

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A GOOD POSITION, AND TIMELY HELP.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 21ST, 1861, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

'And the earth helped the woman.' Revelation xii. 16.

BEING carried by the current of my discourse last Lord's day morning into this chapter, I feel disposed to stay there. And in noticing our subject this morning, I think it will be important for me to define the position of the woman, that is, the position of the church; the woman, undoubtedly, is the church, and what of course is true of the church as a body, is true of the church individually. Were it not for this, I am sure I should not be able this morning to speak from these words in a way that would be profitable to us. I therefore desire while I look at the church as a body, not to lose sight of individuality. Religion, as we often say, is a personal thing. And it is therefore, under this idea that I shall, in the first place, carefully define *that position into which every saved soul is sure to be brought*, in order to shew afterwards *what that is from which Satan by the flood that he casts out of his mouth tries to move this woman*, tries to move her away from. After I have given this, I shall then shew *the several senses in which the earth helped the woman*.

I. First, then, I notice **THE POSITION**; and I say in so doing I shall treat it individually, that is, the position into which each saved soul must be brought. This 12th chapter of the Revelation represents the woman as clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, as I indicated last Lord's day morning, all these are taken from the Old Testament; and we shall this morning as we go along see clearly a complete correspondence between the Old Testament upon this matter, and what is said in this chapter of the woman, the church. Now then, as to her position, or the position into which every saved soul must be brought,—we have in the 54th of Isaiah a description of it; and then I shall have to go from there to the 60th of Isaiah. First then, the church stands in matrimonial and indissoluble relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.' And you observe

that in this position of relationship to Christ everything that is against us is entirely lost.

Let me once more go over the ground I have often gone over before, where it is said that 'thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth.' Our youth there means our natural origin, that we were conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity, and have gone astray from the womb, speaking lies. Now this is our natural state: but by oneness with Jesus Christ we have another youth—we are born of God an incorruptible seed: and in this oneness with Jesus Christ our original sin is, by his atonement, taken away, and our condemnation by original sin, for the judgment was by one man's offence to condemnation, but this condemnation by the Lord Jesus Christ is taken away. So, my hearer, if we would get rid of our original sin it must be by this oneness with Jesus Christ, who is the Husband of the church; it is his blood that taketh away original sin; it is his righteousness that exempteth us from the condemnation of original sin. And if this be true, then it follows that an infant can be saved in no other way: that an infant stands in need, seeing it is included in original sin, that it stands in need of his atonement, that it stands in need of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth:' and then again, 'Thou shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.' The widowhood here means that divorce under which we are by nature: that is to say, we did in the first Adam apostatize from God, and we put the serpent, the old serpent, into the place of the great God, and we became followers of Satan; we were led captive by him at his will, we were under the powers of darkness. This is the shame of our widowhood, so that we were divorced from God for our sins; we had sinned against him, and he put us away. So that we are thus by nature alienated from God, through the ignorance that is in us: God's eternal law standing against us. But the Lord Jesus Christ having magnified that law, to raise up the name of the dead as it were; the law in a sense dead to us in a way of favour: but Jesus Christ having met that law, and magnified that law, and become the husband of the church, we are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, to apostatize no more for ever. If you have attained this standing, and are brought to see that your eternal life and salvation must be by this oneness with Jesus Christ, by this indissoluble union to him, that it is a union made up of ties, some of which I shall presently notice: if you are brought into this; there will be no more fatal apostacy from it, but if you are brought into it merely theoretically, then circumstances may arise, and you may be carried away from it and apostatize from it. But if you are brought into it vitally, really, and truly, and can examine your feelings upon the subject, I think you will recognize in your own feelings something like an impossibility of apostatizing; because you will naturally say to yourself, if there be not eternal certainty in this oneness with Christ, and if his precious blood do not cleanse from all sin, if he does not carry out the great end of the love he has to the church, in giving his life for it, namely, that he should present it at the last without spot, or blemish, or wrinkle, or any such thing: if this be not true, you will say, I have no hope; but if it be true that I by virtue of his oneness with Jesus Christ—notwithstanding hard-hearted as I am, vile as I am, sinner as I am, wretched as I am, abominable as I am by sin, filthy, loathsome, and hell-born, hell-deserving, as I am; yet as he came into the world to save sinners, he will by what he has done as the Husband of the church, present me at the last great day, without spot, without wrinkle, without blemish, without blame, without fault; there shall I stand with a better holiness than an angel ever knew; I shall there stand in a righteousness that an angel never can attain to, even the righteousness of God, and so he shall be unto the church, Jehovah—her righteousness, she shall appear in her Husband's name, and in that righteousness he has wrought for her & and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, Jehovah,

our Righteousness. Now this is the position: here the woman becomes clothed with the light of her Husband, the sun; here the woman has the moonlight of the gospel to light her footsteps through this devious wilderness; here the woman stands in anticipation of being crowned with twelve stars, with the fulfilment of all the testimonies, prophetic and apostolic, that shall adorn her brow through the countless ages of eternity.

