

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

INTERPOSITION AND VICTORY.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 26TH, 1861, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

'O my soul thou hast trodden down strength.' Judges v. 21.

THE victory as recorded in this chapter was by the interposition of the living God, and therefore becomes a type of that eternal conquest which we have by the interposition or mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ: and upon the circumstances connected with this chapter we enlarged last Lord's-day morning from another part of this chapter: and I shall now this morning merely take up the parts which appear to me to require a little more attention; and in so doing I shall notice, first *the interposition by which the soul treadeth down all opposition and gains the victory*; and then, secondly, *the vain attempt made by the enemy to escape the judgment of God*: and then, thirdly and lastly, *the opposite destiny of the two*.

I. First, then, *this victory which was wrought by the INTERPOSITION of the Lord*. It is said that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera." There are, of course, opinions numerous as to the meaning of this: and I will throw in my opinion among the rest, that is, upon that part of it that may stand upon mere opinion—but the scriptures will help us when we come to the spiritual view of it, to see what its meaning is. Some have thought that the stars in their courses fighting against Sisera is merely a figurative form of speech to denote that heaven fought against him, and that God was thus against the enemy. Well, this is true, there is no question about it; but I should question whether this is the precise meaning. If we take the stars literally to fight against Sisera, then I think we must take the 10th of Joshua to explain what is meant. You will recollect there that when the kings of Canaan gathered themselves together against Joshua, and night was coming on, so that the Israelites by that circumstance, speaking after the manner of men, could not, on that day, gain the victory, that Joshua prayed, and was led by the Holy Spirit to command the sun to stand still upon Gibeon; and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, that is, the sun was in reality just going down—so that the sun stood still in the west, and the moon stood still in the east, so that there was light on both sides of the mountains until the victory was complete; so that in the light of the sun and moon standing still the Israelites could see their way to victory, and obtain the victory. And so I should think here that Sisera and his army had some hope in the darkness of night; but just where they hoped, there the stars shone with such great brilliancy that the Israelites could see their way still to pursue their enemies, could see their way to victory; and so, in this illumination of the stars, in this light, the Israelites, being led by the Lord, gained the victory. I should think this literally is the meaning. But if you take it figuratively, then it

will mean that the Israelites themselves were stars, moving in those courses in this victory which the Lord led them into, and which he kept them in; so that none could break rank, but every man kept in his place until the victory was complete. Be this as it may, there is one thing clear, that the victory was obtained by the interposition of the blessed God. You will at once see then that it matters not at all how weak the creature may be if the Lord interpose. They had nothing to do but follow on: it was the Lord that took spirit out of the enemy, the strength out of the enemy, and that caused the enemy to err. Hence you read of a bridle being in the jaws of the people, causing them to err; and the Lord speaks in another place of putting a hook into the nose of his enemies, and leading them in that way, in a way of judgment, that shall be to their destruction and to the deliverance of his people. These things remind us of what an awful thing it is to be an enemy to God: what an awful thing it is to be left in that state into which by the Fall we were brought—under sin, under the wrath of God, under the curse of the law, and under the powers of darkness; and all the time we are there, we are reckoned enemies, and we are under judgment. What a fearful position: and yet we are by nature unconscious of it, and unconcerned about it. But those who are made conscious of it, who are brought out of it, and know something of God's salvation, oh, what is the depth of love and service which they owe to the Lord in delivering them from so great a death, and bringing them into that way of escape, delivering them from the kingdom of darkness, the powers of darkness, and bringing them into the kingdom of his dear Son. However, my object will be to take this interposition spiritually, to take the stars spiritually, in order to apply it to our present state; just as we are to day not to talk about matters merely historical, but to see in these circumstances that that applies to us to-day. And I should like if it was the Lord's will, that every one of you should go away this morning from the house of God feeling sure that the Lord has wrought victory for you, that he has reconciled you to himself, that through him you have trodden down strength, that through his interposition you have done and will do valiantly; for it is he that treadeth down our enemies.

