

A VOICE FROM THE CROSS

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice.” Luke 23:46

THERE are four things suggested in our text, his having cried with a loud voice. When, we look pretty closely into what it implies, it implies clearly these four things. First, *peace*; second, *perfection*; third, *strength*; and fourth, *unity*. These four things, though they may not appear at first sight, are yet suggested here, when we look closely into it. First, that of peace. “A loud voice.” The adjective here rendered “loud,” is sometimes rendered “great.” Looking, therefore, at the original word, it combines the two ideas, that of loudness and of greatness; and is intended to be set over against something that concerns us. And the matter to my mind stands like this: Sin is a very loud, and, I was going to say, not only loud, but multifarious voice against us. In a variety of ways does sin speak against us. And it is by the voice of love and mercy from Calvary, it is by the voice of the Savior’s work, that sin is neutralized; for by his death sin is atoned for, and by his precious death sin loses its power. Our original sin cannot say a word against us, for in opposition to this stands the voice of the Savior’s atoning death. Our heart sins before God cannot say a word against us, for in opposition to these stands the voice of the atonement of Jesus Christ. And our life sins shall not be able before God to say, a word against us; not one of these shall utter a whisper even against one of the Israel of God, because over against them stands the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a voice, therefore, more powerful than sin; it neutralizes sin. And what can be more comfortable than this thought, that Jesus Christ has thus taken away the sting of death? for the sting of death is sin. And perhaps it would not be wrong to say that it is the sting of life too, for it spoils everything in human life. It is the sting of life and the sting of death. But Jesus, his precious blood, the voice of his precious blood, neutralizes the whole; and when brought to a consciousness of this, we shall not attempt to set anything over against sin, in opposition to it, as a way in which we can have access to God, as a way in which we can enjoy full pardon, as a way in which we can have the entire approbation of heaven, as the way in which we can prevail with God, and God be unto us a God of peace; we shall not attempt to set anything else over against our sins, or to plead anything else before God, but the precious blood of Jesus. Here is that loud, that great, that powerful voice that is infinitely more powerful than sin itself. Oh, what a sweet standing is this! The apostle, when taking in the whole, as it were, of the work of the Savior, says, “Being thus justified by his blood” justified from all sin by his blood, “we have peace with God through

our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have access into this grace wherein we stand” this grace of peace with God wherein we stand, “and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” When I am brought, and so it is with you of course as well, into the position of which I am now speaking, and have in my conscience a consciousness of the infinitely superior power of the blood of Christ over sin, that there is infinitely more power in that atonement to save than there is in sin to destroy, or to lay anything before God to my charge, when brought into this position, I can then sometimes say with the poet,

“My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss.”

What know you of this secret fellowship with the blessed God, this secret meditation upon him? Know you not, brethren, why it was that the ancients were wont to say, each was wont to say, “My meditations of him shall be sweet”? Why, it was because they found something in him more powerful to save than there was in sin to destroy. But if you meditate upon God after a law order, or after a broken covenant order, or after a mere preceptive order, or after creature-works order, why then your meditations will be anything but sweet; your meditations then will harden the heart, contract the mind, fetter the soul, and make you wish to run away from your own existence. But when you can meditate upon him by Jesus Christ, and hear that his voice, the voice of his blood, is that loud voice, mighty voice, almighty voice, a voice uttered never, no, never to be silenced, this voice has silenced sin, but sin can never silence the voice of Calvary’s blood. Sin has silenced us, and rightly so too. “Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord.” Our mouths are stopped, and we are brought down into self-despair. But when this precious atonement is revealed to us, and its voice comes and speaks peace, and pardon, and health, and everything we can need, then it is our lips are opened, and our mouths then show forth the praises of the Lord. Again, it is a voice louder also than Sinai. That was a very loud voice there. That one saying concerning Sinai I think is very instructive; the apostle says, “They could not endure that which was commanded.” Now, my hearer, if you have never so seen the law as to see that you could not be tested by it without being condemned; if you have never so felt the depravity or your own heart as to feel before God that if you were tested by any one, I don’t mind which it is, of the commandments of God, you must be condemned; if you have never seen this and felt this, and have never seen that there is infinitely more power in the voice of the law to damn than there is in all the goodness you can bring to save you; and your goodness is only fanciful goodness, your righteousness is only fanciful righteousness, they are all as filthy rags. And yet, while we could not endure it, the Savior endured it, and his wondrous life speaks louder for us than the law’s precepts could against us; his wondrous death speaks louder for us than the thunders of Sinai could against us. See, as I have often said, and I say it here again because it has done my heart good many times, the infinite difference between the law at Sinai and the law hushed to silence on the tables of stone in the ark of the covenant. See in the one what a tempestuous scene; see in the other what entire silence. There is nothing now to speak but Calvary’s blood. The curse was mighty, but the blessing was mightier; the law was strong, but Christ was stronger; the thunders of that law were tempestuously loud, but the thunders of the gospel are musically and eloquently loud. Hence, when John listened to the multitude of saved souls carrying out the voice of Calvary, he said that, their voice, and of course it was the voice of Calvary, for this, was their theme, that their voice was as the voice of mighty,

