

A LITTLE PROMISE TO THE ENEMY

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“And you shall bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15

THERE is, as you will perceive, in connection with these words, a four-fold curse pronounced upon the adversary. First, “Upon your belly shall you go,” which implies two things; first, a great difficulty of progress, for the Lord has always thrown impediments in the way of the enemy’s progress, so that he has never been able to retain any one of the Lord’s people beyond the appointed moment. Hence the Savior, in his day, frequently, as we read, cast out the adversary. And if there be a poor sinner standing before God, and seeking for mercy, and the adversary hopes still to carry that poor sinner on as he has heretofore carried him on, the Lord has convinced that sinner of his state, and will step in with, “The Lord rebuke you, O Satan; even the Lord that has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you.” So that it means the difficulty of his progression, and his being stopped at all those times and places where the Lord is pleased to stop him. But in contrast to this, the Savior could be stopped nowhere. He travelled in the greatness of his strength, stood upright and marched on, and every step he took was majestic; every step he took was substitutional; every step he took was of infinite worth; so that he thus travelled on in the greatness of his strength, until he had crushed all his foes, and arrived at that vantage ground of eternal victory to which he will bring all his people. And then the second thing, “Upon your belly shall you go,” which, of course, must also be understood figuratively and mystically, means that he shall not be able to rise above certain limits; he shall always be kept down. Hence here he is spoken of as bruising the Savior’s heel. But he cannot get at anything vital; he cannot rise to touch anything vital; he is kept below that. And just so it is now; the Christian has a life in Christ, and that life is hidden with Christ in God. Unto that life Satan cannot rise to touch us there. The Christian has a sanctification, and a justification, and a salvation, in a word, everything in Christ; and the Christian’s home is on high, his dwelling is on high, and Satan cannot rise to touch the Christian in anything that is vital. Satan may bruise and do us much injury in a variety of ways, yet he can do us no vital, no fatal injury. He is thus kept down. And the enemy, as he himself cannot get up, he does not like to see the people get up; and hence he puts a great deal into the mouths of his servants against high doctrine, because Satan well knows, when a sinner is blessed with eagle’s wings, and rises into the firmament of the everlasting covenant, and comes into the open sunshine of the sun that shall never more go down, and begins to expatiate in gospel liberty, and the feet, spiritually, of that sinner made like unto hinds’ feet, and made to walk upon his high places, and:

“Tread the world beneath his feet,

And all that earth calls good or great,”

no wonder that Satan should put so much into the mouths of his servants against high doctrine. He knows well that he is kept down; he is cast down from these heavenly regions; unto these regions he cannot rise; and he knows that when the soul rises there, it rises out of his reach. There it is, in this mountainous land, that we can run and not be weary; there we can walk and not faint. No wonder, therefore, I say, that he inspires his servants with such tremendous zeal against high doctrines. And Satan generally does this in his Sunday's clothes; he generally does this in his best dress; he transforms himself into an angel of light, and he becomes a great pretender to holiness, and a great pretender to righteousness, a great pretender to piety, and a great pretender to good works, and a great pretender for moral consistency; when the meaning of it all is, Up with my plan, and down with those doctrines! In a variety of ways Satan fights against our rising too high; and yet the promise is that we are to dwell on high, and our place of defense in this lofty dwelling is to be the munitions of rocks, and there bread shall be given us, and that he knows, and he cannot starve us there; and water shall be sure, and that he knows, and he cannot kill us with thirst there. No wonder, therefore, he should not like our rising so high. So, then, you little ones, inquiring after God's truth, do not be at all alarmed at their long faces, and the tremendous pretense they make about creature doings, while at the same time their mouths are filled, as the result of the heart being filled, with enmity against the living truths of the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Satan, therefore, shall progress just as the Lord suffers him. But Christ progressed majestically and efficiently; and so, shall all his people by him. And Satan is kept down; but what could keep the Savior down? He is risen and gone up far above all heavens; his name stands high, and his name will stand high. It is a name that is above every name that is named, not only in the world that now is, but also in that which is to come. Thus, then, our adversary is thus limited, and thus kept down, and all this to endear unto us the Lord our God.

