

A GOOD HYMN

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, June 23rd, 1861

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 3 Number 131

“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.” Psalm 89:1

THERE cannot I think be any reasonable doubt that this Psalm was written sometime after the overthrow of the cities of Judah, and Jerusalem, and the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. Hence at the latter part of this Psalm we read of a covenant which the Lord had made void; you read there of a throne, a scepter, a crown that were brought to ruin; you read there of strongholds that were brought to nothing; you read there of the adversary being set up in his power, and everything that made the people happy destroyed, and they themselves carried away into captivity. Yet amidst all these desolations, here stands the decision, “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.” I can therefore, understand this Psalm only by taking into account the two covenants, one which was sealed by the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain, and the other which was sealed by the great Surety, Christ Jesus, at Calvary’s cross, and the language of this new covenant you find all along through the first part of this Psalm is the language of certainty: in a great variety of forms and relations the Savior is in this Psalm presented. So that here is the new covenant brought in, and the desolations of the old covenant spoken of afterwards. Sometimes the Lord speaks of desolations first, and of the provisions afterwards; and sometimes the provisions first, and the desolations afterwards; but there is just this variety in the experience of those whom he calls by his grace, there are some that see an excellency in Jesus Christ, and that see the blessedness of belonging to Jesus Christ, and that see an infinity and eternity of advantage by having God to be their friend; and they are drawn from an apprehension of Jesus Christ’s love and of God’s goodness, but at the same time have very little knowledge of their own hearts, very little knowledge of their really desolate state as sinners: the law has not yet entered to show them their desolation, as the desolation is spoken of in the after part of this Psalm. Just so it is with some of the people of God: they have to learn their desolations afterwards. Like the Israelites, after they had experienced salvation they had to be led about the wilderness, and to be brought to Sinai, and there to learn things that would be useful to them, essentially so: and just so it is now, many a one is thus drawn to Jesus Christ, and made comfortable, thinks what a comfortable thing it is to be a disciple, what a comfortable thing it is to be a lover of Jesus Christ; they do not dream of the trials and afflictions that await them; but, nevertheless, all these trials and afflictions that await them, and bring to light what they are in their own nature, as being destitute of anything that is good, all this only has a tendency, under the Lord’s management, to endear his mercy, to endear his name, and to endear his truth. When they begin to realize this desolation state, they now begin to read the Bible in a way they never did

before; for after all every man will read the Bible in his own way. If a man is a profane man, he, perhaps does not care to read the Bible at all, and if the man be a Pharisaic man he will read the Bible pharisaically, that is, he will always be legalizing it, doing all he can to pervert the gospel; and on the other hand, if a man be really poor in spirit, and really broken down, and really humbled before the Lord, and really brought to feel that if he be saved it must be only by the mercy of the Lord, this man will read the Bible in a different way from any other person; he will see that he cannot meet the threatening's of God's word; he will see that he cannot meet the law of God, and that there are a great many precepts that he cannot meet, such for instance, as "he that is angry with his brother is a murderer;" why, there is no Christian can meet that precept in his own person, because every Christian knows that he is the subject of that anger at times. And therefore this man is sensible then of his desolate state, and being unable to meet these threatening's, and the law, and to meet many of the precepts, he begins to look about him for one that could meet the threatening's, and the law, and the precepts; and to his delight, he finds that Jesus Christ has done all this, that he was made a curse, that all the curses due to the sinner were concentrated in Christ, and that he is the end of the law, and that he is the perfection of the precept; and he is the way in which that declaration will stand eternally good, that the scriptures cannot be broken. When the sinner is thus broken down, and thus sees the law, how does he hail the Savior by the feet, as it were: how does he then sit at the Savior's feet; how does he then admire the gracious words that proceed out of the mouth of the Lord; and how is he then prepared for the language of our text, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever."

Now I notice our text this morning under a threefold form. First, *the mercies of the Lord*; secondly, *their duration*; they are forever: and, thirdly, *their certainty*.