Let us then look at these stars, these interposing stars, by which we tread down strength. But in so doing we must be careful not to forget one thing, and that is the chief thing; and that is Jesus Christ, the Morning Star, he is that interposing lumination, that interposing light, by whom we have the victory. Before I enter into this subject (and Christ as the Star standing against the enemy on behalf of his people, appears under most delightful circumstances; may it be the lot of those of you this morning that know the Lord, as I go along to drink in a little of the delights connected with the character of Christ as the Morning Star interposing on behalf of poor sinners,) before I enter into this subject let me just remind you of one scripture in the New Testament upon the matter of light, which will accord very nicely with the same idea; where Jesus Christ is said to be 'the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power: when he had by himself'—there it is, the same thing you see,—'purged our sins, he sat down for ever on the right hand of 'the majesty on high.' Bring a poor sinner to lay hold of this, to see Jesus Christ as the true Light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world, that every man that is lightened in the world, truly so, is lightened by Jesus Christ. And here we see that he hath put away our sins, it is sin that has destroyed us, but then Christ has destroyed sin, and he having destroyed that which destroyed us, he having led that captive which led us captive, he having destroyed that captivity, and wrought victory;—precious faith here laying hold of this, will enable you to surmount your guilt, and Satan, and death, and tribulation, and say with Deborah, 'O my soul, thou hast trodden

down strength.' And that this is referred to in that, Christ being the Star, or, the Morning Star, I have no doubt. You observe that after Balaam had been led to speak of the Lord's interposition for the Israelites, he sums up the whole of it under this very character of a star; as though he should say, Now to sum up the whole there is a king of light; (for it is an Orientalism to denote the dignity and excellency of the king, and to denote that the king is not earthly, but heavenly: when applied to earthly monarchs it is a mere fiction, but when applied to the heavenly monarch, the heavenly king, Christ Jesus; there it becomes a delightful fact, an eternal reality): Balaam after ranging over a great many things, says,—'There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.' The children of Sheth there mean the Jews; and there is evidently in these words of Balaam, therefore, an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem; and although that destruction then lay 1500 years in the future, yet Balaam was led by the Holy Spirit to declare the destruction of that nation, and it took place just as Balaam there indicated. But nevertheless there is a true Israel that shall do valiantly. Now the Lord Jesus Christ then is that King of light. And let us see what he has brought in, so that we may tread down strength. And the matter stands thus, that 'he hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel.' And then the other words are very natural as the consequence of this luminous, this glorious interposition of the Lord to give us the victory, that 'the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.' Just notice this, friends; first, 'he hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob,' that is as we stand in Christ: we cannot understand those words in any other way. Only think of your being nothing but a sinner, but simply by being brought to feel your need of this Interposer, and receiving Jesus Christ, that very moment you stand in Christ free from fault before the throne of God, relatively free from fault; and he does not behold iniquity in you, but he views you in all the purity of Christ's righteousness. 'Nor seen perverseness in Israel;' there is another sweet idea. Why not seen perverseness in Israel? Because Christ is the representative, he is the Morning Star, and his people are the morning stars, and as he takes the lead, these morning stars sing the song of eternal salvation, the sons of God shall in the Lord's own time shout for joy. Now 'the Lord his God is with him;' just look at it, 'he hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel; the Lord his God is with him.' My God forsake me because of the depravity of my nature! my God forsake me because of my being compassed with infirmity! my God forsake me on the same ground that he forsook Adam! my God forsake me on the same ground that he forsakes apostates! Never. Why not? Because there is no reason why he should. My sins do not and cannot for one moment touch me there. 'He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel, the Lord his God is with him.' Yet how do you come to the house of God, some of you sometimes? Why, because there is much hardness, and much darkness, and perhaps in the week you have had much rebellion, manifested many weaknesses, committed some sins, have had great trials in the world; and I know it is very easy to be comfortable when there is nothing to make us uncomfortable, and very easy to be submissive when there is nothing to make us rebel. Well, says the devil of a Sunday morning, what is the good of your going, such a wretch as you are? Just as though what you were lowered the Lord Jesus Christ, just as though the Lord any more beheld iniquity in you now, than as though you had been as smooth all the week as you could wish to be: just as though the Lord any more saw perverseness in you now, any more than as though you had been as pure as an angel all the week. Why, those very things that discourage you, what do they do? They make room for this blessed truth, that he sees you in Christ.

