

BROUGHT DOWN AND RAISED UP

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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**“And things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are.” 1
Corinthians 1:28**

VARIOUS are the ways in which the Lord has set forth the greatness and deformity, and, I may say, enormities, of the sinner-ship of fallen man; and he does thereby show up who the objects shall be of his salvation; and that there never was, there never will be, and there never can be found, a sinner too bad for his mercy, too far gone for his salvation. And hence, in our state by nature we are compared to the fishes of the sea, and to the beasts of the field, and to reptiles, or creeping things, and to the fowls of the air. On the other hand, when compared to that which is rational, then we are spoken of under the idea of being one with Satan, of being devils, at least in a devilish state; so far are we degraded. And yet the glorious gospel comes, and makes no hesitation, whether it be, as our almost now stereotyped saying is, whether Manasseh, or whether Mary Magdalen, or the thief on the cross, or Saul of Tarsus; it matters not what the man is, if the Lord is pleased to give him a conviction of his state, and to reveal to him his dear Son, and his great salvation; a man shall be an awful blasphemer one hour, and almost, or quite, in heaven the next, as was the case with the thief on the cross. Bless the Lord! He meets us just as we are. “You see,” then, says the apostle, “your calling, brethren; how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are.” Hereby the Lord is pleased to glorify the exceeding riches of his grace. Not that he rejects the wise man after the flesh because he is a wise man after the flesh; he does not reject the mighty and the noble, because they are mighty and noble after the flesh; neither does he receive the lowest, the worst, and the most blasphemous, and the most morally degraded, because they are so degraded. No; but he has so ordered it in his eternal counsels as to suffer a very large portion of those whom he has chosen to eternal salvation to be so placed in time, and that, therefore, he receives them not because of their position and state as sinners; he has his secret reasons for receiving them, and those secret reasons, perhaps hardly right to call them secret reasons, he has revealed; it is because he has previously loved them; it is because he has previously chosen them; it is because he has previously given

them to Christ; it is because he has previously laid all their sins to the account of his dear Son; it is because he has previously imputed the work of Christ to them. And hence, the order runs like this, "I have loved you;" that is the first; and the consequence is, you are drawn with loving kindness; and him that I have chosen, let him be what he may, or where he may, I will find him out, and cause him to draw near unto me; and the redeemed of the Lord shall return; and because you are sons, he has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. But I shall rather handle our text this morning as a matter of personal experience; and thrice happy the man that can follow in the path that I hope this morning to describe; for I increasingly feel the importance of being earnest and clear upon these matters. We have to die, and it is a great thing to know before we die where we are. It is the wisdom of the wise to understand his way; the prudent, the really spiritually prudent, is made by the grace of God to foresee the evil, and by faith in Christ, the only refuge, to hide himself therefrom. I will, therefore, take a threefold view of our text; first, *that humility which is an evidence of eternal election of God*; for all the time we are something in our own eyes, just in proportion as we are something in our own eyes, the truth of God is rejected, and our evidence is proportionably low as to our election; but let us be brought to nothing in the sense I shall presently describe, and that will stand, as is here laid down, as one evidence, though not that kind of evidence that perhaps may give the soul satisfaction, yet it is that which the word of God recognizes as an evidence of eternal election of God. I will, secondly, notice *things that are brought to nothing*; and then, thirdly and lastly, *those things that cannot be brought to nothing*.