Now it might seem to you that there is no difference between their duration and their certainty. Well, I mean a difference: and the difference I mean, is this, that the mercy of the Lord in itself may endure forever, but is it certain towards us? That is the difference I mean between the mercy continuing as an attribute, and its continuing towards us. Our text clearly shows that the Psalmist believed that not only would the mercy continue as an attribute in God forever, but that it would continue towards him forever: that it would be his portion and his heritage forever, that it never would depart from him. Therefore, not only is there mercy forever, but there is mercy for me forever to possess: so that I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever.

First. I notice then, first, *the mercies of the Lord*. And although I shall not run by way of quotation literally through the 136th Psalm, I shall nevertheless take the suggestions of that Psalm, to enable me to set before you these mercies of the Lord in their variety of adaptation unto us as sinners. In the 136th Psalm you have the mercy of the Lord there associated, first with his eternity, and then with his supremacy, and then in creation, and then in interposition, and then in infinity of condescension, and then in ultimate destiny. Now let us take the dear Savior into account; do not let us speak this morning of the mercies of the Lord apart from Jesus Christ, if we do we shall speak somewhat delusively: we shall speak then like those that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; for it is the language of us all by nature, and perhaps I am speaking to some who are still holding that language, not knowing any better: namely, that God is merciful, and I hope the few sins I have committed, or the many, he will forget, I am not so bad as some that I know, and therefore I may hope that the Lord will forgive me. Now we say to such, God is merciful, it is true; and he is just and holy too, and let me just say that he never did, and

never will forgive any sinner under heaven on the ground of that sinner not being so bad as his fellow sinner. If you can, find an instance of that in the Bible, where the Lord forgives one on the ground that that one does not happen to be so bad as the other, there is no such ground as that; yet that is sandy, the false foundation upon which we all blindly and foolishly build until the Lord teach us better. You read in the Old Testament that the mercy that the Lord showed, was for his name's sake, and that name has special reference to Christ. God's name is in Christ, and the only saving relation that the Lord bears to men is in Jesus Christ.

Now in that Psalm we have the mercy of the Lord associated with his eternity. "Give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever." This is the first feature of this mercy. And I am sure you will not be angry with me for giving way to a little sameness, as it were here, what we have recently touched upon, namely, the eternity of Christ's priesthood. Just look at this, that in the 1st verse of the 136th Psalm, where in our version it is, "Give thanks unto the Lord," the word in the original there is Jehovah: special reference to God's eternity. Now take Christ's eternal priesthood with you there, and say to yourself, How can Jehovah, the holy, just, and good, and upright, how can he consistently with his holiness and his justice be merciful forever unto me? for his mercy endures forever. Ah, associate, my hearer, our great Melchizedek therewith, that Jesus Christ had none before him, and that there is none after him, that he is a priest for ever after the power of an endless life; here we have the eternity of God's mercy, the very thought of it is encouraging, the very thought of it is delightful, for although we have to live in this world but a little while, yet we have to exist through the endless ages of eternity. What shall we do with vast eternity, how shall we meet vast eternity, how shall we meet an unknown and eternal world, how shall we meet it? Here is Jehovah in his eternity, and here is the Great High Priest of our profession, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. So that, by the eternity of Jehovah, and by the eternity of Christ's priesthood, his mercy endures forever. Have you, my hearer, come, let us ask the question, for I have not time to go much into detail as regards your feeling, any further than just to say here, have you something in you that responds to this sentiment of the Bible, namely, that it is by the eternity of Jehovah and by the eternity of Christ's priesthood that his mercy endured forever? Do you feel as to your heart as if you would realize your interest in this, and do you begin to look at life, and death, and judgment, and eternity in the light of this eternal mercy, which mercy sweetly accords with the perfection of Christ's priesthood? And if there be no defect, no circumscription, no lack in that priesthood, there will be no lack in this mercy of the Lord, which is from everlasting to everlasting. I do think, then, this is one of the phases, or one of the aspects of the Lord's mercy, which we have here. There is something in it far beyond what I can set before you. What a sublime, what a beautiful prospect it opens up. Here I have an eternity to meet; Jehovah in his eternity, by the priesthood of his dear Son, steps in with an eternity of mercy, and mercy goes rolling on to all eternity in sweet accordance with all the perfections of God, for there is no jarring note; there mercy and truth have met, there righteousness and peace have embraced each other. Then again you will find in that same Psalm that the mercy of the Lord endures also in the form not only of eternity, but of supremacy. "Give thanks unto the God of gods and Lord of lords," there is his supremacy, "for his mercy endures forever." Here we meet with another very sweet thought, at least to my mind, that as he is God of gods and Lord of lords, he stands above all powers, whether it be lord sin, or lord Satan, or lord world, or lord death, or lord tribulation, or the lord Pope, or lord any other adversary; he stands above them all. All these lords may stand in the way, but they cannot hinder the mercy of the Lord, he stands above them all.

