

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, December 16th, 1860

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 2 Number 103

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matthew 24:14

YOU would naturally think that “all the world” here means the universal world; and that “all nations” here means all nations literally and universally; and the end that is to come, when the gospel has been preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, you would naturally think is the end of the world. But no such thing; all the world here means nothing more and nothing less than the Jewish world; and all the nations here means nothing less, nothing more, than the different tribes that at that time inhabited the land of Canaan; and the end here spoken of means nothing less, nothing more, than the end of that dispensation, and the end of the Jewish world. And you are aware that in ancient times, before the Israelites entered into Canaan, the different tribes that inhabited that land, were called nations, seven nations; and the territorial extent of some of those nations did not equal the territorial extent of some of the counties of England. So that all the world here means all the Jewish world; and all the nations means all the tribes that inhabited that land; for it is not true that the gospel has ever yet been preached to all the world; it is not true that the gospel has ever been a witness to all nations. If we take, for instance, in round numbers the present populations of the globe to be 1200 million, there are about 800 million out of the 12 that have never yet heard of Christianity. Where then is your fact to give propriety to such an interpretation, that all the world here means all the world literally, and that all the nations here mean all the nations literally; and that the end here means the end of the universal world? Yet that is what the language would seem to imply; taken by itself, this is the construction we should put upon it. But we must not take it by itself: we must take it in accordance with that to which it belongs, and in accordance with the circumstances with which the Savior surrounds these words. Ah, how much delusion there is abroad as to the meaning of the Scriptures; how many thousands there are that call themselves Christians, and some I think that are Christians too, that rather glory than not in not understanding the Scriptures. If a difficult subject is brought forward, they say, Well, I don’t trouble myself about it. More shame for you, and I don’t understand it, and I don’t wish to understand it. And the more the shame for you. What! Mysteries given in the Bible that pertain to your soul’s welfare, pertain to your eternal salvation and to the eternal glory of God; and the Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and make it a glory that they don’t understand them! I am sure such a spirit is not the spirit of the living God. But to prove to you that our text has the meaning that I have suggested, I will

just in order to make the matter clear, read the next two verses, and that will confirm what I have said. "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso reads let him understand,);" not glory in his ignorance, but let him understand. Now turn to Daniel nine; and you will find in that chapter a clear prediction of the coming of Christ, and what Christ was to do, that he was to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up, finish up, and complete, vision and prophecy. You will find in the same ninth of Daniel that there is a prince spoken of that is to destroy Judea, that is to destroy the temple, and the city, and the people; that is the abomination that makes desolate. The abomination was the presence of a foreign army in Judea; and that abomination made desolate. So that before that time should come, before this Roman army should destroy the land, destroy the nations, and so put an end to that world, that Jewish world, and to put an end to that, before that for 40 years the gospel should be preached to all that Jewish world. "You are my witnesses in Judea, and in Samaria, and in Galilee;" and after that, to the ends of the earth. So that the gospel before the destruction of Jerusalem was preached in all the Jewish world; and it was a witness unto all the nations of that land before the end came. Take it in this way, and then you will get the truth of it, the meaning of it, and I had almost said the advantage of it. Now again "Then let them which are in Judea flee into the mountains." Now I want to know if all the world, here means all the world literally, and all nations literally, and the end of the world generally? What propriety there would be in the Savior's advice given here, "then," when this end shall be approaching "let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains?" But, my hearer, if it means the end of this world, there would be no mountains to flee to. "Let them that shall be in Judea flee to the mountains." And this did literally take place: for just as the signs of destruction approach, the Christians, who understood this matter, and who, of course, were believers in what the Savior said, and took his advice, we well know that they actually did cross the Jordan, just about where the Israelites crossed that river when they entered into the promised land 1500 years before; and that the Christians did flee into the opposite, the Eastern, mountains, and there they were sheltered during the actual destruction of the land. Here then, take it in this way, you will see how needful it is that we should read the Scriptures carefully. Notice that parenthetical clause thrown in at the end of the 15th verse, "Whoso reads, let him understand." It may not be of such importance, I grant, to us to understand this in the literal circumstances to which it refers, but it was a matter of life and death importance to those who lived in that day. I am sure if you were in the village, or town, or place where your destruction was sure, you would reckon that man to be a friend who came to you, and pointed out the time, and the way, and the place to which you should flee in order to escape. Just so it was here. Thus then, we see that all the world here means the Jewish world; and the nations mean the nations that inhabited that land; and the end means the end of that dispensation. Never think for one moment, friends, that the meaning of the word depends upon the letters of which it is composed; never for one moment think that the meaning of the sentence depends upon the words of which it is composed. You may find exactly the same sentences in different parts of the Bible, and as different in their meaning as anything well can be. Hence in other scriptures were this very word "world" occurs, it has in some places a universal meaning; as when the Savior said, "Go you into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Let that be as universal as you please.