Then again, have you not been compelled to say, Well, I will go; I think I shall get nothing; but if I perish, I will perish only there. Well, the Lord knows you are coming; the minister does not know, but the Lord knows; and the minister may wonder, perhaps, why his mind seems compelled into a certain line of things, when the reason is the Lord means to shew to you that he has so dealt with you, and so suffered you to be dealt with by sin and Satan during the week, to make way in your soul for more of Jesus Christ, for more of the light of the bright and Morning Star; and to bring you more and more off from self to know that he hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel; that the Lord his God is with him; that the Lord looks as lovingly upon you as though you had not a fault nor spot in yourself, as though you were as faultless in yourself as you are in Christ; he looks as kindly upon you as though you were as free from sin in yourself as you are in Christ; he delights as much in you as though you were as good in yourself as you are in Christ, because he looks upon you in Christ Jesus the Lord. And when you can see this, and the Holy Spirit brings home the word with power, and you are led to see more and more into the all-sufficiency of the Saviour, what is the result? Faith is increased; and this is our victory over the world, even our faith. Faith once more sees Jesus; faith once more lays hold of his strength; affection once more is drawn out towards him; and you can say once more, 'O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.' Here I was at the foot of the mount, trying to cast the devil out, but not a whit did the devil care for me; and unbelief taunting me, and saying, See what you are; but presently the Master comes, and when he comes, then the devil is cast out, then Satan is trodden down; and it is by this interposition of Jesus we can again say, 'O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.' Here then is that star of lumination in the light of which we see our way to victory. Take away this Morning Star, Christ Jesus, you cannot see your way to victory. How can I overcome sin, Satan, the world, death, the powers of darkness? Why, if you could kneel down when you go home, and stay on your knees, and say prayers all your lifetime, the devil would laugh at it all when you have done; whereas by faith in Christ Jesus, whereas the Holy Ghost enables you to bring Christ in, then you gain the victory; that is the way to victory. There is a great desire in the pride of human nature to get the victory without Christ, to get the victory in some other way; but it must be by him. And as for those carnal reasonings about this doctrine of mediation, the doctrine descriptive of Christ's interposition being dangerous, let them call it what they may: I often think I am very foolish to take any notice of what they say: I enjoy the sweetness of it—I glory in it, walk in it, live in it, and I believe I shall die in it, without a single fear. I experienced more darkness of soul last summer in my illness, and a greater confirmation of my utter helplessness in these things than I ever had before; and if I had experienced such darkness, and such helplessness, and such rebellion when I first knew the Lord, I should have been overcome by an army of slavish doubts and fears; but all I experienced could not make me doubt my interest in Christ; I was enabled to hold fast the blessed truth, complete in him; I thought, I care no more for death than going out of one room into the other; why should I? Here is the bright and Morning Star, here is Christ Jesus, and if I have not the enjoyment of it I have the confidence of it, the stability of it, the certainty of it, the perfection of it, the victory of it: there I stand; and though he slay me in one respect, I know in another respect he will not slay me. The Lord forbid I should say a word to encourage a spirit of presumption; but I am sure of this, that you that are sensible of what you are in your own hearts will prize beyond description this interposition of the blessed God by the perfection of his dear Son.

