

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

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THE VALLEY OF DECISION.

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## A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 19TH, 1862, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

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“For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.”—Joel iii. 14.

THAT which is here called the valley of decision, is, in other parts of the chapter, called the valley of Jehoshaphat. Now the word Jehoshaphat means, the judgment of Jehovah; and so it may be read, the valley of the judgment of Jehovah. And men tell us that this valley means the valley about two miles long, and about the eighth of a mile wide, lying between the city of Jerusalem and the mount of Olives, and that the judgment at the last day is to take place in this valley. And so they have a great many speculative notions upon this matter. Now, in the first place, there is not the least authority in the Bible whatever, to recognize that, or any other valley, as the valley here intended. Does it mean any particular valley at all, except that of the whole world? The valley of Jehoshaphat is the valley of the judgment of Jehovah, for the word must evidently be taken in that mystic sense; it is the valley of the judgment of Jehovah, and so far from that meaning any particular valley, or any particular age of time, with one exception—the destruction of the Jewish nation, and the general spread of the gospel, are circumstances historically referred to in this chapter, but, with that exception, the valley means the whole world—it means the world at large. And hence it is that judgment by one man's offence came upon all men, and the whole world is become the valley of judgment, and all men are under that judgment, and that judgment has been progressing, and is still progressing, and will progress down to the end of time. Now in the second verse it is said, they come down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, or the valley of the judgment of Jehovah; and then in the 12th verse it says, they shall come up to the valley. In the one case they are spoken of as going down, in the other case they are spoken of as coming up. They are spoken of as going down, because God humbles men under a sight and sense of what they are; and they are said to go up, because, when they are down, then they are commanded to come up to the standard of God's law of judgment; and, in coming up to that standard, if a mediator be not there, then they will be condemned and cast out. Taking, then, the whole world for the valley,—and that, to my mind, is the meaning,—it may well be said, “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision; for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” And if we take the

present population of the globe to be, as it is supposed, about twelve hundred millions, and that one human being departs from time to eternity, upon the average, every minute, sixty every hour, I think it may well—the whole world may well be called, the valley of judgment; for judgment passed upon all men, in that all have sinned. Having said so much, I think our way is pretty clear before us as to how we are to handle the language of our text this morning.

I have, then, first to notice *a five fold decision to which the Lord hath come*; I secondly and lastly have to notice, *that day of the Lord which my text says is near*; “for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” And I will promise, before I enter upon the subject, that I shall leave no doubt upon your mind as to what the day of the Lord is as here intended; and I am sure I shall leave, at the end of my discourse, no doubt upon your mind but that the day here intended is very near indeed.

First, then, I notice *the decision*. Now, what has been the Lord's decision in this valley? First, the decision of the Lord is *a tribulatory life and a corruptible death*. Hence the Lord said, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.” And I am sure this has, even with the mitigations we presently have to notice, been more or less fulfilled. And if it be fulfilled more or less in the condition of men generally, it is fulfilled more particularly in the life of the real Christian; because, when a sinner is brought to a concern about his soul, he has then added to his mind an additional care, sorrow, and anxiety. Once it was only the body, and that was comparatively little, but now he is concerned for the soul; now he feels the weight of sin and corruption; now he feels his lonely, lost, and woeful condition, so that this increases his sorrow. But never mind, it is godly sorrow, and hath in its very roots all the elements of eternal joy. And then the Lord goes on in this decision, that while Adam should eat of the herb of the field, yet “thorns and thistles shall it (the earth) bring forth to thee.” Taking that, as we do, of course, mystically, how true it is! Where is there a man without some thistles or thorns in the flesh somewhere? Where is there a family without some drawback somewhere? Where is there a position in human life, from the humblest to the highest, where there is not some drawback somewhere? And then, not only hath the Lord decided for all men a tribulatory life, but also a corruptible death. “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Here is a corruptible death. Do you not see here an essential difference between your death and the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? He died an incorruptible death, he died an immortal death; though that phrase may seem hardly to stand good, yet I can make it clear that he died an incorruptible death. He did not die from any elements of corruption in his nature, for he had none; there was no sin in him: he did not die from any seeds of mortality in his nature, for he had none; he was holy. Sin is the root of death; death is the fruit that sin bears: but Christ had no sin of his own, he had in him none of the elements of mortality or of corruption; whereas, when you die, you die a corruptible death, and that

