

THE TREE OF LIFE

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning March 2nd, 1862

by Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD

Volume 4 Number 167

“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city.” Revelation 22:14

THE tree of life. What are we to understand by the tree of life? I think there are four things intended here by the tree of life. In the first place, it means that wisdom by which we are made wise unto eternal salvation, for it is life eternal to know God, and Jesus Christ whom God has sent. This wisdom is, as we shall presently show, compared to a tree of life. Hence, in the Proverbs we have a beautiful representation of this; only we must read, of course, that scripture in the 3rd of Proverbs in the light of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Happy is the man that finds wisdom, and the man that gets understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.” And this is very clear, because in this there is life eternal. He that gets a saving acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ, that is the meaning, I think, there intended, that “Happy is the man that finds wisdom.” Suppose we put it in this shape, to make it clear, Happy is the man that finds Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God; happy is the man that gets an understanding of the way of eternal mercy, for the merchandise of this acquaintance is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. And then, to help us out with the meaning of this part, let us bring in these words of Peter, “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold.” However much silver and gold you may have, it cannot do anything toward the eternal redemption of your souls; you need something beyond silver and gold for that; and therefore, “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who, verily, was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you. Now, happy is the man that finds this wisdom, that becomes wise by Jesus Christ, and is enabled to contrast, to the advantage of his own soul, and to the glory of Jesus Christ, the price of his redemption with silver and gold. “The merchandise thereof is better than the merchandise of silver.” Redemption by the blood of Christ is better than any redemption that gold and silver can bring about; redemption by the blood of Christ infinitely surpasses everything that can be brought about by any earthly treasure or power whatever; yes, it goes on to say of this wisdom, that “she is more precious than rubies.” And then, I am sure the next declaration is not even a hyperbole; it

must, I think, be taken literally there is nothing in the shape of a hyperbole or exaggeration, namely, that all the things you can desire are not to be compared unto her. Oh, the man that finds Christ, the man that is made wise, made acquainted with Christ's redemption, that man, by being made experimentally acquainted with his need of redeeming blood, and made acquainted with that eternal redemption, why, that man's soul is formed to sing that song that none can ever learn but they that are redeemed from among men." All the things you can desire are not to be compared unto her." Why, in this heavenly wisdom there is everything; there is life, and light, and peace; as it goes on to say, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness." Her very ways are ways of pleasantness; all God's ways are in Christ; and how pleasant his love is there. Is not the very manner of his love pleasant? It is free, it is everlasting, and it is immutable. So that God's way of loving us there is very pleasant; much more so than in the first Adam and in the old covenant. In the old covenant the Lord says, by Hosea, "I will love them no more;" so that the favor which he there showed ceased to be favor. But you will find no such clause as this in the new covenant, in Christ Jesus. God's way of choosing us in Christ is very pleasant, for it is an election of grace; and God's way of ordaining us to eternal life in Christ is very pleasant, for it is even according to the good pleasure of his will, and not according to anything in the creature; and the Lord's way of calling us is very pleasant, for he calls us by his grace; and the Lord's way of saving us is very pleasant, for he saves us by his grace; and the Lord's way of approving us is very pleasant, for it is in Christ; and the Lord's way of receiving us is very pleasant, for it is in Christ; and the Lord's way of dwelling with us, and bringing us to dwell with him, is very pleasant, for it is in Christ Jesus. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left-hand riches and honor. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retains her" So then, if we take this wisdom to mean the gospel, and Christ himself being the substance of that gospel, then the tree of life means that wisdom; to possess the tree of life is to be made wise unto salvation, is to see that the merchandise thereof is indeed better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold; that all things you can desire are not to be compared unto it. Now, to show that I am right in viewing this wisdom in connection with the redemption of Christ, you have nothing to do but go to the New Testament, and you will see what a beautiful harmony there is between the two. Hence, the apostle, in the first chapter of 1st Corinthians, says, "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. So that way of saving a sinner which the Greeks called foolishness, and which was and is to this day as stumbling block to the Jews, while it is foolishness with men, it is God's wisdom; and while it looks a weak matter in the sight of men, it is the power of God. Oh, how true it is, that as was in olden time, he concealed his power from the Egyptians until he began to minister his judgments, but it was revealed unto the Israelites, so now the Lord hides these things from the one and reveals them to the other. And the apostle, in another place, relative to his own experience, takes up the same subject. He views the gospel, and an understanding thereof, an acquaintance therewith, such an acquaintance or at least he takes it up in sweet accordance with that 3rd of Proverbs, and he speaks in this way: that he counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, "For whom," he says, "I have suffered the loss of all thing, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ." There is a term to give to silver and gold; and he had lost academical honors, and worldly preferment, and a great many things; and yet see how he estimates the one in contrast to the other, "I count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him; not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but