When a sinner attains this position, then Satan comes in like a flood; when a poor sinner attains this position, it is from this position that Satan will try to move you. But, as I said just now, if you investigate your feelings, you will find something in your own feelings that will make it impossible for you to apostatize. And I cannot describe your feelings upon this matter—(I speak now to the man that is thus brought to Christ, that is brought into this gospel position, brought to understand it, brought to love it, brought to feel that in the whole range of being there is no place safe but on this Rock; there is no place of certainty or salvation but this oneness with Christ;)—I cannot describe your feelings better than to take the words of the Saviour, when he said to his disciples, 'Will ye also go away?' 'Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.' I will never believe, nor shall all the men on earth make me believe, if a man be brought experimentally, as Saul of Tarsus was, Paul was, to know what his own heart is, and to know what he is as a sinner in the sight of God, and brought into this oneness with Christ, and to see what Christ is in this eternal relationship; I will never believe that that man can seek another gospel, or make light of what God has done, or speak lightly of what Christ Jesus is in his person, in his work, and in his perfection. Now the woman then, the church, stands in this position. But this is not all; there is something more than this, for mark the language; 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.' This is another part of the standing. 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee.' How often the Lord does this; how often he leaves us to ourselves, to feel what we are and see what we are. It is said he left Hezekiah, that Hezekiah might know what was in his heart. And when the Lord thus leaves us, great sins appear, great faults appear, and the great evils of our nature appear; and there is an increased greatness in our estimation of our sinfulness, and we seem afar off; the house of God becomes as nothing almost; the Bible as a mere nothing; Christ as a mere nothing; eternal things a mere nothing; and the soul seems withered almost out of existence, as though we had no soul. And yet, notwithstanding this, mark, 'with great mercies will I gather thee.' So that when the Lord comes to us again, instead of coming to us in wrath, in anger, in any shape or form according to our demerits, he comes to us as he did to the disciples; 'Peace be unto you;' he comes to us as he did to the disciples; 'Children, have ye any meat?' and they said, 'No;' but he soon had some for them; and if we are shut up in fear, he comes to us as he did to the disciples, commands the doors of our prison to fly open, and stands in the midst, and says, 'Peace be unto you.' So that 'with great mercies will I gather thee.' This is another part of the position. And this is just where I stand. Some of you may think me presumptuous, but so it is: my great sins, instead of sinking me into despair, only set me in more earnest expectation of great mercy; and my great weakness only sets me in the expectation of God giving me his great strength; and my great unworthiness sets me in the expectation of Christ's worthiness; my utter unrighteousness makes me fall in love more and more with the righteousness of Jesus Christ; my abounding diseases, the abounding evils of my nature, only set me in expectation of what the blood of Christ can do; for the Lord to fulfil his word, 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.' That is the position. Hast thou attained this position, my hearer? Art thou brought to see that thine original guilt is such that

thou must, if left to it in whole or in part, be exposed to eternal shame; and that thine apostacy from God is such that, if left to that apostacy, eternal shame must be thy portion; and that if left to thy daily faults, or judged by thy daily sins, inward or outward, or, rather, both together; even in that case, if you could exclude the depravity of your origin, and could exclude your apostacy, your daily faults would expose you to eternal shame. But great mercies come in: ah, you stand there. Who can but love such a Jesus Christ as this, such a God the Father as this, such a Holy Spirit as this, such a triune covenant God as this? Ah, what a standing, what a position, what prospects; what a mighty contrast between what Jesus Christ is for us and to us, and what we are as sinners. Oh! it is a great thing to be a groaning, broken down, helpless, poor sinner at the footstool of mercy, drinking in these eternal truths, these truths constituting the river of God's pleasure, constituting the wine that cheers the heart of God and man, the oil that maketh our face to shine; these are the truths by which a man is brought unto everlasting life. What, say some, must every man in order to be saved come into this relationship to Jesus Christ? Yes. Must every one be brought into this indissoluble oneness with Christ? Yes. Must every one know his need of these great mercies? Yes. Ah then, say you, if thousands of professors were tried by this rule, where would they be? I do not know—I must leave that. I have no quarrel with persons, my quarrel is with sin, and delusion, and deception, and error, and the powers of darkness. I must leave it; how far a man may come short of this standing I have been describing, and thus live and die; and yet be saved, I do not know; all I can say is, I should be very sorry to try it. I can receive a man as a Christian only in proportion as he receives God's truth; I can never receive minister, or man, or woman, or any other person really, until they really, as far as I can judge, receive God's truth. It is not for me to judge persons; my business is to judge principles and fruits; I am to know them by their fruits. What the Lord may do on behalf of such I do not know; how far a man may live in a considerable amount of error, and yet be saved at the last, salvation being of grace, I do not know; but are we to do evil that good may come; are we to sin that grace may abound; are we to insult God because he is loving to us and kind to us; are we to go over to that which would destroy us if it could have its own way over God's truth? Let us stand fast; and having done all, to stand in this relationship to Christ, and in this blessed declaration, that great mercies shall from time to time in magnitude surpass all our sins, and shall gather us into all those times of fellowship that the Lord hath for us.

