

HOW TO BE RIGHT

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning October 5th, 1862

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 4 Number 198

“By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.” Isaiah
53:11

ALL men feel that God is a righteous God, that he is a righteous Judge, that there is a judgment to come. There is something in the natural conscience that acknowledges all this, and it disturbs every one, more or less, but unhappily not enough to make them seek after, with all their hearts, that only righteousness in which they can be accepted before God. How blessed, then, that people who are not at times concerned, but in whose soul there is fixed a conviction of their unrighteous state, their utter destitution of anything by which to appear before God, and are led to seek the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity, the blessedness of that man to whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works! This is a theme that we cannot be too well acquainted with, or too well-established in. There is no life without righteousness, there is no true light without righteousness, there is no peace without righteousness, there is no salvation without righteousness, there is no grace from God without righteousness; if grace comes it must come righteously, grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life. Our text, therefore, is a gracious text; it is a beautiful scripture. May the Lord lead us this morning into the beauty of it, to see the beauty of it, and to feel the force of it, and to realize some of the advantages thereof; and then a few moments speaking and hearing of these eternal things will indeed be well spent. No part of our time is so well spent as those parts of our time when we are brought down to Jesus' feet, and made to listen earnestly, to give earnest heed, unto the things that we have heard, and that we yet desire to hear. Blessed are the people, then, that know the joyful sound of the theme contained in our text, that is the people that shall be exalted in his righteousness. We will notice the subject under two main points; first, *that he justifies by the knowledge which he imparts*; and secondly, *by the knowledge which he possesses*.

First, here is then *the manner of justification*. Of course, I have to speak here of personal justification; that by that knowledge of which he is the author, for as he is the author of our faith, so he is the author of all true knowledge that we have. God never gave any man a true knowledge of himself since the Fall but by Jesus Christ; and God never will give unto any one a true knowledge of himself but by Jesus Christ; and therefore God is known only by Jesus Christ. Christ includes all this, and indeed everything of which you can think, when he says, “I am the way, the

truth, and the life.” Now, this new-covenant order of things, in which everything is done on behalf of a poor, destitute, helpless sinner, is that order of things of which men generally are so ignorant, and being ignorant thereof, they blindly fight against it. And so, the Lord says, “Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them; I would burn them together.” That is, who would overthrow this state of things, established by my dear Son? He has achieved the victory, he has slain the dragon, put away sin, put down Satan, swallowed up death in victory, and established this state of things; who would thus set the briars and brambles against me in battle? Why, a poor sinner, a poor, blind, besotted sinner, is here compared to the bramble and to the briar, fighting against God’s truth. And then one poor sinner’s eyes are opened, another poor sinner’s eyes are opened, and he says, What a fool I have been, first to care nothing for godliness, and secondly, to fight against that only way in which I can be saved! And so, it goes on and says, “Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.” You will perceive that Christ’s mediatorial work is here called strength; there is a strength in his mediatorial work to blot out sin, there is a strength in his mediatorial work to pardon sin, there is a strength in his mediatorial work to abolish the remembrance of sin, there is a strength in his mediatorial work to put down all adversaries and all adversity, there is a strength in his mediatorial work to bring us up into reconciliation to God, and when we are enabled by faith to lay hold of Christ’s work, his life and his death, this is the way that we are to make peace with God; and the Lord says, “He shall make peace with me”, that is, by faith in the atonement and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, the man that is concerned for this, and is brought to understand it, and to see that his own personal works, which are excellent between him and his fellow-creatures, that these works have nothing whatever to do with his acceptance with God; that his peace with God, his acceptance with God, “being justified freely by his grace,” must be entirely by the strength of Christ’s mediatorial work, “let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me;” there is the promise that he shall succeed. I will just look at the scripture again and bring another scripture to help us out. “He shall make his peace with me”, he shall succeed. See how this accords with the Savior’s own words, where he says, “Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out.” Now put the two together. Here is one seeking peace with God by the sacrificial perfection and mediatorial righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you seek peace in any other way, you will never attain anything but a false peace, in which you may settle down and be deceived; but you will never find any true peace with God only in this way. Now the Lord says of such, “He shall make peace with me.” Compare, I say, the other scripture with that, “Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out.” So you may go before the Lord, and say, Lord, my faith is weak, and my hope is weak; yet with what little faith I can believe, it does center in what your dear Son has wrought; I do believe in the strength of his atonement, and I do believe in the strength of his righteousness, and your blessed word says of him that takes hold of your strength, does not say whether it is a strong hold or a weak hold; some can take a stronger hold and some a weaker hold as the Lord is pleased to enable them; but they must throw off all other hopes and confidences, and place their confidence here, Lord, you have said of such that they shall make peace with you; and Jesus, confirming it, has said, “Him that comes unto me I will in no way cast out.” Lord, examine my soul, and is there in me any desire to seek peace in any other way? I have rejected all other ways, and I know I can have peace with God only in this way. Now, my hearer do you understand this, then, that you need Christ’s mediatorial work to bring you into this peace with God? this And without this reconciliation to God by the mediatorial work of Christ you are a lost man; if you have not such an understanding of this as endears it to you, sets your affections upon it, and makes you decided for it, if you have not this understanding,