First, then, *that true humility before God that is an evidence of our election of God*. Isaiah, in his 40th chapter, for it will bear referring to again this morning, notwithstanding our having referred to the same in times past, Isaiah gives us a twofold, shall I say, version, of the way in which the Lord brings the soul down into true humility. He first of all declares that "the nations," and what he there says of nations may, of course, apply to individuals, as nations are made up of units, or individuals; and so it is said of all nations that they are "as a drop of a bucket." Now, we must look at what is here intended; that seems a very simple matter in the first place; there seems nothing particularly meant there, but a declaration of the disproportion existing between the Creator and the creature. Some would be satisfied with that and say that is all that is meant. But, surely there must be something, for that 40th chapter is a truly gospel chapter, there must be something meant beyond this; and the secret, to my mind, is this, that when a sinner is convinced of what the fiery law of God is, that sinner sees and feels that he could no more meet the demands of God's fiery law, and that he could no more quench, or do anything that shall quench that fiery law, than one drop of water could quench the conflagration of the universe. If anyone should advocate that one drop of water would be something that could quench the conflagration of the globe at the last day, we should set that man down to be either jesting or else out of his mind, to advocate that. And so, here the sinner sees something else: he sees that that fiery law of God must stand good, and not one jot nor tittle of it shall fail. Now, he says to himself, this law must stand good in the eternal imprisonment of my soul in hell, or else it must be made good by a surety for me. Here am I no more able to meet it than a drop of water is able to meet the conflagration of the universe. Ah, then, let the Lord Jesus Christ be revealed unto such, how will such rejoice to discover that there is a Person who has met the demands of this fiery law; there is a Person who has quenched the flaming sword; there is a Person who has quenched the fire; there is a Person who has taken away the curse; and he that believes, that's the way it is to be come at, he that believes. Here am I, in the eye of the law, as a mere drop of water, should be as it were destroyed by one moment's touch; yes, if you even touched the mountain of Gods legal legislation, death would immediately follow;

yes, let what would touch the mountain, anything unhallowed, death would be sure to be the result. Here how lovely the Savior appears; he appears as the end of the law; and as we are led to receive him as having met the demands of the law, quenched the fire of the law, we can sing with happy Toplady, one of the best and greatest men of God the Church of England ever knew; he was a man of God in reality; and he shines especially when he dwells upon these things, I say, we can sing, then, with him,

“The terrors of law and of God,
With me can have nothing to do;
My Savior’s obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.”

Have you, my hearer, this humility? Are you thus brought to see that you are in the eye of the law of God, for that is the relation you will see presently the prophet is there speaking of, that you are, in the estimation of that law, as a mere drop of water, that you would be dried up, as it were, and consumed in a moment? If you are thus humbled down, then I am sure that you will do spiritually as the Israelites were commanded to do literally; there were bounds set, they were not to come near the mount, and so you will stand afar off from the law, you will see its lightnings, and hear its thunders, and feel perhaps a little of its majesty, but you will be glad to look unto Jesus; there you will see the scene is very different, there you will see there is no fire, but a river of water, the tree of life, everything tranquil, and that as I have said, come at by precious faith. This, then, is true humility before God. Again, the prophet goes on to compare us then to the small dust of the balance. And so, if you put yourself into one scale, and the demands of the law into the other, why, up you would go, and down would go the law, and there it would be fixed, and you would be as the mere dust of the balance. So that the man who is ever so accurate in weighing his goods and property and so on, there will always be, perhaps, dust in the balance that he will not perceive, makes no perceptible difference, and such is man, when put into the scale of God’s law; he is found to be lighter than vanity, he is found to be as nothing, he cannot be anything but an unjust weight. But, on the other hand, let the Lord Jesus Christ be put into one scale, and your sins put into the other, why, your sins, great as they may be, and many as they may be, will prove to be very light in comparison of his mediatorial work. Let your sins be put into one scale, and Jesus Christ into the other, then his atonement will infinitely outweigh your sins. And you are but a particle of dust, so don’t attempt to add a particle of your own weight to it; reckon yourself to be nothing, and reckon Jesus Christ to be full weight, give him the honor of being full weight, that he has the full weight of all the law’s demands. And so, to take another view of it, to take a more, if possible, solemn view than ever, put the curse of the law into one scale, and put Jesus Christ into the other; Jesus Christ is the heavier of the two, he weighs more than the curse, so that he is a just weight. Thus, then, if we put the demands of the law, as it regards an obedient life, if we put those demands into one scale and the Savior’s wondrous life into the other, there will be a weight of worth and worthiness in him that shall outweigh the whole. And if you are thus brought to nothing then by Jesus Christ you will become a full weight. Receive him and acknowledge that he is that just weight which is the Lord’s delight, and if you are weighed in the balance of faith, you will not be found wanting, but if you are weighed in the balance of the law you will indeed be found wanting, and an awful destitution will be your lot. But if by faith in Jesus you are thus put to the test, then he is the end of the law; if you are weighed, I say, in the scales of faith, having Jesus Christ on your side, that while you are nothing he is everything, here all is settled. To my mind, what a sweet