Satan must go down, sin must go down, death must go down, the world must go down, error must go down, and the mercy of the Lord must reign. The church rejoiced in seeing the dear Savior under this aspect when she said, "It is the voice of my beloved, behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills." These mountainous impediments were in a sense no impediment to him, but rather he took occasion thereby to show the infinitude of his love, the greatness of his power, the faithfulness of his word, the efficacy of his blood, the truth of prediction, the will of the Father, in a word, the supremacy of that mercy that rules overall, so that those things that thus stood in the way he has removed out of the way. Taking this view also, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever."

Then the third idea given in that Psalm is creation: "To him who alone does great wonders." So, the Psalmist goes on to speak of the various departments of creation, and associates with each department mercy enduring forever. And so, my hearer, do we not read that the world was made by Jesus Christ, and for Jesus Christ; and do we not read that all things are yours, "whether the world, or life, or death, or Paul, or Cephas, all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." But let us come closer than this; do you ask the reason why you were created, why you exist as a creature? I speak now to the Christian; I do not speak to you now that are not Christians, because I do not know why you were created; whether you were created and left where you were in the fall I cannot tell; God grant it may not be so. But those of you that know your state, and that know what it is to sigh for mercy, if you ask why you were created, you will find an answer in that sweet testimony; and it is, that you might be a vessel of mercy; God created you in order that he might have you as an object of his love, of his redemption, as a vessel of his mercy; that Jesus might have you as one of his brethren, that he might make of you a king and a priest unto God. Here, then, creation stands associated with mercy. And I am sure it is a solemn truth, that creation apart from the mercy of God, I mean our personal creation, our personal existence, is an awful curse. I have often thought of the Savior's words relating to Judas, they are solemn words, he says, "Better for that man if he had never been born;" awful to the last degree. If any of you are careless about this matter, I know the Lord alone can make you careful; but I do rejoice in every instance of the Lord's power in convincing of sin; or if you be drawn and attracted towards Jesus, I will take that attraction as one evidence to begin with, that you belong to the Lord; and I would not say a word on any account to discourage you in seeking the Lord, because there are little ones as well as great ones, and feeble seekers as well as intense and powerful seekers; and very slow seekers, kind of creeping things, as well as very hasty and swift seekers: and so you find in the last chapter of Isaiah some should come on swift beasts, and some should come on mules, some in litters, all, spiritually taken, meaning the variety of ways in which poor sinners are brought to Jesus Christ; But there stands the declaration, "they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest there the Lord speaks in the language of the covenant to which this Psalm refers. We will sing then of the mercy of the Lord as connected with creation; bless the Lord that we exist, that he has brought us into existence thus to know his name. The Apostle Paul goes further still, he says, "God be thanked that you were the servants of sin, but you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." I know some say that should be translated a little differently; I have hunted that verse over, or, to use a school phrase, I have parsed that verse very carefully, and I cannot see any fault in the translation; I do not think a Greek scholar can alter a word in the translation of that verse, it must stand just as it does. What does it mean, then, that the apostle thanked God for sin? I understand it so only in this way; as though he should say, Now since God has taken advantage of the fall on your behalf, since he has taken advantage of sin, I bless God that he so ordered it as to suffer you

