Jeremiah xxiv. 5.

AFTER what we advanced last Lord's-day morning upon these words, we have to notice the truth of the latter part of our text, that the Lord over-ruled that tribulatory state to which the Israelites were subjected unto their good, and thus fulfilled his own word. Hence, in connection with our text he makes unto these same people a five-fold promise. And we, therefore, in the first place, notice *the truth of our text, that the Lord did acknowledge them for their good*; and then, secondly, *the five-fold promise which he made unto these people*.

I. First, then, that THE LORD DID ACKNOWLEDGE THEM FOR THEIR good. And we of course must take the circumstances expressive of this as presented unto us. And it is no small mercy, yea, it is everything in the fact that the Lord takes care of his children individually; and sometimes causes a very small and apparently insignificant circumstance to stand connected with something very important. Hence, when they were carried into captivity, not only did the Lord save their lives, but he watched very carefully over them. Take for instance the circumstance we have often noticed, that of Daniel and his companions when they came to Babylon; see how the Lord watched over them; see what caution he blessed them with. They saw when they were brought to Babylon, and when they came into connection with the wise men of Babylon, they saw that they were in danger of being entangled in the idolatries of Babylon, and being entangled also in the profanities, and sins, and ungodlinesses of Babylon; they saw this, and therefore desired to be exempted from that luxurious mode of life that would endanger their standing; and so they desired to be fed with pulse and water. It was the Lord that gave them this feeling, this self-denial. "Look upon thy servants at the end of ten days." And they tried this; and at the end of ten days they were fatter, and fairer, and better, and better liking and looking, than those who had lived sottishly and luxuriously; and the king found them better than all the magicians, and soothsayers, and astrologers, and wise men of Babylon. Here then the Lord blessed them with sobriety. And I am quite sure, friends, that the more the people of God are blessed with a sober feeling, and freedom from all that that would clog the soul, and hinder them from those things that are for their present and for their eternal good; the more, I say, they are delivered from these things the better. We see, then, what care the Lord took in this respect. You see we must look at the signs of things: and the Lord having given them that feeling, it is a good sign. Hence, presently Nebuchadnezzar has a mysterious dream, which his wise men could not interpret; out comes a decree against the wise men in Babylon. But the Lord said that he had sent them there for their good; and yet here is a decree for their death. Why, unbelief and reason would say, This does not look much like being

sent here for our good ; we have been here only for a few months, and here is a decree in which we are included : at least, those of them that were exalted ; Daniel and his companions, they were included among the wise men, and therefore were to be put to death ; and no doubt they were much discouraged ; that is, judging of things by appearance ; looking at the character of Nebuchadnezzar, that whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive ; whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down ; all this seemed very discouraging. But then Daniel and his companions knew that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth ; and therefore they cried and prayed unto the Lord to unfold unto them this secret. And what a wonderful secret it was ; what a revelation did the Lord there make unto them ; and of course all those who were spiritually taught would participate in this revelation which the Lord there made to Daniel. We have gone over that ground many times ; and I need not this morning detain you by going over the ground again, any further than just to observe, that it is an example set before us to encourage us when things seem to go against us, when everything seems to threaten our hope perhaps for the life that now is and for that which is to come. They prayed unto the Lord, and he made that revelation unto them which has been the delight of the church ever since, and will be down to the end of time. I shall just once more repeat the essential part in that revelation which the Lord made to them in this captivity ; and that is this,—that the stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands covered the whole earth ; it became a great mountain, and covered the whole earth. Some of you perhaps recollect what our idea upon this was ; but I will just repeat it now,—That the Lord blessed his people while they were in trouble with the spirit of self-denial, with the spirit of prayer ; and as sure as the Lord blesses his people with the spirit of self-denial and prayer, he will make a revelation unto them, in which they shall realise the blessed