view this gives of the position of the Christian, the man who is brought to know what a poor nothing he is. And then it is said, "Behold, he takes up the isles as a very little thing." The original word there means "an atom, and perhaps a microscopic atom, perhaps one that cannot be seen by the natural eye. And so, the prophet is there tracing out that diminution descriptive of our utter nothingness in the salvation of the soul, our utter nothingness in these eternal things. So that, if this invisible atom should get boasting that it forms a large part of the building, that it has contributed considerably to the building, and whereas by nature you are but flesh and blood, and sin, and unholiness, and unrighteousness, you, you unrighteous, contemptible little atom, *you* attempt to make a part of the building! No, you must reject self; self must be nothing, and it must be in a new character you become a living stone; it must be by faith in Christ you become a living stone, by the Lord Jesus Christ being all and in all. Now, thus the Lord brings a sinner to nothing in his own eyes. There, he says, is the fiery law of God; here am I, a mere drop of water; but Christ has met that law, and by faith in him I am free. Here am I, light as the small dust of the balance, but Jesus Christ is a full weight; not anything can be added to him, nor anything taken from him; he infinitely outweighs my sins; so that here God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. And here am I, a mere atom as to my reaching up to the length of the law, or the breadth of the law, or the stature of the law. I have neither length nor breadth of holiness about me, I have no holiness at all; I have neither length nor breadth of righteousness about me, for all our righteousness's are as filthy rags. Let Jesus Christ be all and in all. This is the way the Lord brings a man into true humility, and this is an evidence of our election of God; for God has chosen these, and those that he has chosen he thus convinces of their state, he thus brings down; and how this makes way for the coming in of the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet then gives us another version of this downward work. He says, "All nations before him are as nothing." "All nations before him." Now, the prophet did not just now speak so much of this relation; now in comes the relation which this state of things bears, that "All nations before him are as nothing." So that if you bring all the nations of the earth, with all that they can do, all put together would not be able to minister one iota towards obeying God's law, or one iota towards sacrifice for sin. "Lebanon," says the prophet, "is not sufficient to bum nor the beasts thereof for a burnt-offering." What a mercy for us that Jesus Christ was sufficient! No inefficiency, no deficiency ever appeared in him; he never showed one deficiency; he never met with one thing to which he was not adequate. There is nothing, I think, more beautiful than this. If we look at his life in all respects, look at it in what way you may, there is not an instance where there is the least sign or symptom of deficiency in the Lord Jesus Christ. Sufficient. Justice asks no more; the law asks no more; and conscience, when made acquainted with what Christ is, asks no more. Here, then, while Lebanon was not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof for a burnt offering we turn away from nature, from earth's production, and look to heaven's production. Christ is the offspring of heaven; he came down from heaven; he is of that infinite value that the law and justice and holiness and integrity of the Most High found a sufficiency in him; and so by him we escape the wrath to come, and come into all the blessedness indicated in connection with our text. And then the prophet goes on still further. He says of these nations that they are less than nothing, and vanity. I am aware that is a kind of poetic form of speech, to amplify this diminution, this climax of the diminution, that they are less than nothing, and vanity. I never can understand it, only by just altering the word a little. When I say altering the word, I do not mean that the word is not right as it is, but just put another word in the place of that, which seems to throw a little light into my mind on the meaning of it; and that is one of our own common sayings, that they are worse than nothing, and vanity. You may depend upon it, that your trying to please God by the works of the law, is worse than nothing. So far from

pleasing him, it is offensive; so far from Saul of Tarsus, with his blameless religion, which he supposed it to be, pleasing God, it was offensive to him; and so far from all those who are determined that salvation shall be, in whole or in part, by works pleasing God, it is worse than nothing. You not only do not please God, but you sin against God; your very religion is the worst sin you possess, I say, your very religion is the worst sin you possess. This may seem a strange position for me to take; but it is a solemn, and to the Christian, a self-evident truth.