I will mention only one more, at least from the 54th of Isaiah, that the woman, or the church made up of individuals, is brought into this relationship, each man brought to know his need of being gathered as from time to time by great mercies. They get sick, and diseased, and wander, and get lost to where they are, and broken down, and true ministers bring again that which is driven away, they strengthen that which is diseased, heal that which is sick; they preach a salvation that can save that which is lost. But I have not quite done with this 54th of Isaiah yet; now another thing, not only this relationship, and great mercies;—look at it, poor sinner. Ah, but there are my duties, sir, your duties—well, you ought to do your duties as a man; what of that? Do you think God is going to turn your duties into a chariot of salvation to carry you to heaven? As well might Moses expect to go to heaven in the ark of bulrushes. All the time you have that importance about you, that shews where you are, you are deceiving your own soul, you are puffed up by the conceit of yourself, and all I am saying this morning is mere Arabic to you, you cannot understand a word of it. God open your blind eyes, break your iron neck, soften your brazen brow, take away your adamant heart, and give you a heart of flesh, and then the real scene of

your condition will be opened, and you will cry out for mercy, which God alone can minister. But here is another part in this standing, that the saved man is brought to stand also in a sworn covenant. 'The Lord hath sworn that he would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart,' the kingdoms of this world, 'and the hills,' the little hills, the little kingdoms, 'be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.'

Now I am going to tell you something you will not believe, no, you will not; will not half believe it. You think so. Yes, it is a do believe. What are you going to tell us? Well, I have never yet fully believed it above five minutes at time, if I could always believe it I should be one of the happiest men in the world. The apostle desires that ye might be filled with all joy and peace in believing—not in fleshly doing, but in believing. Well, what are you going to say, then? Say? why, nothing at all of myself. Are you brought then into this oneness with Christ?—Yes, I love that. And do you love his sworn covenant? Well, if so, you know what I am going to say, but you will not be able to believe it, you may try at it. What is it? Why, that 'no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue,' whether the tongue of sin, of Satan, of woman, of man, the tongue of life, the tongue of death, of tribulation; 'every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.' This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me saith the Lord. I told you you did not half believe it. If we always believed this, I believe, instead of thinking so much about our adversaries, we should forget them, and think about God: leave them in his hands, go on with our business, go on with our lawful callings in the world, and go on praying, believing, reading, looking to the Lord, running with patience the race that is set before us. God hath said, and what he has said must be fulfilled. Why if the martyrs had not believed this, they could not have endured what they did. But if you go away from the truth, if you just stoop half an inch, the devil will get a corner of his yoke upon you, get his yoke upon your neck, and if you stoop a little lower, he will get his yoke completely on. Stand upright, eighteen feet high, like the columns and pillars of the temple, as good John Bunyan said, the tallest giants were but nine cubits high, but the pillars of the temple were eighteen cubits. Therefore, the Lord help us to stand in it, walk in it, glory in it, and if Shimei curse, if Haman erect his gallows, Nebuchadnezzar his furnace, or the lion's den, or whatever may be in the way, there is God's Word—and if God give us faith in that word we shall stand by faith like iron pillars, like a defenced city, like a brazen wall, against the assaults of the devil and all his hosts, and say, Whom shall I fear? since the Lord is my life, and my light, and the strength of my life, and my salvation, of whom shall I be afraid? Who indeed? for if God be for us, who can be against us? Any wonder that Satan should try to move the woman from this position? Ah, Satan sees you in this oneness with Christ, he sees you in this order of mercies whose magnitude and force exceed the magnitude and force of your sin, he sees you standing in this sworn covenant, he sees you standing on this firm ground where God will never leave nor forsake you.