body that you have taken so much trouble with, both to sustain it and to adorn it, that poor body of which you are some of you so wonderfully proud, will presently mingle with the dust, will rot, and will not be known from another piece of clay, from another heap of dust. So that we die a corruptible death, a mortal death. This is God's decision, and who can alter that decision? None can alter it. And happy is the man that so feels the force of this divine decision concerning the emptiness of human life, concerning the mortality and corruption of death—happy is the man that is brought so to feel the force of this as to apply his heart unto wisdom, and to cry to God for an ultimate escape from these things. Now, my hearer, our blessed Redeemer took all our thorns and thistles, shall I say? that is, he took all our sorrows and griefs, and he took our mortality upon him, yet there was no mortality in him; he took our corruption upon him, but there was no corruption in him. Therefore he died a pure death, not from any internal defect, but he died sacrificially; he laid down his precious life sovereignly, lovingly; and he laid down a life that had nothing in it mortal, nothing in it corruptible; it was an incorruptible death; so that his pure body could not see corruption. And this the Psalmist exceedingly, no doubt, rejoiced in when He was led by the Holy Ghost to personate the Saviour. "Thou wilt not leave my life in the grave, nor suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore."

Ah! then, Jesus' immortal death is the remedy for our mortal death; his incorruptible death is the remedy for our corruptible death. And so the apostle, tracing out the oneness of Christians with Christ Jesus, looks forward to that glorious time when, by the immortality of the Saviour, our mortality shall be swallowed up in victory; when, by the incorruptibility of the Saviour, our corruption shall be swallowed up in incorruption; when, by the heavenly image of the Saviour, our earthly image shall be swallowed up in the heavenly image of Christ; and when, by the strength of the Saviour, whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself, our weakness shall be swallowed up in his eternal strength, and we shall in the Saviour's image rise. Here, then, is the decision—the valley of decision. God has decided that this life shall be tribulatory, and that our death shall be in accordance with our state as sinners, a mortal death, a corruptible death; yea, in this respect, saith the wise man, man hath no pre-eminence above the beast; they have all one breath; as the one dieth, so doth the other. The Lord help us more and more to lay these things to heart, to be humbled under them, and more and more to prize the provision which God has made as the way by which we shall escape all the terrible woes and miseries that sin hath thus brought upon us. Is not the whole world, then, a valley of decision in this respect? Is there one person exempt from God's decision, that thorns and thistles it shall bring forth, that in the sweat of the face man shall eat bread, some in one shape, and some in another? for the man who has saved money enough to retire, why, he works hard; he does not know what to do with his time; he has as much too much time on his hands as some of us have too little,—some of us do not know how we shall get through what we have to do in the time; and he has nothing to do; what to do with the time he does not know. So he has to work after all; you cannot get away from it, you may depend upon it. Man is a restless being, and those words of Watts' are true of all, that—

"Man has a soul of vast desires,  
It burns within with restless fires;  
Tossed to and fro, his passions fly  
From vanity to vanity."

And the soul never becomes truly fixed until it becomes fixed upon the Rock of Ages; and fixed upon that it will never move.

The second decision I notice is that of *the mission of Christ*. He decided that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. And where did God decide that? In this world. It was in this world the declaration was made. He decided that Jesus Christ should finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness. He decided that Jesus Christ should be perfect for ever all them that are sanctified; he decided that by his dear Son a number that no man can number shall come up out of this great tribulation, wash their robes, make them white in the blood of the Lamb, and stand before their covenant God with the palm of victory in their hands, and the fulness of joy, of glory, of salvation in the heart. And happy, thrice happy is the man who has felt the force of the judicial decision; he will be glad to fall in with the mediatorial decision.

There is another decision, a decision which we all prize, and that is a covenant of providence. You see there is nothing positively promised connected with the decision of threatening; but in connection with the coming of Christ there stands the covenant of providence, that while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. Here, then, is another decision; this is God's decision; and I am sure those of us that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we may rest fully assured that we shall dwell in the land, that we shall be fed, that bread shall be given, that water shall be sure. And if we are enabled to rest upon this, as I have said before, and let our hope be in the Lord, and our consolations from him, we shall feel the most happy when we are in the most complete acquiescence with the decisions of the Most High. Take the first decision, that of a tribulatory life and a corruptible death, and then in connection with this take the coming of Christ, and remember that this tribulatory life and corruptible death are, in connection with Christ, subservient to our eternal good; and that so far from our tribulatory life, if we are brought to fall in with God's decision concerning Christ, so far from our tribulatory life being an injury to us, it will be a blessing to us, because the Lord will make use of tribulations as the way by which to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. If we are brought to fall in with the decision that the Lord hath come to in relation to his dear Son, so far from our death, bad as it is, being in itself a corruptible death, so far from our death being an injury to us, it will be gain to us; "the righteous hath hope in his death;" and the new creature groaneth and waiteth for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body. Is not the world, then, the valley in which these decisions are declared in the word? And happy the man that is favoured to fall in with these decisions. It is no use, you may depend upon it, you will never get rid of trouble, only by the Lord Jesus Christ; you will never get rid of sin but by Jesus Christ; you will never get rid of death but by Jesus Christ; you will never have peace with God but by him. Here, then, is the decision; first, the tribulatory; second, the consolatory, the coming in of the Saviour; and third, the covenant of providence. And the fourth decision is, that "he that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." "He that believeth shall be saved." There are always, as I have often noticed, three things in faith; there must be three things in order to render faith right; there must be the right object, and there must be the right order, and there must be the right spirit in which to believe; there must be these three things. There must be the right object. Cain had the right object; he believed in God, and he came to God; but then he at the same time had not the right order, he was out of order; he did not come in God's way. And then, as there must be the right object and the right order, so there must be at the same time the right spirit that is to say, we must believe really and truly in our hearts and souls. And this is a matter, now I am upon it, I must just dwell upon, because