then he who is your Creator will show you in ultimate judgment no favor, and he who is your Creator will in ultimate judgment show you no mercy; there is nothing for you but wrath, tribulation, anguish, and bitterness. But if, on the other hand, your eyes be opened to understand this great matter, and you are brought into this way of justification before God, then, so far from showing you no favor, and so far from not having mercy upon you, you will be satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord. But I take another scripture. Now this is the knowledge that Christ imparts; he reveals to us the strength of what he has done, and that salvation shall be the very stability of his times.

We have, the same doctrine in substance, though differing in words in the first chapter of Luke, descriptive of the ministry of John the Baptist: "And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest; for you shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." I have noticed before the mediatorial work of Christ is called strength; there is in that work a saving strength; that work is in one place called saving health; "that your saving health;" and so his salvation saves us from all the wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores and sicknesses of sin; it is saving health; and that work is also saving strength. Now, "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." So, he gives them to understand that it is at Calvary's cross that all their sins were blotted out. And if you would enjoy this pardon in yourself, as the woman did who loved much because much was forgiven, it must be by looking to Jesus. "Look unto me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth." So that no one has a right knowledge of salvation unless he understands the way in which God forgives sin, and yet is just and holy still; unless he understands the way in which God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins." In the other scripture in this 27th of Isaiah, it was making peace by the strength of mediation; and here it is to understand salvation by seeing in that salvation the entire remission of sin. It would be dishonoring the work of Christ to suppose that sin could be laid to the charge of anyone for whom he died; it would be dishonoring to his righteousness to suppose that anyone could condemn the man whom Christ justifies. He, by his Spirit, by the impartation to the soul of this acquaintance with the strength of his mediation, this acquaintance with his salvation, and the forgiveness that comes thereby, shall justify many; shall bring them into a state of justification and peace before God. It has been so, it is so, and shall be so. But let us follow out Luke a little farther. It is very expressive, that scripture is descriptive of the mission of the Gospel; "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God;" not through the goodness of the creature; not by the works of righteousness that we have done, not by any worth or worthiness of the creature. The writer seems there deeply interested, and, shall I say, nicely inspired even in the words that he employs. "Through the tender mercy of our God." Oh, what mercy to provide such a way of peace; what mercy to provide such a salvation; what mercy to provide such free, such entire, such eternal forgiveness and forgetfulness of sin! "Whereby the dayspring", the dayspring, the day of eternity, the day of salvation, the day of sanctification, the day of justification, the day of peace, the day of eternal glory, "whereby the dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness." Once you were in darkness; you knew not this way of peace, you knew not this way of forgiveness, you knew not this way of salvation; but now, not through anything good in you, but through the tender mercy of our God, this dayspring from on high has visited your otherwise benighted soul. "To guide," says the inspired writer, "our feet into the way of peace." This just brings us back, then, to the 27th of Isaiah; "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make