Just one more remark before I enter upon the subject contained in our text. It is said of him that he was to eat dust all the days of his life. Now it is not true, literally, that the serpent does eat dust. The serpent lives upon living creatures generally; he prefers living creatures to anything else; and it is not true, literally, that the serpent does eat dust. It just shows that the words must be understood in a mystical and figurative sense; and then, if taken in a figurative sense, I think his eating dust will mean three things. First, the dust will mean that which is his delight, his food, his delight. Food will sometimes convey the idea of delight. Hence those who delight in Christ are spoken of as eating him, as living upon him. He is their meat and their drink, as we sometimes say, their medicine and their food. So, Satan, he lives upon profanity and carnal amusements, and he feeds his thousands with them. Hence all the wickedness, all the ungodliness that men commit, they do it by the spirit working in the children of disobedience. It is his food, it is his delight; and he delights his servants with the same thing that he himself is delighted with, namely, sin, and wickedness, and vanity against God. This is one thing, I think, that must be understood by his eating dust. So that profane people, and people that go to theatres, and all those places of amusement, utterly unworthy of the immortality and capacities of the soul, all such people are one with Satan, inspired by Satan; they are in Satan's service; they are sitting down at Satan's table; they are feeding upon the dishes which he has contrived. The wisdom of the devil contrives all these things. That is one sense in which he shall eat dust all the days of his life. So, then, you play going people, if there be any such here, or pothouse-going people, or any of the rest, if there be any such here, when you are in such a position you are sitting at the table with the devil; the devil

is there, and he is feeding you, and you are feeding with him; mid dying in that state, your portion must be with him, and that forever. Second, his eating dirt also means the errors and delusions which he shall propagate. He is very fond of false doctrines; but this I will not enlarge upon. So, that if I am sitting down to hear a false gospel, or the true gospel perverted, which is the same thing, then I am sitting not at the Lord's table. I may think I am, but it is at the table of Satan. I am listening, then, not to the Spirit of God, though I may think I am. The minister may bring forward plenty of the letter of God's word, and you may think you are listening to the Spirit of God, but it is the spirit of the wicked one that dictates doctrines that are hostile to the truth as it is in Jesus; and these false doctrines are another thing, I think, meant by the dust he and those with him shall eat all the days of their life. And I am not sure that it does not mean another thing; and if it does, then it is a very solemn thing, and I am inclined to think it does mean that, viz; not only means that Satan and those with him shall delight in that which is hostile to God and godliness, and delight in false religions and false gospels, but I am inclined to think that his eating dust all the days of his life will mean that he shall down to the end of time make the sons and daughters of Adam his prey and his food. Now it was an ancient (as you see in the Scriptures) mode of speech, that when one people rendered another people subservient to them, they were spoken of as eating up that people. It is an oriental mode of speech. And so, what are men and women? Why, they are the prey of the devil, led captive by him at his will; they are the food of Satan, they are the delight of Satan, they are the prey of Satan; and the end of this I dare not stop now to dwell upon. See then, my hearer, into what sin has brought us; brought us into a state of guilt and enmity against that God who alone can have mercy upon us; brought us into a state of delusion, none but the Lord can un-deceive us; and has brought us into a state of subserviency to Satan, that we are the mere prey of Satan; and that be forever, if we are left to die in that state, will tyrannize over us, demoniacally tyrannize over us; for there seems a contrast here, that as God delights in mercy, the devil delights in misery; that as God delights in delivering us from sin, and guilt, and misery, and making us eternally happy, that Satan delights in plunging us into everything that will make us wretched here, and damn our souls to eternity hereafter. But I will not enlarge upon these matters; only I felt I ought to make these two or three remarks upon this solemn department by way of introduction. We have had two or three sermons already upon this verse, and I will therefore this morning say nothing upon the preceding clauses of it, but proceed to make a few remarks upon what I think to be meant in the language of our text, that while the Savior was to bruise the serpent's head, here is the declaration to Satan that he was to gain some partial advantage, "And you shall bruise his heel."