truth that all the Lord's dealings with them have nothing in view but their everlasting good. That, I say, of the stone being cut out of the mountain without hands, and becoming a great mountain, covering the whole earth, I know not all through the Bible a more beautiful representation of the substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ than is there given. You must recollect that the ancients held that the earth was an extended plane, not knowing the form of the earth as is now known. Now they supposing it to be an extended plane, the idea would be this—that this stone swelled out and took the place of the earth, entirely covered everything, covered the whole face of the earth, good and bad, everything that was good and everything that was bad ; it covered the whole of its corn, and trees, and produce, that which was bad and that which was good. What a beautiful representation does that give of the substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ ! He comes in, and he is a substitute for all the good things of this life, and he is a substitute for all the bad things of this life ; so that by him all the bad is covered, all sin is covered, not a sin uncovered ; “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” “O Lord,” saith another scripture, “thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people ; thou hast covered all their sin.” Here Christ becomes their substitute, covering all their sins, not a sin to be seen ; so that they, standing out of their sin, have peace ; and standing upon this Mount Zion, this mountain, standing upon this gospel ground, they are just in the sight of God as free from sin as Christ himself is ; and that God no more sees sin in them than he does in him. They are one with Jesus Christ in this standing ; he is the Substitute ; and has covered all their sins ; he is a Substitute for everything. And what is the design of all the Lord's teaching now, but to bring us to this, to make Christ the Substitute for everything ? Can you

think of a thing that you could not with advantage give up for him? Can you think of anything that will bear a moment's comparison with him? Shall the kingdoms of this world be mentioned? Shall the wealth of this world be mentioned? shall the honour of this world be mentioned? shall the friendship of this world be mentioned? shall the comforts of this world be mentioned? mention whatever you may, they are all but fleeting shadows when set by the side of this everlasting substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ. After Daniel had seen the completeness of Christ's substitution, he then saw that this kingdom which was thus established, this substitution thus established, was to remain for ever. What a sweet resting place is this! here God the Father rests in the entire substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ, and here the Saviour rests, he is satisfied with the travail of his soul; and here the Holy Spirit rests; and here the sinner may rest. Here, my hearer, everything is clear, everything is fair. So that when they were taken away, then, from their own native land; yet, when thus brought into this trouble, into Babylon, the Lord made this revelation to them. And Daniel never forgot the same, for some years afterwards, when he was led to take it up again, as shewn in the 7th chapter of his book, how beautifully does he there dilate upon the eternity of this kingdom, the indestructibility of this kingdom, the certainty of this kingdom. So, my hearer, let us now come down to personal experience; our being sent into the land of the Chaldeans; that is, if we apply the words to ourselves, it will mean the Lord so deals with us that we must come into the land of trouble, that we must have our captivities, that we must have our trials; now let us ask ourselves the question, is our experience such as to reveal to us the completeness of Christ's substitution? Here is the great point. You see this is the revelation that the Lord made to Daniel; and when Daniel contrasted this entire substitution of the Saviour, covering everything; when he contrasted that with the other kingdoms he saw in vision, those kingdoms became as the chaff on the summer threshing-floor, while the kingdom of the blessed Redeemer remained. You may depend upon it that it is a bad sign if your experience lead you away from this. I make no hesitation in saying that you cannot mention a trouble, a loss, a consolation; you cannot mention anything connected with you in experience or any circumstance, that has not this end in view, namely, to make you know more and more of what you are as a poor, corrupt, lost sinner; and to endear to you and more clearly reveal to you the complete substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ; that he is the substitution for everything. The Lord has done great things if he has brought us thus far. Only think, for instance, if you were called upon to-day to enter into eternity, to leave time, to go to that bourne whence no traveller ever did or can return, see with