to become sinners. But on what ground can you bless God for suffering you to become sinners? Why, on this ground, that he has taken advantage of that to show the exceeding riches of his grace, to show the greatness of his mercy, to deepen your gratitude and heighten your song of praise to his name. And I think the Lord's answer to the Apostle Paul is in entire accordance with this. Our notion is, generally, that the Lord delights in our goodness, our personal piety, as some people call it, a term used only once in the Bible, and ought not to be so rendered, and that if we can manufacture a little goodness of our own the Lord is very much pleased with that. I make no hesitation in saying that if the Apostle Paul could have been, he was so devoted to God by the love of Christ, counting not his life dear unto him that he might finish his course with joy and the ministry which he had received of the Lord, if any man under heaven would have been as holy as Jesus Christ himself was, it was the Apostle Paul if he could. But did not the Lord send a messenger of Satan, and did not that messenger of Satan find corresponding materials in Paul's nature, and settle down in the flesh like a thorn; did it not fasten there, take root there, stop there; and did not it bring to light some of the devilisms, forgive the word if it is too coarse for you, but it is not coarser than your heart is, not half so coarse; and brought to light some of the devilisms of his heart, more than he knew before? Why, he said, this is just the reverse of what I wanted. He prayed the Lord to remove it from him; but there was something the Lord gloried in more than in the apostle's supposed goodness, than any supposed high-toned piety that men talk of in the day in which we live; and what was that? Why the display of the riches of his grace. What is his answer? Is it, "Well, Paul, I am very sorry that messenger is come to you; you should have stopped him; I am very sorry that he has taken up his abode in your flesh; it is very wrong on your part." No: instead of giving this miserable answer, the Lord gave an answer worthy of a God; "My grace is sufficient for you; my strength is made perfect in weakness." And the Lord blessed the apostle with a corresponding understanding of it; and the apostle would rather be tried with all these devilisms, if it were to make him more acquainted with the grace of God, that he may preach it more effectually to the conversion of sinners, and the forwarding of the saints of God to their eternal destiny, than he would live in all the fleshly piety of which men boast, while at the same time the grace of God would sink and the truth of God be thought little of in his estimation. "Most gladly therefore will I glory in mine infirmities." Here then, my hearer, it is in connection with the mercy of God we shall have to bless God for suffering the fall to take place, for suffering all the afflictions that have overtaken us. Job had to bless God no doubt in time even for all the troubles he had come through, for if it be true that all things work for good, then the time must come when the working together of all things for good shall be so clearly revealed to the saints that they will give glory to God for all the way that he has led them.

Then another form of that mercy is that of interposition. The Lord interposed, overthrew the Egyptians, and brought the Israelites out. Here is sovereignty. Now we have noticed eternity, supremacy, and creation; take Jesus Christ in all three: no mercy without him in the eternity of it, in the supremacy of it. And so, creation, the purpose, the chief purpose of creation, being that men should glorify God for his mercy bestowed through Jesus Christ. The Lord smote the first-born of Egypt, brought his people out; here is sovereignty: "that you may know that the Lord has put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." Now are you prepared for this? I will try and explain a little piece of mystery to you here, and that is the reason that men are not willing to admit the sovereignty of God. There is a kind of secret reason: I know the ostensible reason, but there is a secret reason; and the reason is this: When a man half converts himself, and the devil does the other half, the man makes himself in a great measure. Why, I was as good a Christian as any

