

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A FRIEND THAT LOVETH AT ALL TIMES.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 20TH, 1860, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“He is altogether lovely.” Solomon's Song. v. 16.

WE now have to begin, in order to close our remarks upon this subject this morning, at the 14th verse; which says that “his hands are as gold rings set with the beryl; his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.” You get three things here put together; *riches, holiness, and riches*. First, “his hands are as gold rings.” This, I think, must be understood in the relative sense. He stands in an official capacity. It will mean that he has rings to impart; and that those rings have their meaning; and I shall very concisely set their meaning before you, as indicated from the word of God. And the first thing it will indicate, if I take the last scripture first, is that of freedom. In ancient times, a slave was not allowed to wear a gold ring; and to this the apostle James refers when he says, “Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons. For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool; are ye not then partial?” The meaning of that is that the man with the gold ring is a citizen and free; and the man in vile raiment means the man in slave's raiment; it does not mean a nasty, negligent, dirty person, that one can hardly sit within half a mile off, without feeling him to be a nuisance; it means nothing of the kind; the man in vile raiment there simply means a slave, that was not allowed to wear any other clothes, nor to wear a gold ring; that is the meaning of the apostle there; but the citizen being free, was allowed to wear a gold ring; and it is directly expressive of the freedom wherewith the people of God are made free; free of the city of God; “Christ hath said, “If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Here then in Christ Jesus we have liberty; our liberty is in Christ; there is our freedom from sin, from death, from the curse; there is our freedom from Satan and from wrath; there is our freedom from everything that would injure us. In vain do we look elsewhere; he, and he only, can be our freedom and our hiding-place. We shall never be free from sin in ourselves as long as we live; we shall never be free from the assaults of Satan all the time we are on this side of Jordan; and we shall not be free from occasional apprehensions of God's wrath; for we have those legal principles in our nature that work sometimes very hard to get us away from the freedom that is in Christ and to get us if possible under the law; and notwithstanding all the mercy of the Lord towards us, we sometimes have gloomy apprehensions that after all he will deal with us in wrath, and not in mercy. So that I say we look in vain for perfect liberty anywhere but in Christ Jesus the Lord; and the more we are favoured by precious faith to receive Jesus Christ as the end of everything that is against us, the more we are favoured then to rejoice in

the liberty wherewith he has made us free. I take therefore his hand being as gold rings to denote that he has rings to dispose of to his brethren; and that one thing indicated is that of the gospel freedom, the citizenship freedom; that "ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." And what to a poor sinner that feels where and what he is by sin can be sweeter than that freedom that is by the Lord Jesus Christ? Also it signifies adoption. Hence, you remember that one of the favours bestowed upon the prodigal was that a ring was put upon his finger. And some have thought that as a ring has no beginning and no end, it meant everlasting love. Well, I have no objection to that; but the chief thing meant was adoption; that is to say, that the father still held him as a son. I am aware the word adoption does not perhaps apply well there; but still it was customary in ancient times when a slave was adopted, and taken of course out of slavery, and made an heir of the estate, there was a ring given to him, in token of his adoption. And so this ring of the prodigal seemed to be a declaration of his sonship; that he was now brought into his father's house. And so in order to prove that you are a child of God, you must receive the testimony of that sonship that is in Christ. And if you ask what is the order of that sonship, the answer is very concise, but at the same time very plain; "having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself." Now you must be brought down to know enough of your slavish, outcast state by nature, enough of your orphan state by nature, to make such a testimony as that acceptable to you; to see that if you are a son of God, if you are of one of these, it is according to God's good pleasure; that he predestinated you to this adoption, and that by Jesus Christ unto himself; if you are favoured to understand that testimony, and receive that testimony, and it has on your soul an endearing effect, that it endears the Lord to you; then you are a child of God; for there is the spirit of adoption. Also the ring denotes honour; as when Pharaoh gave a ring to Joseph, the royal ring; and as when Ahasuerus gave the ring to Mordecai. It is therefore the ring of honour; exalting. And so the people of God are raised up to sit together in heavenly places with Christ Jesus; and to wear a great many of the very characters which he himself wears. Is he a son of God? They are raised up into joint heirship with him. And is he a King? They are also kings. And is he a Priest? They also in holiness, or in the perfection of holiness by his priesthood, are priests. And if he be loved of God, so they are loved with the same everlasting love. Then we go on to the next part; "his belly is as bright ivory." There is a contrast here also; for we read of some, and pretenders to religion too, whose god is their belly; and a very miserable god it is; and whose glory is not in the Lord, but in their shame; and who mind earthly things. But the Saviour stands at an infinite distance from that description; he stands in pure, and perfect, and everlasting contrast to that description. When it says therefore, "his belly is as bright ivory," it still carries the idea of devotedness to God; that Christ was devoted to God; that he was holy in thought, word and deed; that there was not a particle of selfishness about the dear Saviour; he gave himself up entirely to the will of God; he gave himself up entirely to those counsels that pertained to our eternal welfare; and he himself did say, and there cannot be any doubt but that he said it truly, that "my meat and my drink is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." As though he should say, while it is my very meat, my very supreme delight to do the will of him that sent me, I should not be content with that if I did not finish his work. Here then, friends, is holiness again, here is purity again. And then it is said of this part of the regal dress that it is overlaid with sap-