And then there are other consequences follow—not only in consequence of

this government being established by such a king as is Christ Jesus, who is always with us, never forsaking us, no separation: no, the thought cannot enter the gospel; all the parts of the gospel are eternal, all the truths of the gospel are immutable, all the truths of the gospel are incorruptible, all the truths of the gospel are immortal; God himself the life and strength of the whole. Oh! what a precious life to live is this faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. I do not wonder at its being written, 'The righteous are as bold as a lion;' for if this standing in Christ Jesus will not make a man bold, I do not know what will. But then look at other consequences: 'Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob;' why not? Because of what precedes; because of those three things that precede; first, he hath not beheld iniquity; secondly, not seen perverseness; Christ was always reconciled to everything: now in ourselves we are perverse, but Christ was never perverse, he never disobeyed, he never disallowed any of the Lord's dealings with him: 'The Lord his God is with him;' all is clear; 'there is no enchantment against Jacob.' Ah, but then such and such a person might do me great harm; well, that is very likely that they may: but if the Lord permit a person to harm you he will make it up to you, and so he will to them: yes, he will make it up to you in one way, and he will make it up to them in another way, you may depend upon it. Haman tried to injure Mordecai, tried to get permission to take his life away, and Mordecai suffered a very great deal of persecution: but the Lord made it up to Mordecai one way, and he made it up to Haman another way; hear that, ye enemies; I shall have a word with you presently, yes. Nothing to do but stand still and see the salvation of God. There is no enchantment that can be finally against Jacob: they may frighten you, and hurt you, and injure you just so far as is essential to bring you into circumstances that will make way for the coming in of all the blessedness God has for you. Mordecai would not so have prized his exaltation if that exaltation had not been preceded by humiliation and tribulation: and so it is now; we are such good take-easy creatures that we should stop short of a great many of the Lord's blessings; but he suffers the enemy to go so far against us, and then when he sees we are poor and needy enough for what he has for us, he will step in, and bring his mercy, and his salvation, and overrule everything to our good and their confusion. 'Neither is there any divination against Israel;' according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'What hath God wrought?' Here then is the interposition of the Lord. 'O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.'

Again, the Saviour answers to this character in the New Testament, and all his appearances as the Morning Star accord with it. In his next appearance he is characterized chiefly by that of attraction; and then in his third appearance as Morning Star, he is characterized as a conqueror, as giving us the victory; and then in his fourth appearance as the Morning Star he is characterized by association with eternal plenty; all good news from first to last. I think his character is indicated by the star that the wise men in the East saw; and it drew them to Jerusalem, it was a light that drew them to the babe of Bethlehem. And so that gospel that draws me to Christ must be of God, 'for every one that hath heard and learned of the Father (saith Christ) cometh unto me.' And they came and worshipped him, and the Lord took care of them; Herod meant their death, and the death of the Babe of Bethlehem too, but could compass neither; the Lord sent the wise men to their country in safety, and the Babe was taken care of. And so my hearer if we are being drawn to Christ we are exposed in many ways to danger, but the Lord will take care of us, the enemy shall miss his aim, the counsel of God shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. Then again the Saviour appears as giving us the victory, under this idea of interposition, by which we tread down strength. Now that scripture in the 2nd of Revelation, you cannot

understand it without Jesus Christ, you cannot understand it after the flesh. But take Jesus Christ as the way in which what there is said is realized, then you will understand it. 'He that overcometh,' saith Christ, 'and keepeth my works unto the end.' Now we have shown what they are; his works are to constitute us free from sin, and complete before God, and so to govern us as to make all things work for good to us. Now 'he that overcometh,' that is he that layeth hold of this interposing work of Christ, 'and keepeth my works unto the end,' that is very significant, keepeth them *unto the end*. Some have laid hold of the work of Christ notionally, and their notions have been correct, but their hearts have never been changed; the consequence is they have never felt their need of this interposing perfection, and, therefore, have not kept it unto the end, but have gone away after something else more pleasing to the flesh and to the world. But 'he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.' How so? Because the Lord is with that man, and the Lord is the governor among the nations; and if all the nations of the earth were to employ their power to take you away from God, they could not do it, or to take that life from you that you have in Christ, they could not do it, or to substantiate a single charge at the bar of God against you, they could not do it. There you stand, a poor puny individual, whose mortal life is but as a shadow, and yet in that standing in Christ you can defy all the nations of the earth, all the powers of hell, and all the tribulations that may overtake you. 'Whom shall I fear,' saith one.