thundering, and as the voice of many waters. Not tempestuous thunders, but the thunders of eloquence, of music, of harmony; even harpers harping with their harps. So that it is a voice louder than the voice of the law. Bless the Lord for this, then! As there is no name like the name of Jesus, that name is above every name, so his voice is above every other voice. "Never man spoke like this man," this holy man, this righteous man, this God man, this Immanuel, this wondrous Person. Here, then, my hearer, if you would have peace from the law, and all its damning power, and all its terrible requirements and penalties, it must be by the loud voice of him who has said, "The dead" and that is more than the law can say, "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live." When the law shall call the ungodly out of the grave, or Christ, by virtue of his character as legislator, for he still remains the legislator to the lost, as well as the Savior to the saved, the law shall call them out of the grave, not that they may live, but that they may go into the second death, a death that never ends, the worm that dies not, and the fire that is never quenched. But here death is swallowed up in victory. Again, this voice is not only louder than sin, and the law, and its curse, but also louder than tribulation. You must have trouble in this world. We may as well make up our minds for it. There is no place that trouble is afraid to come to. What Joel says of the progress of locusts, the army of locusts, may be said of tribulations, "They shall run upon the wall, they shall climb upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows;" and nothing shall escape them. And so, it is, trouble will visit everyone, cannot get away from it. But then Calvary's cross, amidst all these troubles, can speak peace; and if he gives peace, who then can make trouble? There is a power, then, in this voice to hush the mightiest tempests. The billows may roll, and the winds be furious, but when this voice is applied, "Peace! be still!" immediately there is a great calm; immediately we are at the land whither we would go; immediately all is well; immediately we are brought into the sweet embraces of God's everlasting love; for this peace that is in Christ leads into a heartfelt acquaintance with the love of God. It is a loud voice, then, giving us peace from sin, peace from the law and its curse, peace from all tribulation. I do not think that we half believe, half our time, in that which the gospel will surely accomplish, namely, that it will wipe away all tears from off all faces, that is, from all that belong to Zion. It is in this mountain, Mount Zion, in this gospel order of things, where this precious faith is found; there it is the gospel shall wipe away all tears from off all faces. Ah! said the old Adam, the gospel may do it; but I will try and do it another way. I will try and make my money do it; and I will try and make a comfortable home do it; and I will try and make a little worldly applause do it; and I will try and make a beautiful dress do it. I will get out of my trouble somehow or another. Yes, such we are after the flesh, so fond of a few fleshly comforts. Well, say some, do you mean to reproach us? Not to reproach you, friends, any more than I do myself; for I do not pretend to be any exception to this rule. I am that fool, instead of looking to the gospel, and getting rid of my troubles there, instead of looking to the Lord, and getting my consolation there, I am everlastingly building castles in the air. What! say some, after living all these years? Well, you ought to know better. So, I do know better; but do we always act up to our knowledge, really so? I think not. Now, the Lord says he will wipe away all tears from off all faces. It is to be done by the gospel. We have really been very kind to the Lord, saving him all the trouble we could; and the very steps we take to get rid of our troubles generally multiply them. And so, it is we must come to the Lord at last. What say you, David? Well, he says, "Send out your light and your truth for I have been feeling about in the dark, hardly knowing what to do; and now, Lord, I cannot get rid of my trouble. I had a gourd there, but it was soon blasted; and I had a barn there, but it is gone, somehow or another. And now, Lord, send out your light, for my light is nothing but darkness. "Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto your holy hill. Then will I go unto the altar of God," same subject as our text,

Calvary's cross. There is the altar of God, "unto God, my exceeding joy." There are no consolations, after all, like gospel consolations. May the Lord bless you today, and make it a good day to you, and help you to drink out, shall I say? of the river of our text, in a way, I hope and trust, my own soul has been favored to do! Calvary's cross has great effect upon the mind of every child of God, though not so much as the Christian could wish. It is such a delightful meeting! Oh! instead of being cursed, we are blessed; instead of wrath, here is mercy; instead of anger, here is approbation; instead of rejection, here is reception; instead of being sent away, we are infinitely welcome. Here is everything; yes, abundantly more than we can either ask or think is found here at Calvary's cross, by the tender mercy of our God, whereby this wondrous dayspring from on high has visited us. This, I think, then, is one thing intended by the loud voice, to neutralize everything that is against us. And that is very pleasing. But still this can be appreciated only as we have a sight and sense of what there is against us; it is this will make us appreciate Calvary's cross.