that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” Here then this tree of life means being made wise unto salvation, being made wise unto what the Lord Jesus Christ is. Happy is the man that finds wisdom; happy is the man that finds Jesus Christ; and I may go a little further with this and say that happy is the man that seeks Jesus Christ; for, said one. “Fear not you, for I know that you seek Jesus.” The man that is seeking Jesus Christ is born of God. Do you not here at once recognize the wonderful difference between mere religious formality and duty, and that of seeking Jesus Christ?

Jesus Christ my hearer, is a Savior; and to seek Jesus Christ rightly is under a sight and sense of our need of him as our Savior to seek him. Jesus Christ is a Redeemer, and therefore to seek him truly, is to feel our need of a ransom; to feel that there is a mighty debt that we owe, that Christ only could pay off; and to feel that we are by nature under the law, and that we needed Christ to obtain for us redemption. Jesus Christ is righteous; and when a sinner finds out that all his own righteousness’s are as filthy rags, he then begins to seek Jesus Christ. I do like that religion that gives a poor sinner a sight and sense of what he is, and lifts him up in earnest, seeking after Jesus Christ, because all that is included in the idea of the tree of life. Here, then, Jesus Christ, by the Gospel, is the tree of life; and happy is everyone that retains this tree of life. Let us keep, then, for one moment, to the gospel. “Happy is everyone that retains her,”: the gospel. The man that has found out the gospel of the new covenant, found it truly, will never part with it. I have known the Lord now some years, and I have never yet been able to part with the gospel, not with any part of it, for therein is revealed the righteousness of God, that is to say, saving righteousness; as the apostle thus expresses it: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believed. For therein is the righteousness of God”, that is, the righteousness of Christ, “revealed from faith to faith”, from one degree of faith to another; by which righteousness we are exempted from the wrath of God, and by which everything is made right between us and God. Ah, then! shall we part with this? What! part with the tree of life, the tree of plenty, the only fruitful tree that exists? for all other trees must come to nothing; yes, the world itself; but this remains, and that forever. Happy is everyone that retains her. So, then, my hearer, if we are citizens of heaven, we shall be made wise unto salvation; if we are citizens of heaven, we shall know the gospel, and retain the gospel.

The second thing intended by the tree of life, is that of peace or reconciliation to God. As war causes devastation, and desolation, and death, so we, all of us, by nature, are at war with God; and there is nothing in that state of war with God but desolation and death. Such was our state by nature, and yet the Lord alone could open our blind eyes to see it, And those of you that know not the Lord, little do you think in the spiritual sense, I mean, and as it pertains to your souls, and as it pertains to your eternal welfare, and as it pertains to matters between you and your Maker, little do you think what a desolate scene exists. You are blind to it. Little do you think what a depraved heart you have; little do you think how filthy and loathsome you are in his sight; little do you think of the yawning caverns of hell, waiting for your coming; little do you think of the terrible threatening of the Bible that hang over your head, and it will be but a very few days before they must burst forth in their eternal fury upon your guilty soul; and you are blind to it. If anyone had told me this, while I was in a state of nature, I should, maniac like, have laughed at it, because I should not have understood it; I could not recognize the solemnity of it, the truth of it, nor the importance of it. I will now say, then, to the man or the woman that is convinced of what I have now stated, however miserable, and wretched, and cast down you are, if your desolate, solitary