what boldness you may go; you will say, What is there for me to fear? why, here is the Saviour a complete substitute; complete by his atonement, complete by his righteousness, complete by his substitutional work; complete by his suretyship and our sanctification; complete by what he has done; he is the life, and death is put away; he is the light, and darkness is put away; he is our justification and our sanctification; he is our salvation; he is God without a cloud upon his face; here is a sun that will never go down; here is a prospect of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Now then, my hearer, if this be the path that we are travelling; if we are learning more and more of the excellency of the substitution of Jesus Christ, I am sure in this way it is that our souls will rise in gratitude to God. I never can bless God for my creation apart from the substitutional work of Christ; because if I stand apart from that, it had been better for me, better for you, if we had never been born. Human existence is unquestionably a

most direful curse apart from the substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am fully aware of the opinions of many divines upon this scripture; they make a very great noise about it; and they have been promising that all London is to be converted, that all England is to be converted, that all the world is to be converted. But I find that sin is travelling on as fast as ever; the devil is as busy as ever; men are as depraved as ever; so that I still find now what there has always been, there are just as many Christians as the blessed God makes, and not one more; and there never will be. Nor does that scripture, the stone filling the whole earth, bear any such meaning whatever. You will at once perceive it is a substitutional idea; it covers everything, covers the whole earth, does not leave an inch uncovered; and so, therefore, it means his entire substitution, substitution for everything. You are to give up all the endearments of nature, all the endearments of mortality, and life itself; and he is to be a substitute for the whole. This then is one part of the good that the Lord made their troubles subservient to. And so, happy for you, my hearer, however painful the circumstances may have been by which he has brought you to it; happy for you if you are brought to see and feel that your exposure to God's wrath by his law, you stand there as a sinner, is entire; and you want a substitution that is entire; a substitute that is the end of that law: is broad enough, and long enough, and strong enough, mighty enough, and durable enough, everlastingly to present you to God without spot and without blemish. Thus then the Lord acknowledged them. But again, see how he will stand by them in trouble. Ah, Nebuchadnezzar, you are too late now with your fiery furnace; they have had such a revelation of the complete substitutional work of Jesus Christ, and such a revelation of the eternity of God's kingdom, of his friendship, of his mercy, and of his love; ah, Nebuchadnezzar, thou art too late; you should have set this golden image up before they were favoured with this revelation; and you might have shaken them a little then; but now you may set up your golden image, and call upon these men to whom this revelation is made to bow down to it, and to worship your gods; and that if they do not do so, you will cast them into the fiery furnace; ah, they won't do that, you are too late, you may depend upon it; they have seen so much of the substitutional perfection of Christ, and they are so taken up with God's love, and mercy, and grace, and goodness, and glory, and the certainty of his kingdom, that they will laugh at your fiery furnace; our God whom we serve is able to deliver us; and if not, if he does not deliver us, our bodies shall be burnt to ashes before we will either serve thy gods or bow down to thine image. Ah, there is nothing under heaven so strengthens a man against enemies and against trouble as this revelation of the complete substitutional work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the martyrs, this was their strength; they overcame, not by their own fleshly goodness; they knew they had none; they overcame by the blood of the Lamb. Well, cast them into the furnace. But then, Nebuchadnezzar, call upon your duty-faith gods, your free-will gods, your Popish gods, to see that your dear servants don't meet with any injury in casting these three men into the fiery furnace. Oh yes, my gods, will take care of them. Do you think they will? Yes. Ah, when they approached the fiery furnace, it slew the men that cast them in, but could not singe the hair of the head of one of the servants of the God of the Hebrews; no, the Lord acknowledged them. "I will acknowledge you." And a Divine Person appears in the furnace, in form or appearance, as Nebuchadnezzar said, it is rendered in our translation, "And the fourth is like unto the Son of God;" it ought to be rendered as all the learned agree, "And the form of the fourth is like the Son of a God."