Now then, after proving, which the word does prove, that the word "world" in our text means the Jewish world; and that the "all nations" here simply meant the nations inhabiting that land. After having thus given what I think to be the meaning of our text, I will now proceed to notice what

lies before me under two main ideas. It is not my intention to dwell at all upon the end of that dispensation; I have said, I think quite enough upon that. The two main points I intend dwelling upon this morning shall be, first, *that character of the gospel which is here given*; it is here called “the gospel of the kingdom.” Sometimes you are aware the gospel is called by other terms: it is called the gospel of salvation, the gospel of the grace of God, the gospel of Christ, and the gospel of God; but here, for a special reason, which will show itself as we go along, it is called “the gospel of the kingdom;” this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all this Jewish world. And then, secondly, *the design of its public proclamation*; it shall be “a witness unto all nations.” How far in a way of accommodation this language may be taken from its primary meaning, and applied to all ulterior objects, is another thing; but let us distinguish between the primary and proper meaning of the word of God, and any accommodatory use that we may put the same word to.

First. First, then we notice *the gospel as here given*: “the gospel of the kingdom.” Why is it on this special occasion called the gospel of the kingdom? For this reason, that one kingdom, which was a kingdom of God, the Jewish dispensation was a kingdom of God, it was established by the Lord himself, by his command, and by his direction, and by his power; and by those miracles, and signs, and wonders which are recorded in connection with their deliverance from Egypt, their sustentation in the wilderness, and still more in that land. But now the time is come that another kingdom, the true kingdom, the antitypical kingdom, the eternal kingdom, is to be founded; therefore, on this occasion, and in relation to the founding of another kingdom, it is called the gospel of the kingdom. And hence you will find that this accords very nicely with what is said in the second of Daniel; Daniel has traced out the heterogeneous image in its successive departments, and then he comes to the fourth, namely, the Roman, he says that “in the days of these kings,” namely, the Roman kings, “shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed.” Now you see how true that is, Daniel said that 500 years before it took place; and see how true it was; it is too well known to be disputed by anyone; that Jesus Christ lived, and died, and rose again, and that the day of Pentecost, and the ministry of the apostles, that these things did take place in the time of the Roman kings, no one can dispute. This prediction said, that in the time of these kings the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. See how true it is as to the time predicted; and see how true it is as to the fact; and that this kingdom shall not be destroyed; see how true that is; his kingdom cannot be destroyed; “and the kingdom shall not be left to other people;” see how true that is; all that have been born of God from that day to this, and have entered into Christ’s kingdom, are in that kingdom now; they were first in the grace department of that kingdom, and now they are in the glory of that kingdom; and it has never been left to other people; no; the man that is brought once into this kingdom is in this kingdom forever; there is no breaking in, and there is no going out. I bless the Lord that while there is no breaking in, it does not say there is no *coming* in, but no *breaking* in. No one can break into regeneration; no, the Holy Ghost alone can quicken the soul, and bring him in. And there is no going out; neither are there any complaining’s in the streets. “Happy is the people in such a case; yes, happy is the people whose God is the Lord.” This kingdom, then, shall not be left to other people; but this kingdom shall destroy and consume all other kingdoms; Christ shall outlive all other kings, his people shall outlive all other people; his kingdom shall see all other kingdoms out; all other kingdoms will wear out, and become mere chaff and dust, vanity and worse than vanity; while the kingdom of Christ will still remain its freshness, its vitality, its glory, and its blessedness. But let us come to this kingdom and hear what the word of God says about it, the founding of it, the gospel of the kingdom. I will give just two or three samples, and that will be enough, I think, to show