state as a sinner, be made know to you, God help you to bless him even for this. The Lord be praised for making you miserable, for his is making you miserable now, that you may not be miserable forever; he is cutting you down, in mercy, that you may not be cut down in judgment; he is humbling you by a chastening hand, that you should not be condemned with the world; he is giving you a praying heart, that you may, by and bye, be employed in sounding forth to eternity, with all the redeemed, those wonderous praises that you shall realize in the Lord's own time. Now, if you are acquainted thus with your miserable and desolate state, and there is nothing between you and God but your sins, and a fiery law, then you will seek reconciliation, you will sigh for mercy. And this tree of life indicates this because it is a kind of paradisaical representation. It represents a state of peace and tranquility, in contrast to that of war. And so, to enter in, then, to find this tree of life, you will do as is said in the 27th of Isaiah, which comes to the very same point. After the Lord had there spoken of the slaying of the dragon, and the establishment of a vineyard wherein there shall be peace, which he keeps night and day, then the Lord speaks of sinners who are enemies to him; and after he speaks of enemies, he refers to just such a character as I have described, one convinced of his state. He says: "Who would set the briars and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them; I would burn them together." But here the sinner hears that, sees that, fears that, trembles at that; then the Lord steps in and says "Or," that is what we call a disjunctive conjunction. It is an important little word. "Or" here is hope coming in you see, "Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me." And if you ask what that strength is, the answer is, Christ is that strength. I have just now quoted the words, "Christ is the power of God," and so, "Let him take hold of my strength", that is, take hold of Christ; that is, believe in Christ, look to Christ, rest his hope upon Christ. Ah! but suppose I do so, say you, shall I succeed? You shall, if God be true; for it says there, "He shall make peace with me." Jesus Christ has made peace with God; and if we attempt to make peace with God in any other way than that which God himself has ordained, we shall be deceived; but if you are brought to make peace with him in this way, then you will find, when pardoning mercy shall flow in, when the Lord shall come in with, "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgression, and will not remember your sins," ah! you will say, now I have found the tree of life; the bitterness of death, and death itself, is passed; the winter is over and gone, the time of the singing of birds is come. Here is a change of scene; here is peace, here is the tree of life. I shall not die, but I shall live, and shall declare the works of the Lord.

These, I think, are two things fairly implied in this tree of life. First, the gospel; and happy is the man that finds the gospel, that gospel meaning the representative of Jesus Christ; and secondly, that it means peace with God, reconciliation to him by faith in Christ. How it changes the scene! Just now, nothing but sin between you and God; now, no sin at all. Just now, nothing but a fiery law between you and God; now a peaceful tree of life. Just now, nothing but threatening's between your and your Maker; now nothing but promises. Just now, everything against you; now everything for you. Just now there were impenetrable clouds, that you could not get through, God was hidden from you, and appeared like an angry God, but now he comes forth into the light, and says: "In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you says the Lord your Redeemer." Such, then, is the tree of life, the gospel of God, and the peace of God.

Third. The tree of life means also, health and plenty. I think this is the third thing fairly intended. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations, and the fruit was for food. I am sure we

can all in nature recognize the very beautiful connection and suitability of health and plenty. You see, if you have plenty, and have not health to enjoy it, then the one does not accord with the other; and if you have health, and have not half enough to eat, then that does not do comfortably. But the two are very beautifully put together here, health and plenty. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations; and so, the man who has found this gospel wisdom, this tree of life, and holds it fast, the man who is thus brought into reconciliation with God, here is health. If we take the leaves of the tree to mean the words of the Lord, he sent his word and healed them; and I am sure, if the leaves of the tree mean the gospel words of the Lord, not one leaf shall wither. Not one gospel word ever withered yet, or ever will.

And the Lord assimilates the soul to his own truth. This made one say, "I am like an olive tree in the house of my God and the apostle takes this up and says, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Not one gospel word has ever withered; no, it is always green, it is always fresh. Like the dove that Noah sent out from the ark, it brought an olive leaf plucked off; not an old dead leaf; not an old dead sermon picked up in Paternoster Row, and bought for sixpence, and read out by a dead parson; no, it was a living leaf. And so, the living words of the Lord, they are fresh, and will ever remain fresh. Here, then, is health. And so, the healing power of his word is perfectly wonderful. There are a great many leaves on the tree, and a great many words in the gospel. It does not matter what the trouble is, if the Lord is pleased to bring home his word it will put you right, reconcile you to anything, can bear you up under anything, can make you happy anywhere, whether in a lion's den, a fiery furnace, a prison, or whatever it may be; if the Lord is pleased to send his word as adapted to your necessity, you may rely upon it, it will not deceive you; it never did, and never will. And the word of the Lord does keep us in good health; and the rebukes, and reproofs, and chastening's, and humbling's, though they are sometimes rather trying sort of dealings with us, yet they do us good; yes. Often to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet; and the Lord's people would rather that the Lord should speak to them if rather roughly, than not at all. "Be not," said David, "silent unto me, lest I be like them that go down into the pit." Here, then, is spiritual health, and that health is in Christ, and by Jesus Christ, by his blessed word. And then this tree of life, bearing twelve manners of fruits, denotes plenty; so here is health and plenty. How suitable those things are to go together. We may even apply these two ideas to the eternal destiny of the people of God; for in heaven that shall be said in a more unexceptionable sense than it can be said of the saints on earth, that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity;" there is the health. Then another scripture says, "The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." You see I am getting another idea to it now; I have got the health and the plenty, now I have got the happiness. Here is another idea; here is health, and plenty, and happiness. Now, who would not go to such a country as that? Here is health; never to be sick as long as you live. Now, even our poor mortal health, we like it very much. And then the kind hand of the Lord in supplying our temporal needs; there is very much glory due to his name for his mercy to us in these respects; and then, to make us happy in it really seems to crown the whole. "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity;" the cause of sickness is for ever taken away. And then "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them;" there is plenty: "and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;" there is the happiness. Here then, is a gospel tree of life; here is a peaceful tree of life; here is a healthful and plentiful tree of life. Bless the Lord for this. I was going to say, what could we want more? It may