peace with me; and he shall make peace with me; and Luke sums up the whole by the very same idea; he says, "To guide our feet into the way of peace." And we know that the word feet there has special reference to faith; for we walk by faith, and we stand by faith; "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ, by whom we have access into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." I say we walk by faith; so that to guide our feet in the way of peace means that influential faith that will bring our walk of faith into sweet harmony with God's way of peace; and we stand by faith; therefore, said one, "Take heed lest any man fall, for you stand by faith." Let me cease to believe in the strength of Christ's mediation, then my feet are gone; let me cease to believe in electing grace, then my feet are gone; let me cease to believe in the operations of the Holy Spirit, then my feet are gone; let me cease to believe in the testimonies of a swarm covenant, then my feet are gone. And one of old said, "My feet had well-nigh slipped." And how was it then, David, they did not slip? how was it your faith failed not? Why, "your mercy, O Lord, held me up." And so, Peter's faith failed partially, but it did not fail entirely nor finally, but failed only partially, and it recovered itself again, or rather the Lord recovered it. "He restores my soul;" it is the work of the blessed God. Oh, my hearer, is there anything in all the Bible upon this very subject of a saving knowledge of Christ, of a saving knowledge of God, more solemn than the admonition of the Savior when he said, "Take heed that the light that is in you be not darkness"? You may have a great deal of knowledge, a great deal of speculative and theoretical knowledge, and you may be as sound in sentiment in the head as the Bible, but that is not the kind of knowledge I mean; I mean that knowledge by which you are brought to feel after that peace that is by Jesus Christ; I mean that knowledge by which you feel before God you are a sinner laden with sin and ruined, that you are a last, perishing sinner, and that you need his salvation, the remission of sin, the light of Christ, and that peace which he has established; and that it is a matter of infinite concernment to you. In reality there is nothing so much concerns us as this all-important matter. If the light that is in us be darkness, if it be not heart work, then how great is that darkness, proving fatal to the soul! it is divine teaching that we want in this matter. And hence, where the heart is not right with God, let a man do what he may in the ways of God, if his heart be not right with the truth of God, he is met with that terrible scripture, "Who has required this at your hand?" And then, again, to show that we are justified by the knowledge that Christ imparts; that is to say, that is the manner of justification; he does not justify a man before God, and leave that man in ignorance as to how it is done; he does not justify a man, and leave that man unacquainted with the righteousness by which he is justified; he does not justify a man, and leave that man unacquainted with the origin, perfection, nature, and design of that righteousness. So, for the soul to be without knowledge is not good, says one. And hence, to show that this knowledge is experimental, if you go back again to the 27th of Isaiah, "In that day," the same chapter where it is said that "it is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them;" it is said, "In that day the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish." Can a man be ready to perish literally without knowing it? And can a man be ready to perish spiritually without knowing it? No. When a sinner's hopes are cut up, and he feels that he has a holy God, a righteous God, to meet, and no holiness and righteousness to meet him with, he feels ready to perish. "We perish! We perish!" as exclaimed the people at Sinai, when they had heard the thunders, seen the lightnings, and listened to the tremendous voice, they could not endure that which the Lord commanded; they exclaimed, "We perish! we perish!" "The great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem." So, there is no stopping short; the sinner that is ready to perish is like the prodigal, there is an

inseparable connection between his conviction and his justification. There is in the prodigal's mind a conviction, that conviction works, turns his feet to his father's house, and it terminates, as there described, in full possession of all there is for him. "He shall make peace with me." Thus, then, in this knowledge there is an acquaintance with the strength of Christ's mediatorial work, that we are without strength, that all the strength in which we have peace is in his mediatorial work; that, second, the 1st chapter of Luke, there is a knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, that it is an order of salvation in which there is remission of sin, and that founded upon the tender mercy of God, and hereby that darkness is past, and the true light now shines, and shines forever; "your sun shall no more go down;" "the dayspring from on high has visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." That is the way we have peace, then, being acquainted with these things, and it is the way in which we have forgiveness, it is the way in which we have salvation, it is the way in which we have tender mercy shown unto us; it is the way in which the dayspring from on high terminates the night of sin and death; it is the way in which the Lord does all these things, and establishes peace.

Again, a justifying knowledge, or a knowledge in and by which Christ justifies us, means also a knowledge of God's sovereignty, of Christ's universal dominion, and the specialty of his mission. John 17, "You have given him power over all flesh;" there is the universal dominion of Christ; that is the power of his resurrection; he achieved that power. The kings of Judah and priests of Israel lost their power; old, worn-out Israel lost its power; but here is a priest that will never lose his power. His precious blood shall never lose its power. Here is a king that will never lose his power; here is a people that will never lose their power; for as their day so shall be their strength. They are a mighty people; the Lord Jehovah is their strength. "Trust you in the Lord Jehovah; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" "You have given him power;" he retains that power, ministers the same to his people; in other words, brings his people into it. And this made one say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." So, then, to know God, so as to be justified, is to know him not only in the strength of mediation; not only in the entire abolition of sin, and the peace which he has made, but also in the universality of Christ's power. And then comes the sovereignty of God, "That he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him." You cannot be justified without this. No man, sir, since the foundation of the world, has ever been justified in speaking against God's sovereignty. No man, no person, has ever been justified in speaking against eternal election; no man has ever been justified in that. They justify themselves in that and justify one another in it; but God has never justified them in it. "You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him," by his knowledge, the knowledge he imparts. The sovereignty of God: God gave to Christ as many as seemed good in his sight. And now comes the specialty of his mission, "that he should give eternal life." And now, mark, "This is life eternal" that is, evidentially, in the evidence of it, "that they might know you", as having given me power over all flesh, and having given me the people. Linger upon that, don't be afraid to face it, my hearer, whatever your creed, or sentiment, or experience be, don't be afraid to face God's word. Set your face towards the light, you can't do better. They are not my words, or else I should not speak so positively about the matter. Face the words again, look at them again, "You have given him power over all flesh." There is universal dominion. You must know God in order to be justified before God you must know him in this delegation of all power to his dear Son, "that he should give eternal life." You must know him in that, that eternal life is the gift of God, the ministration of Christ, while the Holy Spirit carries on his work of life with power in the soul, "to as many as you have given him." Do you know there is a people given