Nebuchadnezzar knew nothing of the Son of God; he might have had a little intellectual information upon it, it is true; but "the fourth is like the Son of a God," was an orientalism to denote the superiority of the fourth person. The fact is, the fourth person was God himself. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God;" and this Divine Person appeared in human form, and took away the violence of the fire, took away the bonds and bands of his servants; and they all walked at large in the furnace. "So will I acknowledge them." So, my hearers, your enemies may be getting up a furnace for you; they are gathering a bundle of sticks; they are just about to light the lucifer; and old Lucifer at their back helping them on; just about to do something that they think will put an end to you; their own fire will burn themselves, and you will come off harmless at the last. Not so much as the smell of fire was upon them. Now don't lose sight of this, if you can help it, friends, that this boldness of these three worthies followed upon the revelation made to them of the completeness of Christ's substitutional work; the stone covering the whole earth, being a substitute for everything. There is nothing that will embolden a man so much as this; because it is sin that makes cowards of us all; it is righteousness that makes us bold as a lion. When our sins are taken away, and righteousness put into the place of them, and we have peace with God, and victory by Jesus Christ; there, where we are sinless, we can be bold as lions, and part with a thousand lives rather than part with one particle of this blessed truth. Quenched the violence of fire by faith; and if it was by faith, it was after that order which is by grace. Not so much as the smell of fire upon them. How this circumstance must have endeared the blessed God to them; how it must have made them say, "Who is a God like unto thee? pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin. Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto our God?" Here we have the greatest monarch in the world and our God brought in contrast; the great monarch that made the nations tremble, at whose very name they trembled, he declared that we should die; but our God declared we should live; Nebuchadnezzar did all he could to kill us, but he could not even injure a hair of our heads, because the Lord stood by us saying, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." Again, go on a little further. The Lord does sometimes sovereignly stop the mouth of prayer; but he does not subject his people to other men's order upon that subject. Hence when the petition is got up, that whosoever shall ask for thirty days; what, are we to do without our God for thirty days? are we not to pray for thirty days? Ah, you do not know our God. "Whosoever shall ask of any god save thee, O Darius, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions den." Must not pray, then, ah, but Daniel, still in this light of the revelation the Lord had made unto him, still standing on the rock; still knowing the Lord was on his side; still knowing the lions were but playthings in the hand of the Lord; and still knowing he could shut the lions' mouths; as though Daniel should say, my companions were put to the test; they were cast into the fiery furnace. We suppose Daniel was not at Babylon at that time, or else he was so exalted in circumstance that they did not then dare to lay an accusation against him; but be that as it may, Daniel had not yet been put to the test. Now it comes to Daniel's turn. Ah, so with you; some of you may not yet have been put to the test; but you will have some tests by and bye; that will test what you are; whether you can stand the test for the truth's sake or not; when you come into a position by which you must lose considerably, or else give up the truth in whole or in part; that will try you; all very well when wind and tide and we are all going one way; we can't tell what test we might be put to before we die. However, Daniel took the wisest course that could be taken; and

that was prayer to God ; it furnished him with matter for prayer. We poor things try to pray sometimes, and don't know what to say ; and I don't know that Daniel would multiply words much ; but there was a subject of prayer to God ; his life was in danger ; cast into the lion's den ; a subject of shrink from that danger. My God is able to deliver me ; and if he did not deliver me, let me die an honourable death ; do not let me die an inglorious death ; here am I in captivity ; I have boasted of my God ; I have spoken of his eternity, of his mercy, of his love, of his power ; and I have testified monially swept away every other god, and declared there is no god but my God ; if therefore I must die for him, let me die in accordance with the testimony I have borne of his ability to support me. He knew how to pray to the Lord ; opened his window towards Jerusalem ; for though the temple was not now standing, yet the spot was still reckoned sacred, was still reckoned sacrificial, and was still reckoned as containing the mercy-seat ; he