well be said that all the things that can be desired are not to be compared unto this tree of life that is in the midst of the city. Health and plenty never come to want. Why, the Old Testament saints, as well as the New, that had suffered great privations for the truth's sake, when the Lord was with them, they could smile at it all. The apostle, when he enumerated the various privations and sufferings he underwent, why, he smiled at it all, and said, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." He knew that when he should die, health, and plenty, and happiness were in waiting for him. Such is the tree of life.

Fourth, it means also, fellowship with God, sociality with God. All the time Adam abode by the tree of life and forbore to meddle with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God walked with him, and he with God. But he possessed that Paradise conditionally. Jesus Christ here, in this second Paradise, has taken all the conditionality upon himself, and has made the promises yea and amen. Now we have a very concise account of Adam in the garden of Eden, but it is one of the peculiar excellencies of the Bible that it is an amazingly suggestive book; it will bear thinking of most deeply, and it will sometimes continue to suggest thought after thought, till your soul is enwrapped in meditation sweet that shall endear the Lord; and sometimes by careful thought, the Lord guiding us in that thought, we enter into things that we do not without that thought enter into. "My meditation of him shall be sweet." Hence, when the Lord came into the garden of Eden, one can hardly divest oneself of the idea that the Lord used to talk with Adam and Eve, and walk with them, and made their days exceedingly sweet, and that the visitations of the Lord to them were looked for by them, and that they were exceedingly delighted in his presence; we know that the Lord's presence is delightful now in Christ Jesus. But, by-and-by, when Adam had sinned, and had forfeited and lost his right to the tree of life, when he had done this, the Lord came (one, I say, seems constrained into this train of thought), the Lord came as he was wont to do (speaking after the manner of men, as of course I am now) to have a little more converse with Adam and Eve; he looked to the wonted place where they were in the habit of meeting, but Adam was not there, he was gone, "Adam, where are you?" Why, you used to be here waiting for me; you used to be glad to hear my footstep; you used to be delighted at the very sign of my coming. Where are you? "I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid;" ah, how the scene is changed; "and I hid myself." You were afraid! "Have you eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded you that you should not eat?" Ah, he could not deny it. The Lord traced it to the source and pronounced such curses upon the enemy as there recorded, but at the same time brought in the promise of a better paradise; brought in the promise of a better scene of things; "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Ah, what a change man underwent now! Now God was a terror to him; now God was a consuming fire to him; now God was his judge; "I was afraid, and I hid myself." Ah, what shall we say, friends, of the sociality we have in Christ? Such an event can never take place in Christ; no, bless the Lord, no. Here we have a Mediator, Jesus Christ the righteous; we shall always be glad to see the Lord; the time will never come when he will come and say to one of his children, Where are you? Have you lost your standing? Have you lost Paradise; lost the tree of life; lost all right to my presence; lost my favor; lost my approbation; lost your holiness, your peace, your righteousness, your love, your life, and your soul, and all lost together? Ah, happy is the man that is convinced of the state he is in by nature, and is seeking after Jesus Christ, to be brought near to God by this heavenly tree of life, the gospel, this peace, this gospel health, this gospel plenty, and this gospel happiness. When once brought here, no going out again. No; "Who shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus?" Ah, we may well rejoice in a new covenant, in a better covenant, established upon better promises. Why, my hearer, forgive me if I say here, I say it not