Wesleyan living, for six weeks on a stretch sometimes; I used to be converted by a thunderstorm, or a dark night, or a sort of a fright. I thought, I can be a Christian if I like, and I can cease to be a Christian if I like. Hence then they cannot admit of God's sovereignty, because they know not what that conversion is which man may not bring about. But let God take hold of a man as he did of Saul of Tarsus, and lay him down under a sight and sense of what he really is and where he is, and let God's hand be heavy upon that man, and keep him down, and he cannot get up: there is his guilt, and his sin, and his bondage, and his wretchedness, and the law, and the wrath, and the sword, and the fire, but for the life of him he cannot see the lamb for himself and the burnt offering. He knows that Christ died for sinners but cannot see that Christ died for him; he knows that God has a people but cannot see that he is one. There he is stripped and humbled and cannot help himself; there he lies. Now there is a set time to favor such, and by-and-bye, the Lord comes in with the command, "Deliver him from going into the pit, I have found a ransom;" or as the margin reads it, which is an explanatory sort of word, "I have found an atonement;" and then peace comes rolling into his soul, and brings him into the eternity, supremacy, and greatness of his mercy. Now that man cannot deny the sovereignty of God, he has it in his own experience: he was cut down in a way that none, but God could cut him down; and when he was down, he felt that none but the Lord could raise him up; and now he is raised up, he is raised up in a way that none but the Lord could raise him up. Hence said one, "He brought me up out of the horrible pit, he set my feet upon a rock, he established my goings; he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."

But again, here is this mercy also in the infinity of its condescension. "He remembered us in our low estate." I have a favor to ask of you that love Jesus Christ, that you do not stop short in comprehending the meaning of that scripture. "He remembered us in our low estate." Well, say you, that means my state by nature. True, that is right. I am in the pit of sin, the pit of death, the pit of corruption, the very precipice of hell, virtually in hell, that was my low estate. That is quite right and proper, but there is something else you must take into consideration, and that is the manner in which he remembered you in your low estate, and then you will read out the deep part of that scripture at Calvary's cross, Jesus Christ so remembered you in your low estate as to go into it himself, he was laid in the lowest hell, in the deep, in the lowest pit, he went into deep mire, for so says the 69th Psalm, wherein was no standing. That is the kind of remembrance by which God the Father remembered you, sent his dear Son into your low estate, Christ went down into your low estate; and the Holy Spirit, in sweet keeping with Christ's humiliation, came to you in your low estate; and thus you are indebted to the Eternal Three; to the Father for laying help upon one that is mighty; to the Savior for being all the help you needed; and to the Holy Spirit, for revealing to you your low estate, and, by Christ Jesus, bringing you up: as the next words witness, "Who remembered us in our low estate, and has redeemed us from our enemies, for his mercy endures forever." "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord." Then there is the ultimate destiny, "Give thanks unto the God of heaven." That Psalm begins with God's eternity and terminates with the ultimate destiny of the people, implied by the Lord being called in the last verse the God of heaven, "Give thanks unto the God of heaven, for his mercy endures forever." So all the preceding mercies spoken of in that Psalm will all roll together; there is eternal mercy will overtake you, there is supreme mercy, or mercy in supremacy, will overtake you: there is mercy in your creation overtook you, there is mercy in its sovereignty will overtake you, there is mercy in its infinity of condescension will overtake you, there is mercy in sustaining you will overtake you, and all these mercies will meet together, and God is the source of all these mercies. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever."

Second: Secondly, notice *the duration of these mercies*; though I have already anticipated in a measure that idea, but my reason for noticing the duration of these mercies is to show that the people of God shall get safely through everything, their duration being firm as to sufficiency. You never found a child of God get into any trouble that he did not get out of it again, and such is the continuation of that mercy, that that declaration must be fulfilled, "Nothing shall by any means hurt you." Well but, say you, what do you say to the martyrs? The Lord said to the disciples, "Nothing shall by any means hurt you." Presently one comes and says, Lord, you did say that nothing by any means should hurt us, whereas Herod has slain James. Why, it has hurt him, we have buried him, and been weeping over him. Yes, natural. Therefore, how can it be true? Now suppose such a thing, suppose one of the disciples were to have said so, and suppose the Lord were to have said, Stop a little, and suppose it was John said this: well, John, I will just take you up into the third heaven to see James, up he goes, and he sees a person there, his eyes like a flame of fire, his countenance like the sun, his feet as fine brass, clothed with a garment down to the feet, a golden girdle around him: why, this is the Master. No, it is not, it is James. James? Did Herod hurt you? Oh, dear no, do not you see I am very well, he has not hurt me. Why, did people say he hurt me? Why, he killed you. Oh, he has only sent me home sooner, that is all. Well, you are as well without the body as you were with it. Ten times better, I have no troubles of any kind whatever. And so walk the whole range of heaven's ethereal plains, and ask from the first martyr Abel, down to the last, Did your martyrdom hurt you? Oh no, we are all well, we are witnesses of the truth of the Lord's word, "Nothing by any means shall hurt you." But pleasing as this is I dare not pass away from this part without just noticing the contrast. Go to the rich man in hell, to the man that knows not and loves not the truth, is not born of the Spirit of God, and say, Did death hurt you? Oh, it has hurt me, it has taken everything from me I had, it has left me comfortless, and hopeless, and friendless, and helpless, oh, it has left me in an indescribable state of eternal destitution, and privation, and woe. See the contrast. Ah, to the one to die is eternal loss, to the other, to die is eternal gain. So sure, then is this mercy, and so solemnly sure is the judgment as well.