Now I look at you in this way. You are a very conscientious, upright, excellent man, very true, and very good, and very proper; yes, and you are everything that you think you ought to be, or that your neighbors would desire you to be, and you are admirable. Presently you come to the religious idea of it, and then, when you hear of electing grace, you spurn that; when you hear of divine predestination, you carnally reason against that; when you hear of the completeness of Christ's work, then that you cannot understand; when you hear of a covenant ordered in all things and sure, and that we are saved irrespective of good or bad and that while there is a hell to reward evil works, there is no heaven to reward good works in the legal sense of the word, because the reward is of grace; now here your religion, that appears so admirable in the mere social sense of the word, is the worst sin you possess. Why, say you, I think it is the best thing; how do you know it is the worst? How do you make it out? Why, because you put it into the place of Jesus Christ, more or less; you put it into the place of God's sovereignty, you put it into the place of his covenant; and you do not attempt to put those things which you know to be sins in that place, and therefore your religion is the very worst part of your sin, is the worst sin you possess. And so, the Jews of old, to make room for their religion, they crucified Jesus Christ, to get him out of the way. Now, just look at the delusion. So that you are not only nothing, but worse than nothing, when you attempt to put anything of your, own doing into the place of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing under heaven, I make no hesitation in saying it, that there is nothing under the whole canopy of heaven so offensive to the most high God as that of setting Christ aside, putting something into the place of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in times past when they put only one very simple human invention into the place of God's order, we see how solemnly he manifested his disapprobation. The original order was that the ark was to rest upon the shoulders of the priests; but the people thought, I suppose, a new cart would look better, look more respectable than to see those men carrying it on their shoulders, look more respectable; let us have a new cart: and they put it on this new cart and David, when referring to the judgment of God upon Uzzah under that circumstance, said, "We sought not the Lord after the due order." So that their care of the ark, as they set aside God's priests, the position of the priesthood, their mode of caring for the ark was the worst sin of all the sins they had. I know this may sound strange to some, but it is so; and I believe the world no more knows wherein consists true holiness or true righteousness, or wherein consists that which truly pleases God, that the world knows no more of it than the irrational creatures that are destitute of reason. So it is; the natural man, all the time that he is a natural man, cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them. I must not lose sight of the other side of the question, that there is not a good work under heaven, there is not a work so pleasing in the sight of God as that of his dear Son being received; there is not anything under heaven so pleasing in the sight of God as that of receiving his truth in the love of it; there is not anything so pleasing under the heavens in his sight as being thus nothing, making way for Christ, receiving the truth of God and abiding by it. Here, then, my hearer, do you know what it is to see yourself as a mere drop of water by the side of a conflagration which Christ alone could meet? Do you know that you are as light as the small dust of the balance, and that Christ alone can constitute you, by his mediatorial work, that just

weight by which you shall not be found wanting? and do you see yourself as a mere atom, and that Christ must be all in all? and do you see that you are nothing, and worse than nothing, for you can do nothing but sin against God? And if you attempt to bring in your own righteousness, you do in proportion displace the Savior, and thus offend the Most High in a way that constitutes the sin beyond all your sins; there is no sin so awful as trampling underfoot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and doing despite to the spirit of his grace. So, then, the worst thing you can do is to set Jesus Christ aside, and the best thing you can do is to receive Christ, and receive the truth, and abide by it. I have told you the worst, and I have told you the best. And thus, then, God has chosen things that are not. So, then, if you see yourself to answer to this description, you will not set the truth aside, but receive it; you will not set Christ aside, but receive Christ, and abide by him, and glory in him; as it is written, you will glory in the Lord.