Now, I think we may embody under a threefold form what is here meant; first, *that Satan should venomously and craftily pursue and per-secute the Savior*. I think this is one thing fairly implied. Of course, the words cannot be understood literally; they must therefore be understood as being not only figurative, but they must be understood as being very highly figurative. Second, *that notwithstanding this, the Savior would keep the adversary at his feet, or rather under his feet*; and, third and lastly, *the contrast, or what is implied in the contrast, that the Savior bruised the serpent's head*, which we noticed in our last sermon, but that Satan can bruise only the Savior's heel.

I notice, then, first, *that it means that Satan should venomously and craftily pursue and persecute the Savior*. Take, for instance, what we should in modern language call the Savior's moral character; see how crafty the adversary was in that. If he could but once establish the idea that the Savior was what Satan inspired the people to say he was, a winebibber, a blasphemer, a deceiver,

a devil, a friend of publicans and harlots, everything that was bad, if he could but do this, he saw that he should then get the people to denounce him; and, so far, he apparently gained his end. But, my hearer, let us stop here for one moment; let us stop, I was going to say, and take breath, and praise and bless the name of the Lord that there is not one thing in the whole range of the Bible that we are more satisfied of than that of the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are as sure that everything said against his purity was false, entirely false, we are as satisfied of it as we are of our existence. Oh! we glory in it; for if he could have been defiled, where would have been our sanctification, our justification, our salvation, our acceptance with God? for we are defiled, all our righteousness's are as filthy rags, and we all are as an unclean thing, and we all do fade as a leaf, and we needed a pure fountain to take all our defilement away. So that the adversary thus pursued him; and the Savior endured it, the Savior bore it; he bore this misrepresentation of him before men even unto death, for this reproach upon him was one of the chief means by which the people at large were turned against him. And the apostle Paul throws a little light upon this; he says, "I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus;" but now he comes spotless forth, his character comes meritoriously forth, he is indeed a Sun that has no spots, he is without blemish; and we glory therein; and herein lies our freedom from sin, herein lies our freedom from death, herein lies our freedom from condemnation, herein lies our acceptance with God, herein lies our victory over the adversary. Some of you little ones, inquiring the way to Zion, you will feel sometimes that you could set your good works, and your good temper, and your good disposition, and your good desires, and your good resolutions, you find if you set these against the adversary, they will soon all go down, and he will laugh at you. But when you are enabled to say, Ah, Satan, I begin to be aware of your devices now. I have been foolishly pleading my own righteousness; I have been foolishly setting up something of my own, but hence-forth I will go forth in the strength of the Lord, and I will make mention of his righteousness, even of his only; I will set the Savior's purity over against my impurity; I will set the Savior's righteousness over against my unrighteousness; I will set his grace over against my unworthiness; I will set his atonement over against all my sins; I will set his worth and worthiness, and the greatness of his name, over against all my necessities; and if you are enabled to do this by precious faith, then the victory is yours; you overcome both the craft and the venom, you overcome then the power of the adversary. And thus, then, he pursued the Savior venomously and craftily, and in the sense intended in our text bruised his heel but could reach nothing vital; bless the Lord for this; so that we glory in the Holy One of Israel. And then, in the next place, he pursued the Savior craftily also as regards doctrine; not only as regards his life, but also as regards doctrine. And hence he got his servants to say, "How is it that your master eats with sinners?" How is that? Well, here is the answer for you: "Go you and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Here, you perceive, the Savior does not attempt to plead the cause of these sinners on the ground of anything in them, but simply on the ground of God's mercy; "Go you and learn what that means, I will have mercy." That is what the Lord says, the Lord says, "I will have mercy." Poor sinner, can you respond to that, and say, Lord, if you will have mercy as your rule of dealing with men; if you will have mercy as your way of showing your love to sinners; if you will have mercy as your way of pardoning sinners, if you will have mercy, eternal mercy, as your way of bringing poor sinners to yourself; Lord, if that be your way, then, on the ground of your own way, I will pray with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That is just what I will ask of the Lord, mercy. Well, says the poor sinner, that is just what I want. And the Lord says, That is just what I mean to have.