what this gospel of the kingdom is, or what the gospel of God is in this feature. And the first I take is that of the first of Luke, which refers especially to the kingdom of Christ where the angel announced the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ; that "you shall call his name Jesus." That character stands first; his name is Jesus. And we are also informed of the reason why that character is put first; "he shall save his people from their sins." So, the very first character which he bears is that of the Savior, it is that of a person who has wrought salvation. So then, are we sinners and nothing but sinners? What did Jesus die for? He died for sinners. What did he come into the world for? He came into the world to save sinners. And whom does he call by his grace? Not the righteous, but sinners. He does not expect us to be saints until his salvation has constituted us saints; he does not expect us to have any holiness nor to be partakers of one particle of holiness, until his salvation has brought holiness to us; he does not expect one thread of righteousness of us until his salvation has constituted us righteous. So then am I lost? There is salvation. Am I a sinner? It is the very first character of the Savior in founding this everlasting kingdom to meet my sins for me, to bear my sins for me, to overcome my sins for me, to destroy my sins for me, and to be responsible for my sins for me, and to stand as the great surety of this everlasting covenant. "You shall call his name Jesus." It was sin that spoiled the reign of Adam, the first Lord of the earth; it was sin that spoiled the reign of the Jewish dynasty, or Jewish role, or government; but here is a kingdom set up where sin itself is swallowed up and destroyed. I think, therefore, it is a glorious gospel as the gospel of the kingdom. But I feel disposed to linger here a moment, if I can convey to you the idea that I mean, that Christ's first character is that of a sin bearing Savior, is that of a sin atoning Savior, is that of the sin conquering Savior. Now when a sinner is thus brought in before God guilty; all such a one reasons, not yet knowing the order of God's kingdom, nor the order of his salvation, such a one thinks if he could but bring a little something good of his own, then he would be happy. My hearer, you need not at all. That is the worst thing you can do, I will even go so far as to say that is the worst sin you can possibly commit, admitting of course that you do it in ignorance, and therefore there will be mercy for you; but the worst sin you can possibly commit would be to put a little of your own fancied goodness into the place of Jesus Christ, and so thereby build up yourself in enmity against his perfection, against the completeness of his salvation, against the certainty of his salvation. Now that one sin of bringing in your free will, or your duty faith, that one sin would be greater than all your other sins put together, because your other sins do not attempt to displace the Savior, but rather make you acknowledge your need of him; but this one sin of human consequence brought in, in proportion as you displace him, that is the greatest the most fatal, and the worst of all your sins, let them be what they may, apart from this. But if you are brought to feel that you are unclean, unclean, nothing but unclean, then the very first character in founding of this kingdom which the Savior bears is that of a sin atoning Savior. And you can only become a subject of this kingdom by being sinless; for there is not anything that defiles, or makes a lie, or makes abomination, can enter into this kingdom, and the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God; the unclean shall not inherit the kingdom of God; liars shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Therefore, it is only by his atonement in its perfection that you are reckoned sinless; in that way, and in that way only; can you enter into this kingdom; by his righteousness you are made righteous; and that way and in that way only, you can enter into his kingdom; and by his Spirit you are delivered from error, delivered from lies, and brought to speak the truth, and in that way, and that way only, can you enter into his kingdom. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit;" of the pure cleansing word, there called water, and by the eternal Spirit of God, uniting the soul to Christ's eternal salvation, that takes away all the sin, and shame, and confusion; and that while you in yourself still feel that you are a poor sinner, yet in him you have a life without