Now Satan cast a flood out of his mouth, that the woman might be carried away from this position. Now to shew you I am right, if you go to the 60th of Isaiah, see the sweet correspondence there between that and this chapter. Here the woman appears, as we have said, clothed with the sun; there it says, 'Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!' Go to the end of that chapter, or towards the end; what does it say? 'The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee.' I take the sun and the moon there to mean

natural acquirements, human intellect, human learning: you shall come away from the natural to the supernatural; 'for the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light,'—there it is, 'and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down.' Christ went down once, but he is risen to go down no more: 'neither shall thy moon,' which I take to mean the gospel, 'withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.' Have you attained to this position, my hearer; art thou brought into this position? If so, thou art one of David's mighty men; if so, thou art an heir of glory, a citizen of heaven, a true disciple of Christ, a son of God; a child of God, an heir of God; if so, then God in all he is, in all he has, in all he has done, in all he is doing, in all he will do, is thine, thine, and thine for ever; he is indeed then thy portion; he will indeed increase thy greatness, and comfort thee on every side, that thou mayest for ever sing of his righteousness, sing aloud of his amazing mercy.

There is a point I wish to make very clear here, which lies on my mind very weighty, and it is this; if you notice—now mind what I am going to say—that there are no chapters in all the Testament wherein the conversion of the Gentiles is more positively declared than in these two chapters, the 54th of Isaiah and the 60th of Isaiah. You say, what of that? Now what is the kind of gospel contained in the 54th of Isaiah? We have noticed what kind of gospel it is: there is Christ the Husband; there are great and eternal mercies; there is a sworn covenant, there is the sure defeat of all the machinations of the enemy, that no enchantment can prosper against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel. Now what does it say in this chapter? 'Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.' So these sinners, Gentile sinners, that are to be converted, are to be converted by the truths of that chapter; and if they are to be converted by those truths they shall be converted to them. In the 60th of Isaiah—'The abundance of the sea,' meaning the Gentiles, shall be converted unto thee.' And what does it say? Why, that these people who shall thus be converted to God, 'thy people,' who shall thus be converted to God, 'shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand and a small one a strong nation,' by these truths.

Now if I could see your modern revival people receive the truths as described in the 54th of Isaiah, and as described in the 60th of Isaiah, then I should think that they were the seed of this woman, the Lamb's bride, I should think then that Zion was the mother, that they were the offspring of Zion. But do the people that are converted in these modern revivals receive those truths? If they do, then I have not seen them. Ah, but they say, there are four revivals recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and the modern revivals are just like them, say they: and I think they are just unlike them. Four revivals in the Acts of the Apostles; very well, sir, you shall have it,—2nd chapter, day of Pentecost, what was that revival from? The positive prophecy of Joel, and the 16th Psalm; both of them thorough hyper-Calvinist chapters, I speak thus because I shall be understood. Revival the second is, they say, in the 4th of Acts; very good. What was that from? The 2nd Psalm, sir, 'why do the heavens rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion;' the same truths, you

see. The third revival is in the 10th of the Acts : and what is that from, sir? Why, the 60th of Isaiah. 'The Gentiles shall come to thy light;' and so they did, and it was God that commanded the light to shine in the hearts of the Gentiles, and they sent for Peter, and Peter came and saw the light, and rejoiced in the light, and they all rejoiced together. Do modern revivalists receive these truths? No, they do not, there is not a revivalist among the whole that receives these truths; they run away from them, and hate them. I like the modern revivals for moral purposes and for social purposes, but I think no more of them; and I think they may all be accounted for on the laws of psychology and physiology; I myself feel sometimes inclined to turn philosopher, and explain the whole, without referring them to anything supernatural whatever. I was converted about twenty times before I knew the Lord, sometimes by a thunder storm, sometimes when I thought I was not very well, sometimes when I thought I should get on better in providence; sometimes when a fear came over me that I might die soon, and my religion generally lasted about a month or six weeks, and away it went again. That was my revival, and I believe that my conversions that I had then, were quite as good as nine-tenths of the conversions of the present day, and had I died in such a conversion as that, I should have been lost.

Then again, they say, the fourth revival was at Ephesus. Very good. Go home, sir, and just read the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and see what the revival was; just read that hyper-chapter; if you like, and you will see what they were. My meaning is this, that to the law and to the testimony. We see the people of God here are brought into oneness with Christ, brought into a sworn covenant, brought into the light of that sun that will never go down, brought into the certainty of eternal inheritance, and that it is in those chapters wherein is predicted with such certainty the ingathering of sinners; and those that are not gathered in by those truths and gathered in unto those truths, are they savingly gathered in at all. Ah, it is a solemn thing, look at it, the Lord help us to understand it, whether we possess the spirit of the new covenant or not; the spirit of the new covenant is the spirit of Christ—and if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. The law is the ministration of death; the new covenant is the ministration of life, righteousness, and eternal glory.