“I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” So, it is mercy that changes the heart, mercy that opens the eyes, and mercy that turns the feet to Zion’s hill. Here, then, was Satan craftily insinuating that the Savior was encouraging sinners in the wrong sense of the word. And has that accusation ceased yet? No. The real truth wherever it is preached (and there are but few places where it is preached), is treated in the same way by the servants of Satan to the present moment. Well, they said, we will try again. Well, you may try again, if you like. We will watch his disciples; we are afraid we shall not perhaps, catch him, but if we can catch his disciples doing something wrong, that will stop him. Do you think it will? Ah, you make a mistake. Ah, say they, we have got them now; we have got these disciples now; now is our time; we shall stop him now; we shall bruise his heel, and stop his march now. Ah, the disciples I have done something dreadful now. What have they done? Done! Why, they have broken the sabbath! What have they done, then? Ah, I saw them myself rubbing ears of corn out, and eating them on the sabbath day. Depend upon it; it’s all over with them. “Master, how is it that your disciples”, got him now, “do that which is not lawful on the sabbath day?” That is, these Pharisees had made it unlawful; just the same as the Pope and Canterbury make certain things unlawful by their traditions; and because it is unlawful by their traditions, they conclude it must be unlawful in the sight of God. Well, the Savior says, You think they have done something wrong, do you? If they have done wrong, what did David do when he ate the shewbread, which, according to the letter of the law, belonged only to the priests? but David’s necessity made it lawful that he should partake of the shewbread. And besides, these men seem to have lost sight of that scripture (23rd of Deuteronomy), “When you come into the standing corn of your neighbor, then you may pluck the ears with your hand.” Whether the disciples ate as much as they wanted, I cannot say; but there was the ancient statute that had never been repealed, and it did not matter what day it was. All, said the Savior, “If you had known what that means” you have not learned yet, “I will have mercy.” Why, the sabbath day is a day of mercy, just the very time to eat. So said Jesus, “If you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless.” Here Satan again lost his hold; here again he was defeated; here again he was overturned. But really, time would fail me to remind you; but what I want you to rest upon here is this “mercy.” When the Savior was accused of eating with sinners, his plea was God’s mercy to sinners; and he associated with them to minister mercy to them, to change their hearts, to renew the will, turn the feet to Zion’s hill; and when they found fault with the disciples for doing that which the Old Testament sanctioned, the Savior again made mercy his theme, mercy was that by which he defended them. There is something very sweet in that, that not only under imaginary, but under real wrongs, the Lord defends his people by his mercy; we have plenty of instances of this. But if I were to enlarge upon this subject, I might dwell upon the temptations the Savior underwent, and I might dwell upon the various answers which he gave to those who tried to refute him. I might dwell also upon another point, namely, that bruising his heel implies not only that Satan should pursue the Savior venomously and craftily, but I think it means also that he would make the Savior’s path as rugged as possible; and so, he certainly did. I have never yet been able, I should like to be able, to point out more clearly the Savior’s path, even in the external sense. We can hardly realize his position as man, in the external sense. Only imagine this, that there was not an evening, there was not a night, during the three years and a half of his public ministry, there was not one night in which they were not watching for his life, watching their opportunity to destroy him. There was not one day, town, village, or place, wherever he went to, but they were waylaying him for his life. And we see when, according to ancient prediction and the foreknowledge and determinate counsel of God, he was delivered into the hands of the wicked, so far as to fulfil the Scriptures, we see here,

