

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A PROMISE.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 15TH, 1860, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."—Isaiah i. 18.

AFTER our discourse upon the preceding part of this verse last Lord's-day morning week, we now have, after thus noticing the invitation, "come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord;" we now have to go on to notice *the promise*. I think there are four things fairly implied in the language of this promise. As to our state as sinners, that we entered upon in the preceding discourse; and I shall not therefore attempt to recapitulate the main points this morning belonging to that department. The first thing here then is that of *the forgiveness of sin*; the second is, that of *sanctification of heart and life*; the third is that of *the subservience of sin to the ultimate good of the saints*; and the fourth is that of *the ultimate glory of those that are thus favoured*, whose sins are forgiven, and who are in heart and in life sanctified by the blessed God.

I. First, then, we have to notice THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS; and I make this the first point because it is under this aspect that the Holy Spirit has in numberless cases brought home these words with power. Perhaps there is scarcely a scripture in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit has made a larger use of than he has of these words to roll pardoning mercy into the soul of a guilty, trembling, sinner, who has been brought to see and to feel himself in such a state as a sinner before God, as though his sins were of too deep a dye ever to be forgiven, as though they were too heinous for him ever to find mercy; yea, when he appears to himself as though Satan himself could not be so bad before God as he, the sinner, is; in numberless cases the Lord has brought home these words with power, and has brought their life and import into the soul; and many by these words rejoiced in that forgiveness upon which I wish this morning to make a few remarks. Now this forgiveness of sins is essential to our welfare. It is no use to seek any other remedy but that of forgiveness. The sin is committed; and even if we ourselves had never done any wrong, yet by one man's offence, and we must not give that up; I am glad the Holy Spirit has been kind to us in this respect, to reveal to us very clearly what we are by the fall; for if we are right

there, we shall not be in much error in other respects. Now we are then undone by the fall of man; sin was committed to perfection in the fall of man; for the word of God declares that death came by one, and that over all, for that all have sinned. There we stand guilty; there, in the first Adam, we are all involved in that sin which hath entailed death upon us. And then if we come to the fact that we are all conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity; that the mind of the infant when it comes into the world has in it all the elements of that demoniacal enmity, against God which that child as it grows up is sure to manifest, unless the grace of God prevent; looking at the fact that the sin is committed, that we are sinners, and that we cannot undo what we have done; it is all no use, we may weep, we may repent, we may cry, and we may sigh, and we may groan, but there is not anything we can do that can undo what is done. There you stand like the Publican; a sinner you are, and a guilty and a lost sinner you must eternally be for aught you can do; you cannot undo what Adam did; you cannot undo what your own heart has done, you cannot undo what your life has done; therefore, there is no remedy found in creature doings. Where then is the remedy? Ah, the remedy is first in the mercy of God. Let us see, then, where this forgiveness stands. It stands first in the mercy of God. And this Joshua, the high priest, knew, for I happen to have the impression, and I cannot get away from that impression, that Joshua, and not David, was the author of the 51st Psalm; and that Joshua stood there as the high priest, and represented the people; and that they had murdered the prophets of God and the saints of God; and that therefore Joshua, upon their return from captivity, stands there as the representative of the people, and prays to be delivered from blood-guiltiness. Now I say, Joshua, being taught of God, knew where forgiveness was; he knew that forgiveness was by the Angel of the covenant; he knew that forgiveness was by the mercy of God; and therefore his language is, "have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." Here then the sinner is brought to Christ Jesus; and in Christ Jesus there is mercy; in Christ Jesus there is loving-kindness, in Christ Jesus there is a multitude of tender mercies. Take then the three; the first is mercy. Am I a sinner, miserable by what I am as a sinner? Well, that mercy is infinitely greater than my sinnership. Again, am I a poor, hateful, and loathsome creature to infinite purity? God's everlasting love overcomes all that loathsomeness, clothes me with its own qualities, with its own characters. And hence Christ calls the Church his love, because he clothes the soul with the qualities of his own love wherewith he hath loved it, and thus overcomes the loathsomeness. Again, are our sins numerous; are they innumerable? There is a multitude of mercies, a multitude of tender mercies. "Come now," then, "and let us reason together;" and when you can prove your sin to be greater than my mercy, when you can prove that my loving-kindness, is not able to overcome your loathsomeness, and when