'I will give him power over the nations.' Why, it is a glorious standing. There is a great deal of fear among nations upon the question of power—but then it is that of political power: but the power we have is spiritual, and is the strongest of all power, God himself being our strength. Take the 11th of the Hebrews, take that chapter, and see the wonders wrought there by solitary individuals by faith, the Lord being with them. And it is said, 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers.' Say you, I cannot understand this. You cannot! Well, perhaps there may be a little one or two that cannot. Now let me talk very gently, and explain it to you. First, then, by-and-bye, when you stand before the bar of God you will find that your kingdom has not been shaken, you will find that all the associations into which the Holy Ghost brought you still stand good; but you will survey the nations of the earth, and see that every nation is broken to shivers, that every human tie is broken to shivers, parents and children are parents and children no more: man and wife are man and wife no more: brother and sister are brother and sister no more; friend and friend are friend and friend no more; but you, one with Jesus, he is your Brother still, and all the saints are your brethren still; and the covenant of grace is your mother still, God is your Father still: and thus none of the associations can be broken, while you will see that all others are broken to shivers. Oh, I am sure if the Lord were to enable us more advantageously to contrast time things with what eternal things really are, how little would the one appear when set by the side of the other. And when you shall see all this, and find yourself standing before God in oneness with Christ, in all the completeness of divine relationship and eternal association; oh, will you not then say in the name of the Lord, 'O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.' Again, Jesus Christ says upon this very subject, 'I will give him the Morning Star;' there it is; that is, I will give him to be like me, whatever I am he shall be: if I am luminous he shall be luminous; if I am exalted, that man that thus looks to me, and receives me as his victory, and keeps my works unto the end, he shall be exalted; and he shall be where I am, in the same heaven. 'I will give him the Morning Star.'

But let me come back again. I wish to say a word to you all that are here this morning, how is it? can you say that you feel your need of that

mediatorially constituted perfection that is in Christ, that you see there is something in that freedom from sin which is in Christ, you feel that God keeping you, you could not part with that for ten thousand worlds; you could not turn your back upon it? If that be not your feeling, there is something wrong in your religion, but if it be your feeling, and looking at what Christ has done, and looking at the completeness we have in him, and how the Lord abides by us simply on the ground of what he is, then in reality you can say when the question comes, 'Will ye also go away,'—'Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.' We think because a professor is amazingly earnest: he must be right. Who are more earnest than some of the Catholics? Who more earnest in their worship than some of the Buddhists of China. Who more earnest than some of the Brahmins of India; who more earnest than some of the Mahometans? And very often the grosser their religion, the more earnestness they show. A duty-faith man is in earnest. The doctrine of duty-faith I believe, (and I say it in all soberness) is of the devil, I believe it to be an insult to the gospel; I believe it sets aside real regeneration, eternal redemption, not in the name of it, but in the reality of it, and sets thousands down for Christians, men that are not taught of God; in direct and blasphemous opposition to Him who hath said that 'No man can come except it were given him of my Father;' if I stand up and say he can, I call Christ a liar, I call God a liar, for Christ spake the words of God, and not his own words merely. Be not deluded, if you have come to Christ without Christ coming to you, your religion is nought; think not that sincerity is a proof that you are right, you will be sincere if you are right, but you may be sincere and yet be wrong. Saul of Tarsus was as sincere as a man could be, before God called him by grace; no man was ever more sincere, no man ever more wrong. Well but, say you, where is the secret of all this? Do you not believe the word of God? If you do, you will believe in Satanic agency. Do you not read in the Bible that Satan is transformed as an angel of light, and his ministers as ministers of righteousness; they are all amazingly righteous in their own eyes,—amazingly so, they repudiate the term Pharisee as applied to themselves, and will give long lectures against Pharisaism, while they themselves are eaten up with it. Creature sovereignty is what they love in their hearts, Divine sovereignty is what in their souls they abhor, though they admit the notion thereof in their heads. So then, my hearer, it is a great thing to be delivered from delusion. 'He that keepeth my works unto the end.' I am quite sure of this, that if life be ever ministered to the dead, light to the dark, or freedom to the captive, or pardon to the guilty, or healing to the sick, or justification to the condemned, it must be in the name of Jesus Christ. He is the Morning Star.