while Satan inspired Judas to betray him, and inspired the people to treat him with all the blasphemy they possibly could, that they made his path, I say, as rugged as they possibly could do. And yet, with all this, though they made his path thus so rugged, yet it could not stagger him, it could not stumble him; he still remained firm, it could not alter him. Taken by the assembly of the wicked, as he himself said, "Are you come out as against a thief, with swords and staves, for to take me?" and he was hurried off to the high priest. Early next morning, before it was light, he was brought in before Pilate, and was hurried off to Herod, and there mocked and set at nothing, and then hurried off back again to the priests, and then hurried off from the priests to Pilate; and hardly was the sentence off from the lips of Pilate before he was hurried off, lest the mob should change their mind, lest the people should change their mind, lest some countermand order should come, for they saw that Pilate had given the sentence very reluctantly, and they saw there were strong symptoms against them, hurried him off, and crucified him, there and then. Yet, amidst all this, amidst all these operations of the powers of hell, amidst it all, he never for one moment lost either his self-possession, his meekness, his submission, or anything essential to the achievement of his wondrous work; so that he continues as a lamb led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers, and was spotless after all. Here, then, his people, all of them, for there is not a just man, never was and never will be, upon the earth that does good and sins not, let us, the Lord enabling us, increasingly rejoice that, while Satan thus venomously and craftily persecuted the Savior, yet he touched nothing vital; he could not reach Christ's life, he could not defile Christ's person, he could not impede his steps; in a word, Satan was defeated every step the Savior took. Herein, then, lies the blessed truth that I have just now hinted, that the Savior always kept the adversary under his feet. How it was fulfilled in him: "You shall tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under feet"!

Now let us see how this applies to us. It applies to us first, substitutionally. This was done for us. Christ walked this rugged path for us; he endured these afflictions for us, and we see he came off victorious, as I shall presently have to observe. The victory was complete. The object of the adversary was to get the Savior to sin, to do something wrong; but he did not; he came off spotless at the last. It was done for us; and the more you are enabled to look to him in that which is embodied in the language of the poet,

"His way was much darker and rougher than mine;
Did Christ my Lord suffer, and shall I repine?"

I know not anything that will so reconcile you to affliction, to the ruggedness of the way, let it be what it may, as a cleaving to him in remembrance of what he endured. It will always be true that his way is much rougher and darker than yours; because the salvation, the rugged road he had to travel to achieve salvation, that salvation is your light; the rugged road he had to travel to obtain eternal redemption, that eternal redemption is your light; the rugged road that he had to travel to swallow up death in victory, that victory is your eternal life; the rugged road he had to travel to bring in eternal righteousness, that righteousness is your justification. Ah, my hearer, we live in a day when all of us, I am afraid we are all guilty of this more or less, we all of us think too much of earthly comforts; we study them too much, we love them too much, we cleave to them too much, we think too much of them. And hence, if one little temporal comfort be removed, oh dear, dear! what a dreadful thing: you would really think the world was at an end, you would think that Jesus Christ was gone, and God was changed, the gospel gone, and we were all lost together!

Alas! alas! such is the fuss we make about a few bits of dust, a few autumnal leaves, a few toys; and some of us are almost as silly over a few worldly comforts as the child was that didn't like its nurse, because the nurse wouldn't give him the moon to play with; he would have the moon to play with, and if the nurse wouldn't give him the moon to play with, mamma must dismiss the nurse. And so, it is. But when we are enabled to look at Jesus, and remember that his whole life was a life of sorrow, a life of grief; that he had not where to lay his head; lived in poverty, entire poverty; died in agonies that no creature can ever fathom or describe; ah, this will make us prize the Lord Jesus Christ, and make us look for few comforts here, and think but little of them, for they are all very fleeting, and all the world put together cannot make a heaven on earth. No, my hearer, if we would be happy, it must be in God, it must be in Christ, it must be where Christ was happy; and that was in God. I must confess that the life the Savior lived has a great many times shamed me out of my murmurings; that the death which he died has a great many times made me ashamed of my rebellions, endeared the blessed God to me, and has made me think light of tribulatory paths. And there is such a thing, there is such a thing as being up to your very chin in trouble, and yet scarcely feeling it; there is such a thing. Why, the apostle Paul said, and that is the spirit we want, when he was in a gloomy prison, "We are exceedingly joyful in all our tribulations." And you read of some that wandered in sheepskins and goatskins, nowhere to lay their head, lived as they could, and were reconciled to it. But I say, I am afraid we live in a day when Christians are, to their own detriment, amazingly attached to the comforts, the customs, and the fashions of this delusive, truth-despising, God-hating, and Christ-renouncing world. But, coming back again; now Satan made, then, the Savior's path as rugged as he could; but our comfort is that the Savior came off spotlessly as to his life; truthfully as to doctrine, not one error; victoriously as to his death; ignominious as was the way in which they treated him, still he stood fast, achieved the victory, and all was well.