you can prove that my mercies are not able to outnumber your sins ; then you may go away and tell your fellow worms that the God of heaven and earth, that the God of ten million, million, million worlds, the God-self existent, eternal, and infinite, is unable to pardon your sins ; then you may go away and bear this testimony against God, but not before. Oh, I increasingly glory in God ; I rejoice in God ; there is a greatness in all his perfections ; and he has never said anything that is half so great as himself ; not like us ; we poor creatures sometimes make great promises, and our performances perhaps at the same time, through a variety of circumstances, are but very short and very small. Not so with our God ; if he say, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," he will make it good. Mercy, then, and the very destiny of the Gentiles is to glorify God for his mercy ; this mercy, is a bed on which the soul can stretch itself, this mercy is a covering in which the soul can wrap itself ; this mercy embraces the soul with inexpressible delight, and will hold it fast for ever ; for this mercy is from everlasting to everlasting ; and this mercy is by Jesus Christ. Would you, my hearer, wish pardon to stand on better premises, to stand in better order, than in the mercy of the blessed God ? Again, this forgiveness stands also in his grace. There is no perhaps essential difference between the two ; only different words to convey, especially relative to the object, different ideas. Mercy regards the miserable ; grace regards the unworthy. First chapter of Ephesians ; "In whom," that is, in Christ Jesus, "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace ;" the riches of his grace, as you are aware, are called in another place unsearchable riches ; "that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." The idea intended there is that there is no bound, no limit to the grace of God. Our God is a great God, our God is not a helpless God ; our God works sovereignly, and works omnipotently, and works accurately, and works surely. And therefore this forgiveness, then, stands not only in his mercy, but also in the riches of his grace, or the riches of his favour. I like these rules of forgiveness, because they keep us near to the Lord. If Satan can but lessen Jesus Christ in our estimation, that Jesus Christ who dwelt among us full of grace and truth ; if Satan can lessen and lower the spirit of grace in our estimation ; if Satan can lessen and lower the Father of all mercies and the God of all grace in our estimation, then he can get our hearts cold towards God, get us careless about the house of God, the ways of God, the people of God, and everything else. But all the time the blessed Spirit enthrones the Saviour, and enthrones the Father, and makes the everlasting God our delight ; all the time the Holy Spirit does this ; then we are in that path that David was when he looked at God as his exceeding joy : "I will go," he says, "unto the altar of God ; even unto God, my exceeding joy." But again, this forgiveness stands also in his love. Ah, I cannot describe to you, if I would, the delight with which the Lord forgives, forgets, blots out the sins of his people upon this ground, the