therefore prayed three times a day toward Jerusalem. They could find no fault with Daniel ; they would have found some political fault with him if they could, or some moral fault ; but they could not ; or some commercial fault, official fault, some want of integrity, but they could not ; the fact is we can find no fault with this Daniel except it be in the law of his God ; if we can persuade the king he is an Antinomian, a high doctrine man, which he really was, a very high doctrine man, a thorough free-grace man ; if we can once persuade the king against this Daniel, what he is, that will prevail. Well, the time comes ; the Lord hears, and the Lord answers ; and Daniel is cast into the den ; and an awful moment it must have been ; but you do not find that he offered any objection to it ; and there were the lions turned into lambs, quite as peaceable ; and we may imagine Daniel at the other end of the den ; and the lions between him and those who were outside, so that they could not get to Daniel ; and no doubt they were exceedingly grieved to think the lions did not kill him ; oh dear, we made sure they would have killed him, made sure they would. The lions were quiet and peaceable ; did not touch Daniel ; and Darius saw what a fool he had been, and went to the den. O Daniel, servant of the Most High God, is the God whom thou servest able ? Is he able ? Ah, not only able, but willing ; he hath sent his angel ; the divine angel, the angel of the covenant, the Divine Person ; the same Person that appeared in the furnace ; and he hath shut the lions' mouths ; inasmuch as innocency was found in me. They wanted to persuade the king that Daniel's religion was hurtful to the realm ; but it was not hurtful to the realm ; it was the best thing in the realm ; it is the salt of the earth, the pillar and strength of every kingdom, wherever it is. And so no harm came to Daniel, because he believed in his God. He still held fast the revelation that had been made unto him. Thus then they were carried away for their good ; first, to make more clear unto them the substitutional perfection of Christ ; secondly, to test what the Lord could support them in, what he could deliver them from, and what he would deliver them from ; in order that this might be put upon record for the encouragement of the people of God down to the end of time. But time would fail me to enlarge upon the Lord's mercy in acknowledging his people in trouble. And is this to be wondered at ? is this at all to be wondered at ? Just look at it. If the Lord would own you when you were dead in sin ; when you were a lump of loathsomeness in his sight, and nothing else in his sight ; when your soul hated him above everything else, though you knew it not : nothing against which the carnal mind is so embittered as against the blessed God, whether we know it or not ; it is the fact ; if he acknowledged you then, if he gave you his dear Son then ; if he commended his love towards you when you were in that state, and sent his

Son to die for you; if when you were thus an enemy you were reconciled, brought out of that enmity, reconciled to God by the death of his Son: if he would not disown you then, how much less will he disown you now. Oh, that cursed unbelief; I wish I could throw a word right down upon your unbelief this morning, and kill it dead, if it were the Lord's will. That cursed unbelief, it keeps up in our minds such mean thoughts of the Most High God that we are half our time looking at him as if he was an angry Judge, and as though he had nothing better for us than that which we feel in ourselves, whereas when we are enabled to look at him in the light of what he has really done—the Lord Jesus Christ becomes so precious, the eye of faith becomes so strengthened that it can pierce through all the clouds, and mists, and difficulties that stand in the way, and it can see that this God is our God for ever and for ever, and will be our guide even unto death. He hath said in words holy and solemn, "I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee." All other objects we can part with; but to part with him is destruction: but from us he will never depart, nor suffer us fatally to depart from him. Oh! give me godliness; there is nothing else that will do to live by, nothing else will do to die by. What is our existence apart from godliness? Many more circumstances I might mention where they were in captivity when the Lord appeared for them, as shewn in the Book of Esther; many other circumstances which I will not now name. There is one thing I must not forget, and that is this,—there is beautiful mutuality in this; for where the Lord acknowledges his people, that is just where, after he has manifested himself to them, they acknowledge him. "He that denieth me," says Christ, "shall be denied before my Father; he that is ashamed of me and my words, of him will I be ashamed." What! ashamed of his being a substitute for all things; ashamed because the Lord, we are obliged to own it, saved us from first to last merely and freely by his grace and his mercy? There is an acknowledgement of the Lord.