phires. Here again is riches ; take these precious stones as the expression of riches. And would we be enriched with precious promises, with precious consolations, with beauties and excellencies that shall endure for ever? In what way shall they come? They must come by the devotedness of the Lord Jesus Christ. His meat was to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work. And if we be taught of God, there will not be anything so dear to us as that work which he hath finished ; and it will be our meat to live upon what he has done ; it will be our meat, shall I say, to seek that meat which endureth unto everlasting life ; and that meat is his finished work. Here we lose our poverty ; here we acquire riches ; here we become unsearchably rich, everlastingly rich. If we take these sapphires then as expressive of the promises of the Gospel, and I think we may, for a sapphire promises something ; it is a precious stone, it is valuable ; and therefore it seems to speak, and say, I can bring you some money, and that will bring you other things ; there is something promissory in this treasure. The apostle Peter says, concerning the Lord's mercy in calling us by his grace, and so on, "Whereby he hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promises." Let the sapphires then be the precious promises ; and they do promise us something ; they promise us all things profitable both for the life that now is and for that which is to come. Here then holiness and riches go together. As we have before observed in this description, as sin and poverty go together ; here we have the contrast, holiness and riches go together ; and the more we are partakers of his holiness, the more we are favoured to live in his holiness, in his spirit, in his righteousness, in what he has done, the more precious these promises are unto us ; and if I may use the idea, the more we are favoured to trade with these promises, the more they bring us, for the promises do bring us a very great deal, even while we are on this side Jordan. Such then appears to me to be the meaning of this verse. If we take the first, the ring of freedom, adoption and honour, does it not beautifully set before us the mercies of the Lord ; such mercies as we need? If we take then this part of the regal dress, expressive I say of purity, did we not need such an High Priest ; did we not need such an one, that could be devoted to God for us without spot, without wrinkle, without drawback ; did we not need one devoted to God for us whose meat and whose drink was to do the will of God, and to finish his work ; words we dare not use in the high, lofty, and perfect sense in which he used them ; we trust we can use the words in our humble measure in the spiritual sense ; but then we have another nature, as averse to that as hell is to heaven ; as averse to that as Satan is to the Lord Jesus Christ ; and this the Lord knew ; and therefore left nothing dependent upon us, but made everything dependent upon the Saviour ; all things were given into his hands. And I am persuaded, that the more you are acquainted with the various departments of the mediation of the dear Saviour, the more you will be taken up with godliness and with God ; the more you will talk with him, because you will feel you may talk with him ; the more you will walk with him, because you will feel you are welcome to walk with him ; and the more you will cast your care upon him, because you will feel you are welcome to cast your care upon him ; and with the more comfort will you look forward to eternity, because there is that which brightens up that eternity ; and the less attracted will you be by the things of this world, because there is that which casts them all into the shade. Thus the Lord then takes away the inferior, that he may eternally establish the superior.