I often think of men faring sumptuously every day, arrayed in purple and fine linen; and I often think in this great city, how many heaven alone knows, are from week to week sinking from all the splendor of earth's honors and from all the soothing enjoyments of the fleshly pleasures of time, into the desolation of hell; mysterious, but so it is. And I am sure, if we have any reason to believe we have escaped that fire that shall not only consume the mighty globe we inhabit, but shall burn to all eternity, unquenchable, I am sure we may well rejoice with trembling, adore the God of mercy, and cleave unto him who will never leave nor forsake us. The Lord holds the hearts of all men in his hands.

Third: But I come, lastly, to notice *the certainty of these mercies in their relation to us*. "I will sing." Let what will take place, here stands the matter; "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Here is the certainty of these mercies in their relation to the Lord's people. But let me look here for a moment, in conclusion, at the fact that it is the mercy of the Lord. "Let me not fall", says the Christian, "into the hands of man." We see how poor Abel came off when he came into the hands of Cain; we see how Noah would have come off if Ham could have carried out his ultimate intention, and we see how Jacob would have come off if Esau had been able to have got his way with him, and we see how the Israelites would have come off if the Egyptians could have got their way. Jesus Christ apparently fell into the hands of men, but not in reality; that which he should endure from men was pre-written, and he went as it was written of

him. Is it any wonder that the 22nd Psalm should call the persecutors of Christ lions, wild beasts, bulls of Bashan, all terms to denote their savage nature, their ferociousness, their malice? There is no safeguard against the enmity of the human heart against God. The nearest relation in human life under real trial is no real safeguard. Hence the child will deliver up its own mother, and parents their children, brothers and sisters betray each other, in times of persecution. There is no safeguard except in God, nowhere else. Now these mercies are of the Lord, and not of man. If they were of man, what certainty would there be? When David had numbered the people, he had done wrong; and God came to him. Now, David, here are three things, three years' famine, three months to be pursued by your enemies, or three days' pestilence. "Ah," David said, "I am in a great strait," because he saw that there must be trouble; but I am sure every Christian approves his decision; "Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for very great are his mercies;" my sins and faults are great and numerous, but his mercies are more numerous. "Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for very great are his mercies; let me not fall into the hands of man." Ah, alas, alas, poor changeable man, he has a certain interest in a certain direction today, and that interest sways him most dreadfully. Ah, what I see of this in London. I do not wish to be harsh, but when I look at our shopkeepers, some of them great shopkeepers, having their chaplain, and all but forcing their servants through forms of religion, what is it for? Do these gentlemen that have these establishments in their houses, do they care aught for the souls of the young men and the young women? Not a button. Their object is to work upon their consciences, make them afraid to do wrong, make better servants of them, to get more money by their muscles, more marrow out of their bones. And when these gentlemen have made their fortunes, they retire; bury themselves in some splendid farm in the country or some splendid estate; and the young women and the young men that they professed such hypocritical concern for, may all go to the devil now for aught they care. And what does the shopkeeper say to himself? Now what chapel shall I go to? I must go to where it will have a tendency to raise me in the estimation of my own servants and in the estimation of the public; and so, I shall pass for a respectable man, and get on in the world. And yet they think the Lord will take this for religion. Why, it is nothing but the worst hypocrisy.