ground of his love. Hezekiah gives us a beautiful representation of this matter of forgiveness by the love of God. He says, "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness; but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Who is the person that cast all our sins behind his back? Why, Jesus Christ. So that Jesus Christ, as God and man, stands between me and my sins. If you ask what I have to separate me from sin. I have Emmanuel, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his person, in his life, in his atonement, in his resurrection, in his ascension, in his intercession, in his reign, in his eternal sameness. He has cast all my sins behind his back; therefore they must be at an infinite distance; it is not behind the back of a mere man, but behind the back, as it were, of eternity. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us; and "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." My hearers, what say we to this? Do we love the Lord in this manifestation of the amplitudes of his mercy? Do we love the Lord in this manifestation of the riches of his grace? Do we love the Lord in this great love by which he hath covered all our sins; not only forgiven, but covered them; not only "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven," but whose sin is hid, "whose sin is covered;" they are not to be brought to light; they are gone, and gone for ever. I scarcely need remind you of the next verse to our text, which I have done in the preceding discourse; but I must just refer to it again; "If ye be willing and obedient." Here lies gospel willingness. To be willing in the gospel sense, then, we must be willing in that sense in which we are convinced of the greatness of our sinnership; and when we are convinced of the greatness of our sinnership, it lays us low in the dust before God; and then we are willing to be saved in his way. But fourth, this forgiveness stands also on the ground of mediation. "Little children, I write unto you because your sins are forgiven you for his name sake." Ah, all that there was to suffer he suffered; all that there was to endure he endured; all that sin entailed he underwent; all that law and justice demanded the Saviour met; the work is done, the warfare is accomplished. Therefore it is in his name; your sins are forgiven for his name's sake; his blood cleanseth from all sin. Come then and let us reason together upon the infinite ability of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. I rejoice in the complexity of Christ; I rejoice that he was man, for he could not have suffered if he had not been man; I rejoice that he is God, for he could not have suffered what there was to suffer, he could not have travailed in the greatness of his personal strength, if he had not been God, for then he would have had no personal strength, he could not have brought salvation with his own arm, for he would have had no omnipotent arm by which to achieve that salvation. And the saints of God, as I could easily shew, and hope indeed in some future discourse to shew, the saints of God in all ages have glorified very much in the complexity of the Lord Jesus Christ; the great mystery of God manifest in the flesh, that wondrous meeting place Calvary, where our sins are swallowed up, hushed into eternal silence; and where the promises rise and shine forth; and we, by this mercy, by this grace, and by this loving kindness, and by this mediatorial perfection, must shine forth also. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Then fifth, this forgiveness stands also on ultimate grounds. Here is death to come; here is judgment to come; the last great day to come. And when I come to the last great day, if some of my original sins, some of my heart sins; some of my life sins, before called or after called by grace appeared there against me, how confounded I should stand. Ah, I should say, I have been mistaken; I thought Jesus Christ had settled all this; why, the apostle was wrong

then when he said, "Having forgiven you *all* trespasses;" I thought that these enemies that I had seen I should see no more for ever; I thought they were all cast into the sea and drowned; I thought the matter was settled. Why, the Lord appears to no more advantage than mere poor dying mortals do, everlastingly raking up old grievances. What an awful scene it would be; how would the Saviour look, I wonder, after so many millions being deceived in that way? But shall it be so? If you are one with him, shall any of your faults meet you there? shall there be a witness against you there? What say the holy scriptures? "The sins of Israel and of Judah shall be sought for," for the devil will seek for them, by his agents especially; but shall they succeed? There shall be none; not a dog shall move his tongue against any of the children of Israel. "For I will pardon them; their sins, and their iniquities will I remember no more." It matters but little how determined some of you may be to remember other people's faults, our God does not remember them; "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." "Who is a God like unto thee; pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin; passing by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; because he delighteth in mercy." "Come now, and let us reason together."

II. The next thing in these words is that of SANCTIFICATION. "Though your sins be as scarlet, ye shall be white as snow." That is the construction; that is not the meaning. I hold the text to mean what it says. Every minister I have heard preached from this text has contradicted it. There is no part of the scriptures where the living God has been more contradicted than in this scripture. Men take up the text and say, the Lord says your sins shall be as white as snow: and they employ all their learning to shew us that it is a mere poetic, rhetorical form of speech; that we are not to believe what God says. They believe that the meaning is that though your sins be as scarlet, ye shall be as snow; that is not the meaning; though I shall speak for a moment or two as though it was; and though red like crimson, they shall be as wool. It cannot they say mean the sins themselves? Well, but God says so; are you going to call your Maker a liar? What God says must be true. Well I believe it just as it is. But a word upon this sanctification. Let us substitute another word for the word sins; that will enable me to get at what I want to say. "Though your doings;" though your doings; your sins are your doings; though your doings be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though your doings be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. But while in a state of nature your doings are doings of unbelief, doings of enmity against God, doings of antipathy to God and to everything sacred and spiritual; they are all deadly doings. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." But when convinced of sin, and when reconciled by the nonimputation of sin unto you, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness unto you; when thus reconciled, what a change of doing there is; now you love the Lord, now you pray to the Lord, now you believe in the Lord, now you contend for the faith once delivered to the saints; now you have a holy faith; now you pray with a pure prayer; now you love the Lord with a pure heart fervently; and now you are favoured with pure thoughts, pure meditations, pure reflections; and now you live upon pure food, drink that water clear as crystal proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb; you now live upon holy things; you have a holy life, a holy light, and a holy hope, and holy prospects; and being thus a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, you become a holy people, a peculiar people, and now divinely employed in shewing forth the praises of Him that hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light; so that you can no longer live in an ungodly world, you can no longer give yourselves up to Satan, you can no longer be what you were; you have that