to him? Look at it. Do you say you do not believe it? But then look at it again. If you say you don't believe in eternal election, would you like to say you don't believe in the 17th of John? would you blot that from the Bible? There it is, "To as many as you have given him. This is life eternal, that they might know you, the only true God," in that great mission you have given to your Son; in having mercy upon whom you will have mercy; in giving unto me as many as you will; and that they might know that eternal life is after the order, first, of your gift as to the thing itself; and, secondly, of your sovereignty as to who the objects and subjects of this life should be. "This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Thus, then, here is, shall I call it? a kind of threefold knowledge. First, here is a heartfelt knowledge, at least, of our need, and a clear apprehension of the suitability of the strength of mediation to give us eternal peace with God, to put an end to all our troubles, so that the time shall come when not one trouble shall roll across the peaceful breast; and, secondly, that here is a knowledge, an understanding of the forgiveness of sin by the salvation Christ has wrought, that this is founded upon the broad principle of tender mercy. Ah! what more precious than this tender mercy? "He remembered us in our low estate" upon this same principle, "for his mercy endures forever." "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sin." And here our feet are guided in the way of peace. And then, third, here is a knowledge, I say, of the universal power of Christ. The day of Christ's power was the day of his resurrection and ascension; so that the day of his power continues, the day of his weakness is past. He had his day of weakness when he took our weakness, and was crucified through weakness; but now the weakness is past; he has risen into power, and reigns a Priest on his throne, a King in his glory, the Son at God's right hand, where he will take care all his people shall be; and that he gives eternal life, not offers, but gives eternal life; "that he should give eternal life." Do you ask how he does it? I will illustrate the spiritual by the literal, namely, that just as he called, literally called, Lazarus out of the grave into literal life, just so he calls the dead soul from a spiritual death into a spiritual and eternal life. "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live." And he says, "Marvel not at this." If you think the voice of the Son of God could reach a dead sinner, and minister eternal life to that soul, marvel not at this; for there remains something more wonderful still, that all that are in the graves shall hear the same voice, and shall come forth. They shall come forth, just as sure as when he speaks effectually the soul comes forth from death; just so sure at the closing up of all things at the last, all shall come forth from their graves; his voice shall reach them there, and bring them thence. By the knowledge he imparts. I hardly like leaving this part of my subject, because of the importance of it. First, then, I am brought to feel that I am without strength, and that if I am justified before God, and have peace, it must be by the strength of mediation, second, I am brought to feel that I am a poor, lost, guilty, benighted worm of the earth; and that if I am justified before God, it must be by the knowledge of salvation, by the remission of sins; it must be by this dayspring from on high; it must be by this tender mercy, by this peace which he has made. Third, I am brought to understand the universality of Christ's power, the sovereignty of God in having mercy upon whom he will, and the certainty of the Savior's mission, that he gives "eternal life to as many as you have given him," falls back upon the original gift, makes that the rule of action, and thereby establishes the original gift. They were given to him for this purpose, that he should give unto them eternal life. We have many types of this, and types are but types. The people were given to Moses, and to all the after rulers, and they often failed; but the counsel of God did not fail, because it was a conditional dispensation. But here, in this matter, the pleasure of the Lord entirely prospers in the Savior's hand. He justifies many, then, by the knowledge he imparts. I again assert that he never justifies a man without bringing that man into a knowledge of the truth.

You cannot be justified in a state of hostility to the truth; must be delivered from that, and brought into harmony with the strength of mediation, with the completeness of salvation, the universality of the Savior's power, the specialty and certainty of his mission, and the sovereignty of God. And there I will leave it.