But what are those things *that are brought to nothing*? God has chosen things that are not. When a man is thus brought into a mere negative, brought down to a mere negative, and is nothing, this conviction of your state is recognized by the Bible as an evidence of your election of God; and if you receive the truth and abide by it, if you never experience pardoning mercy before you die, if you never enjoy the light of heaven in the way of manifested justification before you die, if you are brought thus far you have the mark of election, and God will take care of you, that although you may be in bondage all your days, yet that can last only all your mortal days, for at a dying hour salvation, into oneness with which election has put you, will set you eternally free. Oh! how much discipline we need from time to time; week after week, and month after month, and year after year, to keep up in us a sight and sense of what we are; for after the Lord has thus brought us down, we should soon get up again in a wrong way if left to ourselves; we should soon begin to get important and consequential; but just as he led the Israelites about the wilderness literally, so he will lead his people about the wilderness spiritually, to humble, and prove, and try them, and to endear to them the provision he has made. Thus, then, these negatives, these nothings, this conscious nothingness, stands as an evidence of election. He brings to nothing things that are. I dare not branch out here to show what a vast amount of solemn meaning this part has. Perhaps I had better just, as I have some more things to say in the third part of our subject, perhaps better just give a sample of this, and then pass on. To bring to nothing things that are. First, testimonially. Oh! how the apostles brought the Jewish nation to nothing. The things that were so esteemed among men, their traditions, their organizations, their several orders of men, scribes, and Pharisees, and priests, they had their various orders of bishops, and deacons, and canons, and vicars, and curates, and all the rest of them; for though they were not called by the names I have just mentioned, it is the same sort of thing; and they brought the whole of it to nothing. By whom were such things brought to nothing? By the testimony of babes, the apostles are called babes; “Out of the mouths of babes and suckling’s you have ordained strength.” The apostles were thus brought down, as I have this morning described, and they did testimonially bring the Jewish nation to nothing; and when they had done that, God poured out his wrath, and made good their testimony. “Whosoever sins you retain they are retained, and whosoever sins you remit they are remitted.” Need I remind you of the apostate church at large, such as Catholicism, Arminianism, duty-faithism, Church of England-ism, all these *isms*, they all form parts of the apostate church; and when a sinner is brought to where I have described, it brings all human inventions to nothing. “To bring to nothing things that are.” You take that man that is brought down in the way I have described this morning, the man who is brought to know that he is, when set by the side of the law,

as a mere drop of water, as the mere small dust of the balance, and a mere atom, a mere nothing and less than nothing, and vanity, and that none but Christ can stand in his place; I say, bring that man, what will he say to all these systems? Why, he will say they are all chaff, and what is the chaff to the wheat, says the Lord? So that the Lord does thus bring to nothing the things that are; the things that we once thought so much of, why, we hold, them now in infinite contempt, and are determined, and that unto death, to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified, as our life, our salvation, our eternal all. Is it not, so? I need not remind you of this fact of the things that are being brought to nothing, I need not remind you of one more instance very conspicuous, that which appeared in the testimony of our Reformers. See when Luther sprung up, read his experience, and you will see he was brought down; though he was rather cloudy in some things, he lived in a cloudy age, it was wonderful he had the light he had; he was brought down just as I have described this morning: and what did he instrumentally do? Brought to nothing the things that were? How many things that where was John Knox the means of bringing to nothing, and many more that we might name. So that what illustrations there are of this, that God has chosen the things that are not to bring to nothing things that are. They are brought to nothing testimonially, and sometimes instrumentally.

Ah! when the minister is led out and speaking after the order I have been describing this morning, there is a Pharisee. He, perhaps, went to the house of God full of self, and self-gratulations, his own holiness, his own righteousness. The Lord is pleased to bless a testimony of this kind; the light enters his mind. Ah! he says, I never saw Sinai before; I never saw the law before; I never saw my position before; I never saw what a poor nothing I am before. Light comes in, and thus brings to nothing things that are; the sinner is brought to nothing, and then, when he is brought to nothing, the Lord will make a man of him, a man in Christ Jesus; the Lord will bring him into all that blessedness that shall make him a king and a priest unto God. So, I will not occupy more time in this part, but go on to the next.