Such is the position then that true Christians shall attain: and from this position mere professors have a constant tendency to glide off, it is astonishing. Ah, it is hard work, those words, 'Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake; but he that shall endure this hatred unto the end, the same shall be saved.' Ah, says one, I cannot stand it any longer: I will drop a note to such a minister, and tell him I see differently, and I hope I shall be invited to his meeting, and assure him that I begin to have a great respect for those reverend gentlemen. The consequence is that such a person gets a good name directly. You see he could not stand the hatred, because it is such an unrespectable thing, such an unprofitable thing, such an unpleasant thing, for your name to be everywhere cast out as evil; ah, it is a terrible thing—and yet the Saviour gives us to understand that none but such can be saved; 'Woe unto you if all men speak well of you.'

Now I did not think I should occupy so much time upon the position of the church. I shall merely explain now one point, and then close. Satan has in different ages had vast numbers of agents. When David ascended the throne in the mongrel state of things that then existed, David was a decided man, yet the floods of ungodly men that rolled in upon him made him cry to God, and feel his need of the Lord. And so the flood that comes from the dragon's mouth means persons; for in this book of the Revelation, 17th chapter, 15th verse, you will find that the many waters are many peoples, and nations,

and tongues; and their coming from the dragon's mouth is to denote that they get their doctrines from the devil; they themselves do not know it, they think they come from God, they are the agents of Satan, they are commissioned by him, and they unite to roll in upon the church, to move the church away from her position, and to make her a little more moderate. But the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the waters. Now there is something there akin to an earthquake; the earth opening her mouth conveys the idea of an earthquake; and we must understand it politically and ecclesiastically thus. There are so many instances that explain this,—but my eight pages will allow me to name only a few. When the Jews returned from captivity, and were about to build the temple, the enemy rolled in like a flood upon them, and hindered the woman, hindered the church for twenty-one years. But by-and-bye a revolution took place: other records were searched, and while they were stopped by their past rebellions being represented to the king of Persia, by-and-bye things were brought round, and the decree of Cyrus was brought forth, and the result was a revolution in favour of the Israelites: that the very nation that rolled in like a flood against them and hindered them was now by the power of God turned in their favour, and a decree was sent forth that they should peaceably build the house, and build the walls, and enjoy their privileges. Here is a revolution then in their favour, denoted by the earth opening her mouth, and swallowing up the flood.

I need not remind you of the 127 provinces that rolled in against the church in the time of Mordecai—the enemy came in like a flood; but the Lord, by the instrumentality of Esther and of Mordecai, wrought a revolution, and the result was that the earth opened, as it were, swallowed up all these antipathetical powers; and those 127 provinces, the magisterial powers of those very provinces, were brought over to the side of the woman, the church, and the Jews had peace and quietness. This earth helping the woman teacheth us how to pray, how to look to the Lord. If we have an adversary, do not let us quarrel with him; do not let us degrade ourselves, and get into a wrathful spirit with him; let us leave him; and where should our business be?—why, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father that seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.' And you will find by-and-bye from that very quarter where you expected destruction, deliverance shall come, by the very agencies that sought your destruction. So the Egyptians had sought the destruction of the Israelites like a flood; by-and-bye, when the time came, in order that the Israelites might be furnished with wherewith to build the tabernacle and adorn the tabernacle, the Lord commanded the Israelites to borrow jewels, and silver, and gold of the Egyptians; and the Egyptians, as gladly lent them as the others borrowed them, and supplied them with all they needed, and even helped them to get out of the land, and were glad when they were gone. If you have an enemy, then, let us take Jacob's example, and with that I close—Jacob did not go up to Esau, and say, I do not care for you; my God will put you to rights: I do not care for you; you cannot hurt me: that would be imprudence, that would not be Christianity, that would be a way of acting in accordance with the pride, conceit, and self-importance of our nature. Jacob took such steps as circumstances enabled him, he sent a present to Esau to appease him; but he knew that it would not appease him unless God made it the means of doing so; and Jacob would not trust what he had done, nor would he pray without works; he would work as well as pray, and therefore he retired alone, and prayed to the Lord, and there wrestled—an angel with him;—and the Lord heard Jacob's prayer; gave him a new name, softened Esau's heart; and that very man that apparently threatened his destruction now became a friend. 'The earth helped the woman.' The Lord enable us to walk wisely, to speak wisely, and to trust in his mercy. Amen.