II. But I must come now to the FIVE-FOLD PROMISE. Now these persons who are called good figs, we described them last Lord's-day morning; and I think I have characterised them this morning a little, though perhaps not so much from experience, yet a little, by that spirit of prayer into which the Lord brings his people, and that revelation he makes to them of the complete work of Christ; and then the trouble he leads them through afterwards, in which they prove the all-sufficiency of the Lord; in which they prove that the Lord is immutable, that with him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. Now the Lord makes a five-fold promise to these people. "I will set mine eyes upon them for good;" the Lord has done that. See the difference between unatoned for sin and atoned for sin; unatoned for sin is red like crimson, but atoned for sin is as white as snow; atoned for sin shall become soft as wool; the mighty difference between sin in its unatoned position and sin in its atoned position. So here the Lord says, "I will set mine eyes upon them for good." This is language entirely gospel, where sin is atoned for; but under the law, where sin is not atoned for, there the Lord sets his eyes upon the sinner for evil; that is, supposing that sinner is left under the law. But here in Christ Jesus, where the Good Shepherd is, where the Mediator is, the Mediator of the better covenant, established upon better promises, to better purposes, to better ends; where the Mediator is, "I will set mine eyes upon them for good;" here I can look upon them with approbation; I can behold their Shield, and look upon the face of mine Anointed; and I can see them in all that he is; and therefore I have set mine eyes upon them for good. I will look upon them not to find out their sins, but their necessities; under the law it was their sins, but under the gospel it is their necessities. "My God shall supply all your necessities."

"Your heavenly Father knoweth your need of these things." And if we are taught of God, we shall set our eyes upon God for good. We shall not be like the murmurer that looked with an evil eye, because the Master was good; "is thine eye evil, because I am good;" because I give to those that have laboured only an hour the same that I give unto thee who hast worked many hours? "Is thine eye evil because I am good?" Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" Yes, Lord, the sinner is brought to say; thou canst do what thou wilt with thine own; and thou mightest justly have damned me to eternity had it been in the deeps of thy sovereignty so to do; but now that thou hast had mercy upon me, I am brought to acknowledge that thou canst do what thou wilt with thine own; and thy goodness now brightens up my visual power, wipes away the tears from mine eyes, and mine eyes are set upon Jesus. Here then is God looking lovingly upon his people; here are the people looking lovingly upon their God; here is God looking longingly for the people, here are the people looking longingly for God; here is God looking after the people, here are the people seeking after God; here is the Lord glorying in his people, here are the people glorying in God; here is the Lord resting in the church, here is the church resting in God; here is the Lord having an eternity of glory for the people, here are the people seeking that which God has for them, as saith the apostle, "I apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus the Lord." Then the Lord says, "I will bring them again to this land." ² Pass by the literal meaning, take it spiritually, bring them into the spiritual land where Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob dwelt; a spiritual land, for they are a spiritual people, and dwell in a spiritual land. "And I will build them and not pull them down." We have had before us this morning some instances where they tried to pull them down, but could not. They are built up in Christ as a part of the building of mercy, as part of that free-grace building, the top stone of which shall be brought home with shoutings of grace, grace unto it. "I will plant them and not pluck them up." See the latter part of the 60th of Isaiah to explain that not pulling them up. "My people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land for ever." Well then, if they are righteous, and righteous for ever, there is no cause by which they can be plucked up. Sin plucked us up in the first Adam; but there is no sin in Christ; and the people are in Christ; and they are the branch of his planting, that he might be glorified. Then the Lord says, "I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord." That is a very gracious promise, friends. Now some of you had a heart to come to chapel this morning, but perhaps that is all you had; perhaps you have no heart to know the Lord; you do not come with any particular desire to know him; you don't read the Bible with prayer, you are content to remain an unpardoned sinner, an unjustified sinner, an unsanctified sinner; and quite unacquainted with what you really are, and with what Jesus Christ is. Now you have a heart, you see, to be religious in your way, but no heart to know the Lord, to know him in your own soul. But then others of you do know the Lord; the Lord has given you an heart to know him; an heart to know him is a praying heart; a man that prays is a man that is willing to endure anything if he can but attain a knowledge in his own soul, a sweet assurance in his own soul, that he is born of God, for "except a man be born again," it is no use; if that change be not experienced, then you are still under sin, and must be lost if you die where you are; nothing short of undergoing real conviction of sin, being brought into the spirit of grace and supplication, and having a heart to pray until the Lord hears and answers; nothing but this will enable you to say, "I know in whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which have committed to him."