spot, a light without a cloud; liberty without being circumscribed; a perfection, not only untarnished but untarnishable, and then habitation which is impregnable and invulnerable, where you stand and defy your mightiest foes; for it was the rejoicing of the saints in olden time, though that rejoicing seems almost done away with now. "Your kingdom rolls over all;" they did not mean that as the mere abstract reign of the Most high; they meant that the kingdom of Christ swallowed up sin, swallowed up death, and everything that stood opposed to the purity and perfection of that state of things which he had established. This is how he founds the kingdom. Ah, if you know what you are as a sinner, you will love such a Savior as this; you will rejoice in the kingdom of God; you will rejoice that the Lord God Omnipotent reigns in such a way as this; that he reigns savingly; it is grace that reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. And so, if I test the preaching of the apostles by the rule I am now dwelling upon? How true they were in it. "Neither," said Peter before the counsel, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Peter knew where to begin, began with salvation; and your nearness to God must begin with salvation; you can enter the kingdom of God only by salvation. What you want is a Savior; "Lord, save me," that is the first thing; after you have got salvation, after you possess that, then you shall be a saint, not before; you will be a poor, earthly, miserable saint if you are a saint by your own doings; it is God Almighty alone who can make a saint; sanctified of God the Father, sanctified by a Savior's blood, sanctified by the Holy Ghost; the whole of it God from first to last. The gospel of the kingdom. But again, "And he," this same Jesus, "shall be great," abstractly and relatively; his salvation is great; that is the next clause the angel brings forth. "He shall be great." So, his salvation is great, greater than sin, greater than Satan, and greater than the curse, and greater than death, and greater than hell, and greater than all your tribulations. Then he will also be great relatively. Oh, how great will he appear to you; you will say, how can I do this great wickedness to neglect this salvation, now that I do in my soul feel my need of it? How can I be that hypocrite to come forth into public, and be ashamed to own his truth? Unite with a parcel of Pharisees, duty faith hypocrites, while my conscience bears me testimony that I am a sinner from tip to toe, that I am as black as hell, as filthy as hell, as sunken as hell; and I am more like a demon in myself than anything else, and yet come forth in public and be ashamed to unite with the sect everywhere spoken against, but unite with a parcel of hypocritical Pharisees for the sake of a good name on earth, a little more custom to my shop, a little more worldly ease. Oh! You hypocrite! You are acting the hypocrite, and if your convictions are real, God will work you out of that hypocrisy, though you may at present love the praise of men more than the praise of God; if the work be real, God will tumble you out of it, the whole of it, and if he breaks some of your bones in doing it, then you will cry out, O Lord, heal the bones you have broken. I hope the very neck of your pride will be broken, the neck of your hypocrisy, and then you will come forth united to the truth as it is in Jesus. The gospel of the kingdom, then, is the gospel of salvation; it is the gospel of Christ's greatness, that defies everything opposed to it. This is the foundation of the kingdom. "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation stone;" something that is not very easily shaken something that shall wear well; "a tried stone, a sure foundation stone." A precious front stone; "and he that believes;" there it is, whether you are a great sinner or a little sinner, a Pharisee sinner or publican sinner; "he that believes shall not be compounded;" he whose sins do confound him, and he stands confounded before God, it is my being enlightened, and brought to see this foundation, here he places his hope; he says, if I may place my hope there. Yes, you may, poor sinners; that foundation is laid for the very purpose of those that have no other hope, no other foundation; "no other foundation can any man lay but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus the Lord; the gospel of the kingdom; the kingdom begins well, and it will end well too, or

rather it will never end.

Clause the third in the founding of this kingdom; “And he,” the same person, shall be called the Son of the Highest.” There is his right; first, you get his work, salvation; secondly you get his competency or his sufficiency; third, his right; he is the son of the highest. He is by virtue of being the Son of God heir of all things; his right there is none to dispute, for he is God’s only begotten Son; God never had such a Son before, such a one as he is; he is a complex person, God and man in one person; and never will again. Abraham had but one son after the manner of Isaac; and therefore, Isaac is called Abraham’s only begotten son; but Isaac was not literally Abraham’s only begotten son, but he was the only son that was the child of promise; he was the only son whose birth was after the manner; and therefore, called Abraham’s only begotten son. All God’s children are his begotten sons; but none are begotten as Christ was; and that he came not by the order of nature, but by the power of the everlasting God. But now by virtue of his being the Son of God, then, as he had no sin, never forfeited anything by sin, the kingdom is his by right; no other Son; God has but one Son, his well-beloved Son, heir of all things, by virtue of his Sonship, by virtue of what he is. And then eternal election has made the people joint heirs with him; and when they are brought to believe this, then their faith is the evidence of it, and they become manifestly joint heirs with Christ, heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him. If believers then, we are the children of Abraham; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ. So sure as his Sonship stands good so must ours; so sure as his right stands good, so must ours; so sure as the everlasting God delights in his own dear Son, delights to maintain his right; “Sit you are my right hand;” says the Father to the Son, “until I make your enemies your footstool;” and “your people shall be willing in the day of your power;” just so God delights to maintain the rights of his people; because he has made the rights of Christ and the rights of the people one; one with Jesus, by eternal union one. This gospel of the kingdom then, is founded on the salvation of Christ, founded on the greatness of Christ, founded on the Sonship of Christ; and if this foundation be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?