Let us now, in conclusion, look at *the contrast*. The Savior is none the worse, but all the better, for what he has endured. But can it ever be said of Satan that he will ever be the better for what he has endured, and what he does endure? The wound inflicted upon Satan is eternal defeat; he can never survive it. But leaving that out, the two points I want to notice now are, first, that the Savior is none the worse, but all the better, for what he has suffered. It is what he has suffered that gives him satisfaction now. He is none the worse for it; the smart is gone, the sorrow is gone, the grief is gone, the pain is gone, all gone; and what he has achieved by that makes him happy. "He shall see of the travail", the word "travail" there, as you are aware, means the labor, "of his soul, and be satisfied." Hence the Old Testament saints were wont to put the sufferings of Christ and his glory together. He rises now; survives it all; he is all the better; he appears now in full glory; and he would not reckon himself happy if he had not suffered all there was to suffer and achieved thereby what he has. And this was one thing that made him so cheerful in suffering. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God." So that there was not (and I think this is a self-evident truth), here was not one thing that he did not entirely survive. As to his character, as to his doctrine, upon which they accused him and condemned him, and as to the way in which they treated him, and as to the sins he bore, and as to his becoming a curse, you see he has got over it all. This is a self-evident truth, that he has got over the whole of it.

Now, friends, in conclusion, let us have a word with you upon its bearing upon us. Is Jesus Christ all the better for what he has endured? So shall you be. You shall not have a bodily affliction; you shall not have a family affliction; you shall not have a soul affliction; you shall not have a circumstantial affliction; you shall not have a trouble in life; you shall not have a trouble in death; you shall never have any trouble, that you shall not be all the better for; you will get over it all by the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, you say, I shall never get over this; I shall never get over that. Yes, you will get over it all. "And you, which has showed me great and sore troubles, shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side." Just as Joseph was none the worse, but all the better, so shall you be and just as the three worthies were none the worse, but all the better, for the fiery furnace, so shall you be and just as Daniel came out from the lions' den unhurt, so shall you. Oh, what sweet prospects are these! Here, then, nothing vital in the Savior was touched; his heel bruised, that is all; not that literally, but mystically; nothing vital touched. You see, in the first Adam, Satan got at the vitals there; Adam sinned, and Adam died. In the first covenant, the Levitical priesthood, Satan got at the vitals there, and that covenant waxed old and passed away; and the royalty of David withered and died out forever. But here, the priesthood of Christ lives and flourishes; here, the royalty of Christ lives and flourishes. Ah, then, bring me into sweet association with Jesus; then let troubles come, let tribulations come, let losses come; yes, if I were so placed, if it were possible for me to undergo what Job underwent, survive it all. Let Jonah get into the sea, he shall get out again. So then, as the Savior survived it all, and he is all the better, so shall we be to all eternity infinitely better too for what he has suffered; our own afflictions shall work for good, and that which he has suffered shall make us happy; that is, what he has achieved by his sufferings shall make us happy to all eternity, while our afflictions shall work also for our good; for these light afflictions, that are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. What do you say to such a God as this? You know there is but one thing that you dread, at least, it is the chief point you dread; that is where the fears very often culminate; and your poor tabernacle sometimes trembles at it; that is our weakness; and what is that? Why, death. What does the Bible say of death? Why, that it is gain. It does not say how much gain; no, for the simple reason that no language can describe the greatness of the gain; to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

The sum and substance of what I have said is simply this, that the adversary pursued the Savior venomously and craftily, and he pursues the people of God now venomously and craftily, and does them all the injury he can: second, that the Savior, nevertheless, completely conquered him, and that therein lies our victory, by faith in what Christ has done: and third, that while he thus pursued the Savior he could not touch anything vital; the life, and everything belonging to our eternal welfare, are safe. The Savior is perfectly happy by what he has achieved by his sufferings; and so his people shall be made happy by the perfection of his achievement by suffering; while their own sufferings, there is a needs be for them, so the word of God assures us, and they shall work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. I cannot say more. I cannot preach a better gospel.