it is an infinitely important matter. I have met with persons in my time that pretended to have, and had, too, a great many doubts and fears as to their interest in eternal things; and I used to think that it was real, and I have sympathized with them, and pitied them, and tried to console them. But I have found after a time, just watching them narrowly, that their doubts and fears arose from a different source from what I had thought; for I discovered afterwards that there lay at the bottom of their profession a kind of a suspicion whether the perfect work of Christ, whether a knowledge of it, an acquiescence with it, and decision for it, was after all so essential to our welfare; and whether electing grace was after all altogether so important as we had hitherto believed; and as to whether the new covenant—whether it was so essential, to prove that we are Christians, to stand so firmly by these things or not. And so I have met with these doubters and fearers, and by-and-bye they have gone over to one system, and then over to another.

So, then, I say, those of you that are exercised with doubts and fears, examine yourselves as to what the real source of those doubts and fears is. If you feel in your soul you have never been brought into a right decision; that you have never, with all your soul, with all your might, and with all your heart, received the testimony of what Christ has done; or received the truth of electing grace; or received the truth of a sworn covenant; if there be something at the bottom that makes you rather suspect these things, and you begin to feel a sort of half-secret dislike to them, but don't like to bring that dislike out; now, if this be the root and ground of your doubts and fears, there is a current of unbelief at the bottom of your profession; there is a worm at the root of your gourd, and however prosperous you may hitherto have appeared, yet, by-and-bye, that worm will wither your profession; that undercurrent will burst out,—overflow all the banks of your pretended belief, and it is impossible for me to foresee or to predict what you may come to. Oh, my hearer, the heart is very deceitful; it is a great thing, therefore, to be decided from the very bottom of our souls. When we are not really decided for God, we have not been brought savingly into the valley of decision; if we are not brought to feel that, God keeping us, we would rather part with our mortal lives any day, than part with one particle of mediatorial perfection, than part with one particle of, or pervert, electing grace, or God's sworn covenant. Although, in so doing, we may be more respected in the world, and more thought of, especially in the religious world, and perhaps get some temporal advantages thereby, yet if we are taught of God there will be nothing lie so near our heart as the decision that God hath come to, that "he that believeth shall be saved;" "if thou believest with thine heart." See, then, that your doubts and fears arise from the right source; and that while you doubt and fear as to your interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet, at the same time, you can say in the sight of a heart-searching God, that you not only have no other hope but his free grace, but that you can truly say you desire no other; that you do experimentally know the utter futility and uselessness of any other; that you have no other refuge; that you can truly say that you feel in your own conscience, and see in the light of your own understanding and experience, that you must be damned to eternity if you are not saved in the way that David describes, when he declares his eternal salvation to be, and all his desire to be, found within the range and after the order of a covenant,—that sworn covenant confirmed at Calvary's cross, and established by the perfect priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. I feel deeply what I am now saying; for there are so many ministers and professors about the country that are turning and twisting about; and some of the greatest doubters, doubting and fearing ones, three parts of their religion seems to consist of doubting and fearing, and now they are gone over to—I don't know what. May the Lord help us, then, to see whether