I. I now go on to the next part ; THE STRENGTH AND GLORY OF HIS STANDING. "His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold !" I am inclined to think the sockets here may have some reference to the royal shoes ; for the church a little further on is spoken of as her feet

being beautiful with shoes; and the word *sockets* perhaps may have some reference to the royal shoes. But while we may be a little in the dark as to the precise meaning of this Oriental imagery, we are not in the dark as to its spiritual meaning. I think therefore strength and stability, firmness of standing, is the idea conveyed by the legs being as pillars of marble; to denote that he stood firm. Let us then contemplate the dear Saviour standing firm to his object. The object I now refer to is the church. He set his heart, in oneness with the Father, upon the church; he loved the church with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, with all his strength; and he came into such a relation to the church, and the church into such a relation to him, that when the fall took place—and great indeed was that fall; the ruin of the whole human race, and the root of the eternal damnation of unnumbered millions; the fall of man was an awful circumstance; and it is a circumstance that is profitable for us to understand, that we may be humbled down low enough to appreciate what the Lord has in mercy done to deliver us from the pit into which we were sunken, from the state of things into which that fall brought us. But if the fall do take place, if it should take place: not that there was any *if* in God's knowledge of it; God knew it would take place; I think we may fairly assume this, this is self-evident; nothing presumptuous I think about saying that God knew it would take place; and in the deeps of his sovereignty abstained from preventing it. But if it should take place, so firm does the Saviour stand that the very moment that sin is committed, it falls not upon the church penally, but upon him; if she fall, he will be the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; he stood by us there; he came in; that is a very significant scripture, that he is a Lamb slain; perhaps you will say, in God's counsel; truly so, truly so; but then there is a period referred to, there is a point in time referred to, from the foundation or the beginning of the world. And so when the fall took place, then Christ was virtually dead; his death then, shall I say, was secured by the fall; there he stood, and never thought of leaving us. And prediction after prediction for four thousand years, or indeed more, for we have lost about fifteen hundred years of the Old Testament age, through our being too eager to follow Bishop Usher in his chronology; it is proved, I think, now by ancient MSS. that the world had been standing between five and six thousand years when the Saviour appeared on the earth; all this time prediction after prediction, all in entire accordance with the declaration, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head;" that was never withdrawn; he stood firmly during all those thousands of years; one prophet rose up after another, and to him give all the prophets witness, the last as well as the first. Bless his dear and precious name, he stood firm then; and how firm did he stand when he was in this world? He came under God's holy law; and that law wakened him morning by morning; that law exacted of him daily labours; that law exacted of him perfection; that law exacted of him all that obedience that should bring in an everlasting righteousness. And was he ever moved? No; he stood firm. Where then, my hearer, must your firmness be? Is it in yourself? Alas, alas, we are tossed about like feathers and straws before the wind; we are such poor creatures that we are one thing one minute, and another thing another minute; sometimes hot, as it were, and sometimes cold; sometimes careful, and sometimes careless; sometimes as though we had never heard his name, and sometimes somewhat swallowed up in him. Where, then, amidst all this versatility and mutability among us in our deceitful hearts, where is our stability? Why, in his stability; in his stability, we can never be fatally thrown down until Christ himself be thrown down; and he never stumbled, never could stumble; and consequently none of the stumbles of his people can ever affect

the firmness that they have in him; there is their firmness; and they will be recognised to all eternity by the stability of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here again comes in our precious little word *faith*. Ah, if I am enabled to believe this, that my versatility, my weakness, only in the contrast endear his immutability, endear the firmness of his standing; that while Satan and conscience may truly tell me that my feet have slipped many times, I will point to One whose feet never slipped, who always stood firm. We may be shaken in circumstances, among friends and among foes, yet in him we cannot be shaken, there we cannot be moved; there we can endure anything and everything; the rains may descend, the floods may rise, the winds may blow and beat upon us, and move us in every other respect, but cannot move us there; precious faith will hold fast the stability of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is he not altogether lovely in this, then? Follow him to Calvary's cross; still he stood firm. Dr. Watts, in one of his hymns I think, says that Christ bowed his feeble knees, but that now he is on the throne of glory he stands firm. Now, with all due deference to the doctor, I do not like those words at all. Jesus Christ, I admit, was crucified through weakness; but I will not admit, and no power on earth can make me, and I am sure the Lord will not,—I will not admit that Jesus Christ was crucified through any personal weakness that he had; he was crucified through the weakness he took upon him, and that weakness was our weakness; we are weakness itself, and he took our weakness upon him; and he had strength enough to bear that weakness, and did bear that weakness; he needed his own power, his own omnipotence, to bear him up under that weakness; and he stood fast until the glorious words were uttered, "It is finished." Here, then, also he is altogether lovely. He stood fast all through the Old Testament age; he stood fast in his life and in his death; and stands fast now, and always will, by the objects of his love. But there is another point which I think is very important for you to notice; you see in the present day a great deal of turning and twisting about, and dishonesty, in the professing world; but the Saviour, as well as his people, will stand a contrast to that. One important consideration in Christ standing fast is his standing by the truth. There is a vast amount of instruction in that verse in the 17th of John, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." After the lapse of thousands of years, it requires no alteration; it was election then, let it be election now; it was an eternal kingdom then, let it be an eternal kingdom now; it was an incorruptible inheritance then, let it be an incorruptible inheritance now; it was the church then, let it be the church now; it was my brethren then, let it be my brethren now; it was thy will then, let it be thy will now; it was thy pleasure and thy purpose then, let it be thy pleasure and thy purpose now; it was my great object then, and it is my great object now. The Saviour abode by the discriminating truths of the Gospel. He never once asked a sinner to come savingly to him; he disdained such a thing. Whenever he wished a sinner to come savingly to him, he commanded him with a self-acting command; that command went with the same power that it did to Lazarus in the grave; "Lazarus, come forth." Therefore those men that represent the Saviour in the way they do; why, these men charge us with helping forward infidelity; they are the very men that are so doing. According to the gospel of the present day, instead of the weak crying to the strong to help them, it is the strong crying to the weak; instead of a poor sinner being made sensible of what he is, instead of insisting upon this as an evidence of life, and being led to cry to God, the story is that Jesus Christ is weeping on his throne, and shivering at the door, and asking you to come, and you won't come, and he does not know what to do; and these men represent themselves as better