The second thing intended, taking the scripture I just now referred to as our guide, is that of *perfection*. "It is finished," John 19:30. Perfection. "With a loud voice." Here is, then, perfection. What does it mean? Why, it means a perfect and an eternal freedom from all sin. As the word of God has it, "You are all fair; there is no spot in you;" neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing. Here it is as we stand in him, no evil can befall us, no plague can come near that dwelling. And it is a delightful truth to believe in, is this perfection; for when he said, "It is finished," that testimony is a truth which is explained in a great many parts of the word of God, that it means our entire freedom from sin. And hence the apostle says of Christ, a scripture we seem almost always quoting, because it is one of those luminous displays of the Lord's mercy that is attractive to our soul, that "he has by his one offering perfected forever them that are sanctified." Now, my hearer, is this testimony of Christ's perfection dear to your heart? and are you, when you look at the law, and look at the precepts, and look at what a poor creature you are, are you sometimes saying, Oh, what should I do but for this perfection that is in Christ? Oh, how I love this completeness of the Savior's work! Oh, how I love to read of his being the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes! Oh, how I love to read that he that believes has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation! Oh, how I love to read of the delightful truth that he has put away sin, all sin, by the sacrifice of himself! It is the voice of perfection, meaning entire freedom from sin; so that the Lord will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. What a wondrous way of mercy is this! The learned say there it is a wrong translation, for that there was a great deal of iniquity in Jacob, they say, and a great deal of perverseness in Israel; and therefore some of them they maul, and pull, and tug, and tear the translation about, to make it say something that accords with their learned pates and Pharisaic hearts. But the Lord does not say there was not any iniquity in Jacob, the Lord does not say there was no perverseness in Israel, because that would not have been true. But he says he will not see it, for he has cast it, says another scripture, behind his back. He said he would not behold iniquity, for Christ has blotted it out, put it away; it is forgiven and forgotten. He does not say there is no iniquity or perverseness, but he will not behold it, and he will not see iniquity in Jacob; and, consequently, there can be no enchantment against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel, "for the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." It does not say there is not any, but he won't see it. We may well cleave unto the Lord our God, for where will you find a friend like that on earth? Here, with our God, all is right. He will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. You may depend upon it this is one of the things that provoked the Pharisees of old. You can hear them speaking one to another. You can hear one old Pharisee saying to another, One of the strangest things to me is this, dear brother

Pharisee, one of the strangest things to me is this; that this Jesus of Nazareth, he has chosen those plain, plodding men, and they make a great many blunders, and yet he won't see any fault in them. We have pointed out several of their faults to him, and he won't notice it. There they are, gathering corn on the sabbath, and he rounds it off, and oils it over, and smooths it down. And there we pointed out to him also that they neglected to fast, and they were enjoying themselves; and he smoothed that over, rounded that off, and oiled that over, and made it comfortable, and said, "Can the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?" A most strange thing it is. And there is that Peter; why, he cut off a man's ear; and do you know, brother Pharisee, instead of his letting Peter fall into the natural result of his own rashness, never trust me if he didn't put the man's ear on again for him, and Peter went free. And do you know that Peter even swore that he never knew him? and never trust me if he even told him about it afterwards. What do you think he said? "Well, Peter, do you love me?" "Yes," said Peter, "I do." Did you ever see such a master as that in your life? Well now, if he did but know what dear, good creatures we are, and what good-for-nothing creatures his disciples are, he would turn them out and take us in their place. And what a strange sort of thing is it! it is one of the strangest things, that the world, they see so many faults in us, and yet the Lord won't see one. What a strange thing it is! and it always has been strange. But it is love that does it; that is the origin of it, and the dear Redeemers mediation makes that oblivion just; so that, while God is merciful and loving, he is just and holy too; just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. This mighty voice, then, my hearer, is the voice of perfection.

"'Tis finished,' said his dying breath,
And shook the gates of hell;"