we are brought to a decision, never to be moved back again. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel;" but if thou art stable and fixed,—decided,—then the rains may descend, the floods may come, the winds may blow and beat upon you from all quarters, but you cannot be moved; you are founded upon the Rock. There are a great many fleshly excellences among men, if you look at them. There is an amiable man; but what of that, if underneath it lurks the devil with his lies? There is a man that does immense good; but what of that, if under that apparent good there is that which would poison the soul if you could receive it? Let the word of God be your trust; never look after human appearances, whether the man is a popular man or an obscure man; judge after no such fleshly rule, but take the word of God to be your guide. God's decision is this, that his truth shall stand; the heavens and the earth may pass away, but his word shall not pass away. Thus, then, he who has felt the force of a judicial decision, of a tribulatory life, and a corrupt death, and eternal condemnation following upon that where grace prevents not; he who has felt the force of that will prize the next decision, namely, the coming in of the Messiah to take away all this tribulation and corruption, and bring life and immortality to light; he will also prize the next decision, namely, God's covenant of providence, that bread shall be given, and water shall be sure—our needs shall be supplied; and also the next decision, that he that believeth,—but then it must be heart-work, it must be unfeigned faith, and the man must feel at home in the truths of the gospel. You must, in your own soul, feel that there is something in a sovereign God that endears him to you to eternity, and that that God is the God with whom you wish for ever to dwell; that there is something in electing grace that so endears the great God to you, that in the embraces of that eternal choice you feel you wish for ever to dwell; that there is something so endearing in mediatorial perfection, that in that perfection you wish for ever to dwell; that there is something so endearing in God's immutable oath, in his sworn covenant, that in these divine, these eternal truths, you would wish for ever to dwell; and that you are out of your element in anything contrary to these things. Now, if this be thy feeling, and thou art thus made honest in the truth, then you may doubt and fear ten thousand times a day your interest in the things of God; I, in one sense care not for that, because, if your soul be really one with the truth, the truth is one with God, and by that truth God is one with you, and you are one with him; and your doubts and fears cannot disinherit you. So that if your doubts and fears arise from real godly jealousy, then they are profitable to you; they solemnize and sober the mind, and help you to read God's word and approach the throne of grace with more earnestness; and so, like the Lord himself, being in agony, you will pray more earnestly. But, if your doubts and fears arise from a sort of secret suspicion as to whether these doctrines, after all, are so important as you have thought, then there is thus a rottenness at the root of your profession, and the God of heaven knows what will become of you, for I do not. We live in a day when it not only becometh Christians, but ministers themselves, to be men of prayer in private, and men of much meditation and much reading, I mean in the Holy Scriptures; and much wrestling with God; and to be very clear in public, and to be very earnest, and to be very decided, and to be immoveable, and to preach just as they are led,—feel a love to all the people, desire to profit their souls, but at the same time faithful. It is the valley of decision; and if we come to a wrong decision now, we shall be found in the wrong place in a dying hour, and if we are found in the wrong place then, we shall be found in the wrong place at the judgment day; for as death, as we say, leaves us, judgment will surely find us. Now is the day of salvation; now is the day to make the right decision; and if we are brought to a right decision now, then we live in that right decision, we die in it, we rise in it, we reign in that r

decision, and that to eternity. Our God has never been hesitatingly decided for us; he has been decided for us from the very depths of his infinite mind, from the deeps of eternity. From all eternity, in all he has ever thought, and said, and done, he has been, in all the perfections of his nature, on our side; and you might as well talk of God Almighty himself being lost, as to talk of one being lost whom he loves, for whom the Saviour died, and whom God takes into his almighty embrace.

Talk of sin, Satan, hell, tribulation, and death plucking from the hands of Omnipotence a sinner that he takes in hand! Puny worms, poor maggots, miserable moths, lying devil, to put men off with such glaring contradictions against the faithfulness, love, mercy, of the great and blessed God. Call it *hyperism*,—call it what you like; what have I to do with that,—with what a poor worm calls these things? I have not to do with man, I have to do with God; my reason is to be with God; my soul is with God; my conscience is with God; my destiny is with God; my salvation is with God; my hope is with God; my inheritance is with God; my glory is with God; my triumph is with God; my advocate is with God; my intercessor is with God. I have done with men. “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils,” and deal with God, and God only. It may seem like boasting on my part, but I cannot help it. I would rather cry oysters, or apples, or lucifers, or sweep a crossing, than I would have my mouth muzzled, and preach as some poor, miserable, crawling dawdles do. Men that are too lazy to work, they crawl about and preach whatever the people may like; and so they deceive themselves and deceive the churches. Such are hypocrites, saying, “Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priest’s offices, that I may eat a piece of bread.” Why, my hearer, the British empire itself is a mere toy in comparison of the salvation, the eternal salvation of the soul. Where are we, then, if we feel not the solemn weight and importance of these things? These are four of the decisions,—a decision of judgment, a decision of mediation, a decision of a covenant of providence, and a decision of character—must be decided in the heart and in the soul. It has been predicted, and that lately too, Ah! we shall have Wells a little softer by-and-bye;—he is more quiet than he was. That is because they have let me alone,—that is the reason of it. You may depend upon it, if they give any hints of that kind, and begin to hold out their baits to me, I will out with my sword and cut the bait off, hook and all. I will look to God for strength,—to give me strength to take away the gates of Gaza, bars and all, and think nothing of them. No, my hearer; instead of being softer, I hope to be harder. I leave false prophets to go in soft raiment; to go with a penknife just to trim the trees up, and make them look nice. Let me go with the axe, and lay it to the root, and cut it down, and there let it lie until God shall come, take the sinner up, transplant him into the likeness of Christ’s death, and make him bear that gospel fruit that shows he is brought to a right decision, a heart decision, a firm decision, a complete decision, an everlasting decision an immoveable decision. Must not wonder at my talking like this;—my text contains what I am very fond of. I like decision,—it is so much like Christ. He was always decided. So he is now. Having loved his own, he loved them to the end. God having loved his people, he has loved them with an everlasting love; having chosen them, chosen them for ever; saved them, saved them for ever. He saves like the God that he is, in all the eternity of that mercy that is from everlasting to everlasting.