than God is; for your neighbour dies in unbelief, and you go before God, and say, Lord, it is not my fault, for I did all I could for his salvation, and he would not be saved. Why, that is a reflection upon God, that the everlasting God did not interpose, but that this dear creature did all he could. All such sentiments as these are of the devil; and those that hold these sentiments, we know that they have yet a great deal to learn. We must be like our Master in this as well as in other respects; we must stand fast against the wiles of the devil, and having done all to stand; and walk in the same truth that he did, live in the same truth that he did; and that same truth will bring us to that glorious kingdom which he himself hath founded. But not only does he stand firm, but his legs are said to be "set upon sockets of fine gold." The first idea here is holiness. Pure gold conveys the idea of purity. Christ stood upon holy ground, never stood in an unholy place; every step he took was holy. He stood on law ground; he was holy, and he stood fast to all the law's demands, to all the requirements of justice. And what has he here done? Why, he has formed, shall I say, by his walking in purity to the end of the law, he has formed holy ground for us to stand upon; to bring us off the unholy ground of the old Adam, of sin, and bring us to stand upon holy ground; where sin, Satan, and death, cannot touch us. But I think it means something else as well; that his steps were golden steps. Every step he took brought something to us. When he stepped from heaven to earth, that was a golden step; that brought something to us. When he stepped from heaven to earth to take our nature, we rejoice in the prediction, and in the fulfilment of the prediction; that in Bethlehem he was to be born; that his goings forth had been of old, even from everlasting. His obedient life was a golden step, brought us everlasting righteousness. His atoning death was a golden step; brought us victory. His resurrection, his step out of the grave into life, to die no more was a golden step; and when taking that step he said, "Because I live ye shall live also." And when he stepped at the last from earth to heaven, that was a golden step; the thief found it so; it brought him something; "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." And all his intercessions, they are golden steps; and every one of the steps he takes in dealing with his people, both in what he permits and in what he performs, it will be found at the last that while to us a great many of those steps have been grievous, yet they were all golden steps; that every one was a step towards our eternal good; as saith the apostle; "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose." And what a golden step that will be at the last day, when he shall come in flaming fire with his mighty angels, when he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. How will he stand then midway, as it were, between heaven and earth, with his saints on his right hand; what a golden step that will be when he shall say, "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Yea, his steps to all eternity, in walking with them, dwelling with them, and they with him, will be golden steps indeed; there our text shall be realised in perfection; "he is altogether lovely." In Christ then we are perfect. As I said the other evening of Job; Job was perfect and upright; and feared God, and eschewed evil. Ah, it is put upon record in that way, the Lord's people know how to understand it. If Job were perfect, how was it he cursed the day of his birth; how was it he said, "Behold, I am vile?" How was it he said, "I repent and abhor myself, in dust and ashes?" Well, but, Job, you are perfect. Ah, I am perfect in Christ, upright in Christ; I fear God in Christ; and I eschew evil, avoid evil, go away from evil, in Christ; and God has taken me by what I am in Christ; but I am now taking myself by

what I am in myself. That is right, Job, perfectly right; take yourself, by what you are in yourself, and you may depend upon it, if you are made to do that, God will take you by what you are in Christ; and he will thus take you without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. The Lord has taken another from us this last week; and many these last seven or eight months; and this wonderful subject of Christ's substitution has come in upon them in their departing hours shut the devil out; and in spite of agonising nature, and in spite of all they were, in and of themselves, they died as happy as though, I was going to say, they really were in heaven before they got there. How do you account for it? Only by the great fact that Jesus Christ is not partly lovely, but altogether lovely.