faith now that unites you to Jesus, unites you to him who is holy, unites you to him who hath loved you with an everlasting love. Hence John would have our consecration to God stand upon these grounds; for he says, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. . . And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Though then by nature all your doings are doings of unbelief, of enmity, of antipathy, yet the doings are now changed; you can now go into your closet, and fall on your knees honestly before God, and pray out of an exercised heart to God for mercy, for grace, for wisdom, and for all you need; you can now go into the house of God, and not sit grunting and groaning because the minister is so long in prayer; but as the minister prays he will, if taught by the Holy Spirit, at least sometimes lay hold of your very thoughts and feelings; and as the minister goes along you can add secretly your Amen to it, and say, Amen, Lord, so bless us this morning, or evening, as our minister is praying. Thus then it will mean not only forgiveness, but also sanctification and consecration to God. And it is a real consecration to God; willingness; the heart is willing; the soul, the mind is willing; hope is in it, life is in it, everything is in it; it is delightful; and these are our happiest seasons when taken up into the enjoyment of this consecration to God. Severation from the world is no severation at all if it be not thus vital; sanctification is no sanctification at all if it be not that kind of sanctification that enlightens the eye, unstops the deaf ear, quickens the soul, unites to Christ, leads to renounce all confidence in the flesh, and to rejoice in God, and God alone.

III. Third, THE SUBSERVIENCE OF SIN TO THE WELFARE, THE ULTIMATE WELFARE OF THE SAINTS. I have nothing to do with the lost; I have nothing to do with such. The eternal destiny of the lost is a deep I never attempt to fathom, never can fathom. Part of the human race are left; God, willing to show his wrath, sovereignly left them; he endures with much long-suffering their doings for a time; and as a matter of justice, shows on the ground of their sin his wrath. By sin they are fitted for destruction. I have nothing to do with them; but I have to do with the saints of God. And you cannot imagine a better thing, anything better could not have befallen the saints of God, than the fall of man; the best thing that could have befallen them. It was in love to you, and that is going a long way, it was in love to you, in love to the Church, that God suffered the fall to take place; the best thing that could have befallen you. Why, so deeply and so well was the apostle versed in this, that he said, "God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin." You may set your Greek to work, some of you learned gentlemen, but you cannot make that verse, translate it as you please, read otherwise than it does, not fairly at least; you cannot, according to the grammatical construction of that language, make it read otherwise. "God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you."

Apart from the love of God, apart from election, apart from Jesus Christ, apart from God's immutable covenant, then the fall would have been, as it is to the lost, a dire, an awful, a tremendous, an eternal calamity. But God had great love to show. How shall I show it? I must suffer them to come into circumstances that will demonstrate the greatness of my love. I have an act of great grace to manifest in recording their names on high; how can I shew that? By suffering them to come into circumstances that shall render such an act necessary to their welfare. I have a dear Son to give unto them; and I mean them to have a life above creation's life, a holiness above creation's holiness, a righteousness above creation's righteousness, a kingdom above creation's kingdom, a glory above creation's glory. But how are they to have that? I will take advantage of their sins; I will make

their sins subservient to the great purpose ; my dear Son, after sin hath destroyed them in their creation standing, my dear Son shall go and destroy that which destroyed them, and bring them up into a life, a holiness, a righteousness, a kingdom, a glory, a freedom, a relation, a state, a blessedness, infinitely surpassing that that they fell from in the first Adam. Thus, then, if I look at sin as unatoned for, it is as scarlet and as crimson ; but if I look at it as atoned for, it all turns bright, all looks white together. I sing with Kent,

"Here Satan was nonplussed in what he had done,
The fall wrought the channel where mercy should run,
In streams of salvation that never run dry,
And all for the lifting of Jesus on high."