And then the fifth decision is the contrastive destiny of the two. This I need not enlarge upon, having already in a measure anticipated it. This world, then, is the valley of decision,—the voice of the law against us. Then comes the Messiah and meets that. The ground being cursed is against us. Then comes the covenant of providence, and mitigates that. “He that believeth not”—is against us, if we believe not—“he

that believeth"—if we do believe, and receive the truth really into our souls, then it is for us,—we shall be saved. You may doubt and fear all the way to heaven. If your doubts and fears arise from godly jealousy, not from any inclination to go away from God's truth, then I respect your doubts and fears, I sympathize with you in them; they are doubts and fears that I myself am at times exercised by.

I come now to the last part of our subject, namely, "The day of the Lord is near." What day of the Lord is that which is near in the valley of decision? The day of death is the day of the Lord, sir, that is near. Take the man that has despised God and godliness, and everything godly; presently he comes to his dying hour. Ah, man! the Scriptures said you should return to the dust. You have had your own way hitherto. Thou girdedst thyself, poor man! and wentest whither thou wouldest; but now the Judge hath taken thee in hand; he hath commissioned the scythe to cut thee down; he hath commissioned the arrow to enter into thy vitals, and there thou liest, a blind, benighted, lost, miserable worm of the earth, on thy way to hell; and over thy death-bed is written, by the hand of inspiration divine, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still." There thou art, dying in thine unrighteousness; there thou art, dying in thine own corruption. It is the day of God. Man has had his own day when he had health, and wealth, and plenty; but he abused the same, and made use of the same to insult the God that made him; but now the end is come,—it is the day of the Lord. "The day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." And take the Pharisee that has despised the truth; he comes to die; there are no bands in his death. His consciousness of his own supposed moral worth keeps the enemy back, or rather, the enemy never disturbed him. There are no bands in his death, no plague, no trouble. A dead Church parson, a dead Church prayer, or a free-will prayer, with a tremendous noise, try to work the man's nerves up, and excite him, and make him think it is a spiritual sensation; and if he can work up a little spiritual sensation, the bystanders say, Ah! there you see how happy he died; and how happy they died! You see they died happy without those high doctrines. Ah! they did die happy, but it was the happiness of spiritual delusion, sir; it is the happiness that Satan glories in. There are no bands in their death; they never have been really tried under a conviction of what they are, or else they would never have died in such delusion as they are now dying in. It is the day of God; and as they have given themselves up to delusion in their life, God gives them up to delusion in their death. "Like sheep, they are laid in the grave"—by the hand of man; as goats they shall rise from the grave by the power of God—"death shall feed on them, and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning." The day of the Lord is near when we come to die. It is the day of the Lord with the Christian as well; but how different! The day of the Lord is near unto us. A little while longer. The other few days we have will soon be gone, and we shall fly away, and the places that have known us shall know us no more. But have we anything to lament in this day of the Lord? No; it will be his day then, in the glorious sense of the word; and over your dying bed it is written by infallible inspiration, "He that is holy, let him be holy still." Ah! says Satan, I had hoped that I could have made use of their corruptible death to corrupt them in Christ. But no, you cannot. "He that is holy, let him be holy still; he that is righteous, let him be righteous still;" and so, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

Here, then, are solemn decisions; and here is the day, in one sense, it may be called, of final decision that is near at hand, namely—the day of death. That day is near, and there is no alteration after that. Once in hell, in hell for ever; once in heaven, in heaven for ever.