Let us look at the next clause of this kingdom. Now then, this person whose omnipotent arm brought salvation, this person who is great, this person who is the Son of God; “I will give unto him the throne of his father David;” that is David’s throne was a type of the mediatorial throne of Christ. What was the object of David’s throne? The object of David’s reign was to subdue the enemies of Israel, establish the mercy seat in their midst, work out their freedom; and give them full, and quiet, and peaceable possession every tribe of its inheritance. That was David’s aim, together with building a house for the Lord. Now, take this as a type of Christ. What is the object of Christ’s reign? Why, to destroy your enemies, to save you, to establish God’s throne of grace in your midst; to give you full and quiet, and eternal possession of the kingdom; for the time comes when the saints of the Most High take the kingdom, and shall possess the kingdom forever and ever. Notice they are saints first; salvation makes them saints; it is the nations that are saved that shall walk in the light of that eternal city. David’s throne was a type, therefor, of the throne of Christ. But David’s literal offspring lost his throne; but shall Christ ever lose his? No, he never will. “This is the will of my Father that has sent me, that I should lose nothing.” Did he ever lose anything? No; “not to hair of your head shall perish.” When he takes a poor sinner into his Almighty hand, he stands and holds a sinner there, and says, Now sin, now Satan, now world, now error, now death, now hell, pluck this soul from my all my omnipotent grasp if you can. Bless God he defiles all.

“Were safe in our Redeemer’s hands,
Even when he hides his face.”

Clause the fifth. “He shall reign over the house of Jacob.” Do you know what sort of reign that is? It is a reign of discriminating love. “Jacob, have I loved; Jacob have I loved because I would love him, Jacob have I eternally and savingly loved. He shall reign over the house of Jacob.” Who are the house of Jacob? Those that possess the spirit of Jacob. What was the spirit of Jacob? The spirit of truth; not the spirit that denied the sovereignty of God’s love. Jacob was brought to feel that all his salvation was of God; he bears testimony in his dying hour, tells out in his dying hour wonderful things; but as if one should say, I wonder where he himself is, he stops, and he says, Now I am a dying man, and this is just where I am; “I have waited, O Lord, for your salvation.” Why, that’s where you were 50 years ago, Jacob. And that is where I am now; and that is where I hope to be, with one alteration, forever, that now I am waiting for that salvation to take me to heaven; that is all I am waiting for, and I am praying for it, because I know it can take me there. So that if you bring Jacob and Simeon together, how well they would agree. Simeon says, “I have seen your salvation;” Jacob says, “I have waited for your salvation.” And when they meet in heaven, Why, Jacob how did you get here? I waited for God’s salvation. Simeon, how did you get here? I saw God’s salvation. “He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” I like these negatives relative to eternity in some respects better than I do the positives; because if it said, his kingdom shall be forever and ever, that would be strong language, but then the learned might bring in their learning, and say, Ah, but those words have been applied in a limited sense. Very true; but then here is no limitation here, no end; so that after incalculable ages have rolled by it will still be true, his kingdom shall have no end; and if we could look forward myriads, myriads of ages, when we reach the end of those ages it will still be true that his kingdom shall have no end. It was a kingdom that he thought it worth his life to establish; it was a kingdom, though the founding of the same cost him his precious blood, yet so great was the glory of that kingdom that he thought it not unworthy of what he was. He was Immanuel, God with us; yet he thought not this kingdom unworthy of him. I must give only one more sample of the kingdom. See how the Old Testament accords with all I have said, or rather with the New Testament upon this definition of the gospel of the kingdom. Ninth of Isaiah; “Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given.” People tell us the child born there is his manhood; true, nobody disputes that; the son given, there is his Godhead; that is what they say. But, my hearer, if the Holy Ghost does not choose to declare the Godhead of Christ there, why should we assume that the Godhead is there meant? Now bring your theories to the word of God. “Unto us a child is born.” “That holy thing shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.” Oh, no, say they, that’s not it; the son there means his Godhead. But the New Testament says it is his manhood; “that holy things shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.” Some of you are eternal generationists perhaps; I will get that error out of you before I die, if I can; a parcel of old puritanical nonsense; some of the fathers in the dark ages have handed this down to us, and men because it is old, they like it. Like a writer, who argues that it must be true because *he* has preached it *thirty years*. That is a very powerful argument, certainly; I’m sure we ought to enter the lists of intellectual gladiators; he would make a strange display in polemics certainly; he has preached it 30 years; his grandmother told him it was so, and it must be so; very powerful, very powerful indeed; who can stand before such mighty men?