disrespectfully, but I say it as a solemn truth, that the most consistent among you commits sins enough, faults enough, in your hearts, if not in your lives, to lose a thousand paradises if you had them on the same condition that Adam had his. Let us, then, bless the Lord that the promises in Christ Jesus are not yea and nay, but yea and amen; that you are complete in him, that you are joint heirs with him, and all the time his right stands good your right will stand good; your right is founded in his right, joint heirs with him. So that there stands the fulfilment of the promise where the Lord says, for it is a new covenant promise, "I will no more hide my face from them." Hence see the positive way in which the Savior spoke of this matter before he departed; "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you," and you do not between the time of my preparing the place and the time for you to come into the place, if you do not between those two times forfeit your right to the place, if between those two times you perform the condition, if between those two times you keep yourselves after a certain order, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." I make no hesitation in saying, if matters had stood in that position, that between those two times they would have lost it, and the most zealous would have been the first to have lost it, namely, Peter; for he did between the two times with awful oaths deny that he knew the Lord. No; the dear Savior spoke in no such terms. He says, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you," what then? "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there may you be also." No conditionality, all is firm, all is settled, all is decisive, all is certain. "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear in glory with him." Here, then, is fellowship with our God, our springs being in him, himself being our exceeding joy, in contrast to being on the condemnatory side of that gulf which none can ford. "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." But here, I say, in contrast to the separation is sweet sociality with the blessed God, to be severed no more forever. Ah! how feeble is the best that the most favored minister can say as to the glory of these things, compared with what they really are.

I must now hasten to notice *the gates of the city*. Now, the first thing I think the gates of the city also represent or set forth is the gospel of God. The gates of the city looked east, west, north, and south. So, the gospel looks every way. "Preach the gospel to every creature;" to the child, to the adolescent, to man, to old age, and to all classes. It is a nice representation of the gospel. And then the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were to be engraved upon the gates, to denote the identity, I think so, at least, of the people of God with the truths of the gospel. I take, then, the gates to be the gospel; for Christ is called a gate, and the truths that set him forth are spoken of as gates; and the names of the tribes being engraved upon the gates I take to denote the identity of the people with the gates of truth. Last chapter of Ezekiel, "The gates of the city shall be called after the names of the tribes of Israel." There is a great deal of real Christian experience in this. That man that can look upon the several truths of the new covenant, and say, My soul is one with this truth and that and the other, and with all, anything that touches any one of these truths touches him. And then the gates were of pearl denoting the preciousness of them. And so, every new covenant truth is precious to the believer. But I take hastily in conclusion a fourfold view of these gates. Now these gates are for a fourfold purpose, for communication with the outer world, for admission into the city, for discrimination, for security. First, for communication with the outer world. There is God in the city, there is the Lamb in the city. Isaiah 54, there you have the establishment of this city, and the promise that no weapon formed against it should prosper; because any weapon formed against any of the citizens is against the city, and if it is against the city, it is against God. "No

weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of these citizens, “the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, says the Lord.” There is the city of Zion. Now comes the communication with the outer world. “Ho, everyone that thirsts;” here are some poor, hungry, thirsty creatures coming to this city of infinite and eternal plenty; are they welcome? Yes, let them be who they may or what they may, all the pre-requisite is thirst, and hunger, and a willingness to come to terms. “Ho, every one that thirsts, come you to the waters;” here is the river rising froth the throne of God; “and he that has no money; come you, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” You have been trying to cultivate old Adam, and trying to grow something at Sinai, you have been trying to get yourselves to rights by human religion. “Wherefore do you spend money for that which is not bread; and your labor for that which satisfies not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David,” or “the beloved;” the word David means “beloved,” and of course points to Christ. And these gates are not to be shut; they are to be open, and we consequently are to go on proclaiming these provisions to the hungry and the thirsty and insisting upon these terms to those that will enter the city, we are to abide by these terms, and not to compromise them. Ah! say some, if you would but do that, you would get more in. We should get none in at all. That would be getting them into the city of Babylon and persuading them they are in Zion all the time; that would be delusion. The second use of the gates is that of admission. By these truths we come near to God, we have access to God. Ministers are sent out by these gates to proclaim the provision, and the terms that must be come to, and the certainty of being received and kindly treated. Then, I say, these gates are for admission. It is a great thing really to be brought near to God by the truths of the gospel, a great thing; and it is to the law and to the testimony; if you are not brought near to God by the truths of the gospel, all other supposed being brought near to God is but a delusion. And the apostle sums up all this in a few words when he says, “Therefore, brethren, we have boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter into the holy of holies.” And every gospel gate, shall I say, is sprinkled with the blood of Christ. God has an inviting voice to a poor sinner that knows his need of the city of refuge, of the way of escape.