Now *the man who is thus brought to nothing, what is there for him?* The apostle describes, “Of him are you in Christ Jesus,” not of yourselves in Christ Jesus; you did not put yourselves there; but “of *him*, of *him* are you in Christ Jesus,” loved of him, chosen of him, blessed of him, “who of God is made unto us wisdom.” Now, wherein consisted the wisdom of Christ? Why, in abiding by the law of God, and abiding by the gospel of God. Never lose sight of this, that he was both a substitute and an example. There were some things in which he was not our example, but simply our substitute! For instance, in abiding by the law, there he was our substitute; and it was an essential part of his wisdom to abide by the law. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets,” and by these two commandments the Savior in perfection abode. Then, in his atoning death, he is not our example, but our substitute. There he abodes by the law; if the cup shall not pass from him, he shall drink that cup. His wisdom lay in thus abiding by the law as our substitute. And then, secondly, in abiding by the gospel, the good will of God, the new covenant, he never deviated from that, always abode firmly by it. Now, then, it is Jesus Christ who is our wisdom by being our substitute, and by being our example; and if you receive him as your substitute, and can take his decision for the truth as your example, then you will be a wise man; and if you are asked how it came that you are so wise? you will say, Jesus Christ has made me wise; for it is by him I am wise unto salvation; it is by him I know the way in

which God is just, yet the justifier of him that believes; and as Jesus abode by the truth, so it is my delight to do the same; it is my wisdom to do the same. But not only is he thus our wisdom, but also our righteousness. He is our righteousness in the way I have described. The apostle is very beautiful in the collocation, even in the collocation of the words here. First, Jesus Christ is our wisdom. If he had not this leading quality to act wisely, to do wisely ; had he but mingled a single thought, I was going to say, of folly, a wrong thought, with his doings, then that want of perfection in the wisdom would have prevented the other blessings coming, namely, our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. These are rather results of his wisdom than not. He was so wise as to abide by the law of God as our substitute, and to abide by the gospel, and by the ordinances thereof, baptism and the Lord's supper, as our example. He was so wise, such perfection in his wisdom, acted so wisely as always to please God, and hereby become our righteousness, our justification, precious faith again! so that here we are justified; and to become our sanctification, and to become our redemption. If he be our righteousness, what must such a righteousness be? It is Jehovah our righteousness. If he be thus our sanctification, it is a sanctification that shall make us ultimately pure and glorious, even as he is pure and glorious. And if he be our redemption, what kind of redemption is it? Why, it is a redemption like himself; for he has obtained for us eternal redemption. Now, then, you little ones that are thus brought to nothing, and that Jesus Christ is your wisdom, you see his wisdom in abiding by the law as your substitute; in abiding by the gospel as your example, and the ordinances thereof; and by faith in him, here is your justification, and sanctification, and redemption. Now, what is the end? what are you to do? Brought to nothing, now, by him, you are brought up from that nothingness into somethingness, if I may coin a word; "that, according as it is written, He that glories let him glory in the Lord." I like this, "let him glory in the Lord." Now, here is something that cannot come to nothing. Can his wisdom come to nothing? No; and if you are one with that wisdom, you will never come to nothing. Can his righteousness come to nothing? No; and if you are one with that, you will never come to nothing. Can his holiness come to nothing, or be tarnished? No; and if you are one with it, you will never come to nothing. Can his redemption come to nothing? No; and if you are one with it, you will never be a prisoner; you are set eternally free by the blood of the everlasting covenant. Your fleshly wisdom, fleshly righteousness, fleshly holiness, and fleshly power are all brought to nothing, and you have nothing left to glory in but the Lord. Now, in dwelling upon this part of our subject, nine or ten scriptures came to my mind upon glorying in the Lord, but I dare not name hardly one of them. Look, then, at this glorying in the Lord in all the various forms in which we have it set forth in the Bible, and you will find that the work of Christ answers to them all. To glory in the Lord as Moses did, when he said, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation; he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him;" and so glory in him. To glory in the Lord as David did, when he danced before the ark of the covenant; and to glory in the Lord as Job did; for though he was then in the low valley, yet there is something of the glorying kind in it: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."