II. We have now lastly to notice HIS GENERAL ASPECT. "His countenance is as Lebanon." His countenance here must be taken to denote his presence; and I shall just give four ideas upon this. First, that he turns by his countenance, his approbation, his presence, the solitary into the social, the wilderness into Eden, the desert into the garden of the Lord. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them," the tidings concerning Christ; "it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it." Ah, it means his paradisaical presence, his social presence. How social he is. Why, even naturally what socialities he displayed when in this world, He would not rank with the aristocrats, and just stop there with a few great man-made parsons; no, he was social in a pure sense; and they wondered that he dined here and there, and that he was in this house and that house. Ah, but there were some of his brethren there, and where they were, there he would be, though in hell, to fetch them out of it; ah, that he would. But is not this a matter of personal experience too? Are you in a wilderness state? Let Jesus come to you, he turns it into Eden. Are you solitary, and feeling as though you had no hope? Let Jesus be revealed to you in his substitutional excellency, and your solitude is gone; you have the best of company, the presence of Jesus, the presence of God. "And they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God;" the substitutional perfection of his dear Son. The second idea is that it is a pattern to which his people shall come; "Excellent as the cedars." Although he cuts the sinner down, and turns him into a dwarf, and he becomes little, yet in other respects he is a very tall man. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon;" out-top every other tree. You all know that if there are a great many trees together, the poor little shrubs come worst off; they do not get so much sun, nor so much wind, comfortably; they do not get on so well at all. So the Lord's people shall be tall trees; they shall grow up above sin, and above the curse, and above the law; for Christ's righteousness riseth above the law; and above the world, and above death; they shall grow up so high that their heart and head too shall be in heaven while they are on earth. People tell us we are too high in doctrine; why, in doctrine I cannot be too high. A doctrine is no use to me if it has not in it both an infinity of depth and of height. I want it to come down to my low estate, and then raise me up to that that mercy has provided for me. "His countenance is as Lebanon;" something majestic; something tall. As good John Bunyan well observes, the tallest giants we read of in the Bible were but nine cubits high; but the pillars of the temple were eighteen cubits high; to shew that the Lord will make his ministers higher than all the free-will, duty-faith, and popish giants of this world; they may be very gigantic, may have mighty minds, mighty influence; nevertheless, the Lord has pillars connected with his temple that shall out-top them all, rise above them all. But third, it will mean the perfecting of that scene of things into which the Lord brings his people!

There is a scene of things, a state of things, into which he will bring them; and they themselves will accord with that state of things. In the 24th of Numbers there is a beautiful account given; first that the dwellings of Jacob are as valleys spread forth; second, that they are as gardens by the river's side; there is the progression; and third that they are as trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted; trees celebrated for their great fragrance; and I am sure it will be a fragrant scene, in contrast to the unsavoury scene of the damned, that scene into which the people of God shall come. As cedars they are mentioned last. So the poor sinner must be humbled down in the valley; and then the Lord takes care of him as a little plant in the garden; and then he partakes of the fragrance of Christ; and then he grows up into the tall cedar; that is his ultimate destiny; the perfection of that scene of things which the Lord hath ordained.

One more thought; his countenance being as Lebanon will also mean cheerfulness. Take the last chapter of Hosea; there you find the promises of the Lord in connection with the simile here used. "I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine; the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." It conveys the idea of cheerfulness. You cannot be sorrowful in his presence; it is impossible; his presence spiritually, I mean; when he comes, sorrow flees before him. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." But, you say, were they not sorrowful in his presence sometimes? Not when they enjoyed his presence spiritually; no, no. Well, this closes up the scene. "His countenance is as Lebanon." Here is cheerfulness. How many sorrows hath he already borne away? And he will go on bearing one grief after another away until he has wiped away the last tear; and fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore shall demonstrate the truth of our text, that "he is altogether lovely."

Now ready.

SELECTIONS FROM THE SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT, FOR 1859.

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