God has turned the fall of man, red and deadly as it was, into a bright scene ; for there the Lamb is slain from the foundation of the world ; he has turned every one of my sins into a bright scene, for every sin is an occasion for pardoning mercy, every sin is an occasion of the riches of his grace ; every sin is an occasion to demonstrate the intensity of his love ; every sin is an occasion to demonstrate the efficacy of a Saviour's blood, the triumphs of his grace, and the glory of his name. And this is what Joshua means, as the apostle in the Romans shows ; I mean Joshua the high priest, concerning what we are, "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest." But how can God be justified in making such provisions if we do not need them ? "Wisdom is justified of her children." But the text says, "Your sins shall be white as snow ;" so they are, turned all white ; the deadly colour is gone ; they all appear as so many bright clouds, white as snow. Ah, there you are, saying sin can do believers no harm. No, I am not saying that ; sin does me harm every day of my life, works awful havoc with my soul ; but it cannot do the saints ultimate harm ; it does them innumerable harms by the way, but it shall not do them any ultimate harm. Ah, says some one, I don't like to go so far as this with you. Then you must stop behind ; that is what you must do. I believe with all my soul, and no man under heaven can beat me out of it, that it was in love to the Church that God permitted the Church to fall ; and if he had not intended to take advantage of that circumstance, he would not have suffered it to take place. I will just refer to one circumstance. Here is a man, a good man ; he loved Jesus Christ, knew him, and followed him, and according to his feelings he could have died for him. "I will die with thee." "Peter, thou shalt deny me thrice." Lord, why dost thou suffer that to take place ? Because I love you, and you want a little teaching, and I mean to teach you a lesson by that ; and I will take such advantage of it that it will bring out the love that is in your heart ; and I will show that your sin cannot destroy the love that is in you to me, nor the love that is in me to you ; and I will so put matters to right afterwards that you shall become a great preacher ; it shall be one means among many others of making you a great preacher ; and when thou art converted, and restored from this swearing and lying, then strengthen thy brethren ; you will know what your own weakness is, and you will know what your strength is ; you will know what to strengthen them with. Are you going to tell me that Jesus Christ could not have hindered that fall ? that Jesus Christ had not a purpose of love and mercy in it ? I say he had. I have nothing to do with the lost, I am speaking now of the saved. I rejoice, then, that sin itself shall lose its deadly hue, lose its deadly power, and shall become white, become bright ; so that to all eternity we shall look upon the wisdom of God and the love of God in suffering the fall to take place, that he might take this amazing advantage of it by which to stain the pride and the glory of

all flesh, and to bring us off from all created foundations, that he himself may be our life and our portion for ever.

IV. It will mean also, lastly, THE ULTIMATE DESTINY. Carrying out the idea of purity, our ultimate destiny is a destiny of purity, perfection in holiness and in righteousness. We have snow and wool mentioned in our text, and the very words suggest to me two scriptures, with which I will close, expressive of the purity of the destiny of the saints. 55th of Isaiah, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven;" we keep walking among the snow as much as we can this morning, because it is very pleasant. Why, say you, it is very cold; no, this is not cold snow, it is warm snow. Gospel snow was never cold yet, except in the pleasing sense, to the feverish soul; that is all. "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void;" it shall not come back and say, Father, they won't come; no, no danger of that; "but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it;" "it shall accomplish that which I please;" not that which angels please, not that which men please, but "that which I please." "And it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." So I have sent it to tell you that "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Then the destiny; "ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing;" they shall be glad to see you; "and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Here is the purity and glory of the destiny implied in our text. There is another scripture which I intended to have named; Daniel vii.; where the Saviour, in sweet accordance with all this, appears in that purity as the pattern of that to which we are to come; his garment white as snow, the hair of his head like pure wool; there he appears in his majesty, with thousand thousands ministering unto him, ten thousand times ten thousand standing before him, to wait his pleasure concerning the saints; the judgment was set, and the books were opened; that is, the books of the Bible, opened to the saints; and the result is, they take the kingdom, possess the kingdom, and enjoy the kingdom, for ever and ever. Amen.

Now ready. Part I and 2,

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