Now the next point I have to notice is the knowledge he possesses. By his knowledge, the knowledge he imparts; then, secondly, the manner of justification is by the knowledge he possesses. First, the knowledge he possesses of election. Jesus Christ had a perfect knowledge of election, and he is one with the Father in election; and so, he says, "I know whom I have chosen." Also, the Lord Jesus Christ well knew the difference between temporary elections and the one eternal election in him to salvation. The Jews were chosen to national distinction; when the purpose was answered they died out their election died out. But the purpose for which the people are chosen in Christ is eternal, and therefore it is an election that can never die out, but goes running on to eternity, stands good in Christ. Judas was chosen for a temporal purpose; Judas never had the grace of God in him. Men tell us that Judas preached and worked miracles; there is no account of his working miracles; if he preached I think he made a poor concern of it; he might have prattled a little; but he employed his time chiefly in watching opportunities to hoard up money; and he hoarded up just enough to pay his fare to perdition. He was chosen temporally, but never, as the others were, graciously. And the Lord has chosen many providentially, but that is very different from being chosen in Christ. Pharaoh was chosen as an instrument by whom the Lord would make known his power, and marvels, and wonders in Egypt; and ministers, reformers, have been raised up providentially; Cyrus was raised up providentially, and many others have been raised up providentially. We see it in the political, in the military, in the scientific, and in the commercial world; we see men raised up. Look at the inventor of the steam engine; look at the great George Stephenson, the inventor of the locomotive; why, these men were raised, they were chosen of God, and raised up, and endowed with gifts by which the world should be enriched with those appliances that should answer the purpose and counsel of God, the chief end of which is, after all, the diffusion of the gospel, the ingathering of sinners, the coming of the kingdom of Christ; to use a Church of England phrase, my favorite church, "to accomplish the number of his elect." You Church of England folks, that go to church, you pray that, do you not? "Hasten, Lord, and accomplish the number of your elect." Now, if ever I should take it into my head to go to church, I hope that prayer will be read, because I can join with that, if I can't with anything else. That is the main purpose; all things were made by him and for him. Again, a man may be raised up with immense ministerial gifts, and may shake the world almost, and at the same time be destitute of that grace that saves the soul. And so says Ezekiel, "If the prince give a gift to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the year of liberty; after, it shall return to the prince; but his inheritance shall he his sons' forever." where there is grace in the heart it shall he his forever. And so men may have a great variety of gifts in different departments; God chooses these men for certain purposes; but they shall all minister to the good of the church, to the furtherance of his kingdom, and to his glory, "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's." Let the Christian stand by his principles and remember the great object of creation was the illustration of the grace of God in the salvation, eternal salvation, and glorification of a number that no man can number. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ justifies by his knowledge of election. He never justified yet an unchosen vessel; he knew who were chosen; he had a perfect knowledge of election; he knows the parchment roll of election from beginning to end; he tells the number of these mystic stars, not

one of them shall fail. He views them first as mere grains of sand, forming a part of this miserable, sin-blasted world; he elevates them from that condition into that of the magnificence of stars. And so, the twofold simile is used, the sand upon the seashore and the stars in the sky. What an infinity of difference between a mere grain of sand and the majestic planet rolling along by laws established by the great Creator! and what an infinite difference between a soul lying dead in sin, and the soul regenerated, sanctified, pardoned, justified, made triumphant, and made to take its place among the stars of heaven, and to move in its sphere that God has appointed, until by-and-by it shall be absorbed in the glory of the Sun of Righteousness, when time shall be no more! And so, "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." If your name had not been in the book of life, you would have been left under sin and enmity, afar off, never have been brought where you are. So, then, by a knowledge of whom are chosen he justifies many. Second, by his knowledge of his own work. It is a very common thing for men to put too high a estimation upon their own doings. They are not all so humble as the poor negro that Mr. Osborne told us of, when he went to preach; his master said, "Sambo, what do they give you?" Sambo told him what the amount was. "Well," he said, "Sambo, that's very poor pay." "Ah, sir, if you had been there you would have said it was poor preaching too" Well, now, there is no danger of the dear Savior putting a wrong estimation upon his work. He knows that his righteousness is of infinite worth; he knows that his sacrifice is of infinite worth; and hear the sweet words in this same chapter, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." And by his knowledge, first, of the persons who shall be justified; secondly, by the ability of his work to justify them, he will do it; as though he should say, If my blood could not cleanse you from all sin, I would not attempt to cleanse you by it; if my righteousness could not justify you from all things, and bring you into a position that shall justify the challenge that is written, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" if my righteousness could not do this, then I would not attempt to justify you; but I know it can. He sees the travail of his soul and is satisfied. And the Father takes higher ground than that, for the Father saith concerning this same work of Christ, "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law and make it honorable."