But it says, 'the stars in their courses.' This I must not now enlarge upon; suffice it to say that the people of God at large are called stars, but ministers especially. Hence you read of his holding the seven stars in his right hand; the seven stars are the angels or messengers of the churches. And so I take the stars then, if I spiritualize it, fighting against Sisera, to mean the prophets testimonially standing against the powers of darkness. This Sisera was captain of Jabin's host, and his object was to bring the Israelites into bondage, which they succeeded in doing for a time; therefore all that would rob the people of this liberty that they have in Christ are enemies. And the stars in their courses mean the prophets—and then if we take a more extended view it will mean the apostles: and they all moved in their courses. Now a star or a planet moves in its course just as the God of creation hath placed it; it is under no creature control whatever. There is not anything more majestic that we can think of than the planets rolling in their courses from age to age quite free from creature control. And so the holy prophets bore testimony of God—they stood above the fear of man; they

moved in the fear of the Lord: they testified in the strength of the Lord: and they shine with all that united light which they derive from the great centre of light, Christ Jesus the Lord; and all of them gave witness to Christ.

I notice next, *the vain attempt of the enemy to escape*. The river Kishon swept the enemy away. So, if we are not friends we are enemies. Many people say,—Well, I'am no enemy. You are, unless you are a friend. If you had to part with your worldly possessions or else your notions of what your minister says, which would you do? You would find something to blame the minister with; you would turn round, and follow not your head, but your heart, and prove yourself to be an enemy. Ah, when we are put to the test, it makes all the difference. The Saviour says, 'If any man love father, or mother, or wife, or children, or houses, or lands, or his own life'—mark that, 'more than me, he is not worthy of me.' Try yourself by this test; I do not say you are not a Christian, if you do not feel that you could lay down your life—you are not called upon to do that—but if you cannot say that he is well worth dying for, if called upon to do so. Can you say that you do in your soul testimonially condemn the murderers of the saints, and testimonially justify the martyrs in what they underwent rather than lay their highest honours down submissive at Satan's feet? And yet your dastardly parsons of our day can go voluntarily over to the enemy, lay their highest honours down submissive at his feet, for the sake of a little worldly association. Shame on them; after professing to be free-grace men, and after professing to be on the side of the God of supreme perfection; gratuitously, without any real necessity, cause, or persecution either, but simply from a little secret fleshly love of fleshly applause, can go and lay their highest honours down submissive at the feet of duty faith. It would take me a very long time to have any love to them again. I can love a man as a Christian, only as he appears decided for the truth, and is on the side of truth. I love a company of poor, helpless sinners like myself, that have nothing to boast of but the grace of God, his mercy, and his salvation. If you ask what in the whole range of existence lies nearest the heart of Jehovah, that in which his eternal delight centres, my answer is, in the person, work, and relationship of his dear Son. Hear the Saviour's own words; 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again.' But how could he take it again if his work were not complete? and justice will not demand two payments of one debt? Would it be justice? That would be oppression, that would be injustice. Here then is God's delight, and if you are taught of the Spirit of God; your delight will be there also, and every man that is not a lover of this Jesus Christ is an enemy. The river Kishon then swept them away: and so it is, if we are not thus reconciled to God we are always in danger of some judgment taking us away. They had no idea this river would carry them away.

But if brought to know our need of Christ, and to receive him in what he has done, then bless the Lord there is no judgment to overtake us. But that man who is not brought to receive this testimony, still in his state of nature, and still an enemy, he will not be able to say,—'O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength,' but he will say,—O my soul, strength has trodden thee down. I boasted of my strength, but now I come to the swelling of Jordan, now I am come to contend with the horses and chariots of Sinai, I find that strength is treading me down to hell, whereas on the other hand the man who is thus brought to know Jesus, he shall say from time to time, and never more triumphantly than at the last,—'O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength,' the Lord has given us the victory, made the conquest ours for ever.