swallowed up all its counsels. The church must rise; the top stone shall be brought home with shouting of grace, and grace unto it. Mark the distinction here. There is a great deal of sin in me. I have a wicked, infidel heart, that very often sides with infidelity, even against the Bible, and would carry me away too, were it not that grace reigns, and enables me still to hold on with a little faith, a little hope, a little love. I just stand fast, and that is all. Why, say some, have yon such an infidel heart as that? I have, my hearer, and I am sensible of it, groan under it, and glory in the delightful truth that, notwithstanding all the sin I am the subject of in myself, the Lord will not behold iniquity in me as I stand in Jesus. There I am free, there I am happy, there my feet are like hinds' feet, there I am let loose, and can give goodly words concerning him. But again, not only perfection relatively, but it is the voice of perfection prospectively. We are going on toward perfection; we are not yet perfect, except relatively. We are perfect in kind, that is, if we are true Christians. "They shall come forth as gold;" their religion is real. I am not perfect in degree, but only in kind. I know I am a poor sinner saved by grace, and I am, with all the powers of my soul, sincere in that salvation, sincere in the faith, and sincere in my love to Christ. God himself will never say to the contrary, for he has searched me and tried me, and with all the powers of my soul do I love his blessed, blessed truth, and the more I know of it the more I am at home in it. So, we are not perfect in degree, but we are in kind; perfect in kind, not perfect in degree, though we are perfect both in kind and degree as we stand in Christ, and then we are going on to actual perfection. The apostle says, "Warning every man;" that is, every man that came within the range of his pastoral care, every Christian, professed Christian. Oh, say some, we think that means every man generally. Very well; of course, you belong to the world, and you will give that which is holy to the dogs. But if you are taught of God, you will know the "every man there does not mean every man literally, but every professing man to whom the apostle was writing. He was writing to the Colossians. Now

then, "Warning every man." You profess to belong to Christ; we warn and caution you against abounding errors, which he does in the first part of that very epistle; he cautions them against everything which would lead them away from the completeness that is in Christ, and from the simplicity that is in Christ. "Teaching every man in all wisdom." There it is. What is the ultimate end? "That we may present every man perfect in Christ." What a glorious end is that to be answered! So, we are going on to perfection; not to perfection in the flesh, because we know that is going the way of all the earth, viz., to the dust, but we are going on to perfection in Christ. "Put you on the Lord Jesus Christ;" "as you have received Christ, so walk you in him." It is, therefore, the perfect possession of Christ, and the perfect capacity for ever to enjoy him, together with a perfection of inheritance, a perfection of knowledge, a perfection of glory, that perfection to which we are travelling. Thus, then, it is the voice of peace, neutralizing all that is against us; it is the voice of perfection. "It is finished."

Then, third, it is the voice of *strength*. If Jesus Christ had died as mere man, from natural exhaustion, could he, with his parting breath, have uttered a *loud* voice? that voice sounding over the doomed city of Jerusalem, and yet that loud voice indicating that his death should be so loud, that is, so powerful, that the dead should be awakened. And so, this loud voice shook the earth, rent the rocks, opened the graves, rent the veil of the temple in twain, and many of the dead that were in the graves arose, and went into the holy city. The voice of strength, then, is a strong voice. Well, but Christ was crucified through weakness! Truly so, he took our weakness, and, as man, he died; but, as God, he still retained almighty strength. Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice, but he never died as a priest. "He abides a priest continually." He died as a sacrifice. Under the law, it was not the business of the priest to die, but the sacrifice; and so Jesus Christ did not die as a priest, he died as a sacrifice, and the only offering he, as a priest, had to offer was himself, he presented himself, himself the sacrifice. He cried with a loud voice, showing he did not die from natural exhaustion. He took our weakness upon him, and he died sovereignly. I must insist upon this point for a moment, because it is this that is interesting to the Christian, and this that is glorifying to our God. He died sovereignly. He took a retrospective, a present, and a prospective range of vision before he laid down his life. He looked back into past ages, and saw not a cloud left; blotted out as a cloud every one of their trespasses; he took range and survey of the present, not one object of eternal life in existence now whose sin I have not blotted out. He then takes a prospective range, and sees you and everyone for whom he was then dying, and he saw that all was done, all was clear; that now he should be as the morning when the sun rises, even a morning without clouds; and he said with a loud voice, it had not exhausted him. As though he should say, If another church were given to me now, I have strength enough left to die for that also; cannot exhaust him: here is still self-possession. The loud voice, the mighty voice. And, so far from speaking like a dying man, he spoke like a man who had just gained the victory without undergoing the least exhaustion whatever. And yet, he bore what none, but such a person could bear; and his human nature must be subjected to weakness unto death. But, then, he was God at the same time, and by his divinity could, by means of his humanity, express himself in his dying moments, not in the voice of lamentation, not in the voice of groaning and sighing; all that was done, all that was over; but in the voice of infinite triumph, "It is finished." He died triumphantly, laid down his life sovereignly, yielded up the ghost sovereignly. And Pilate, who was not in the secret, marveled that he was already dead; and the people wondered that he was already dead.

They meant, of course, as the next day was the sabbath, to hasten his death. What a scripture is that! how it should encourage us! in a little quiet corner of the 12th of Exodus, of the literal paschal lamb it is said, "Not a bone of him shall be broken;" not a bone of the lamb was to be broken. Who would have thought that that little clause in that quiet corner of the 12th of Exodus had such an immensity of meaning? Come to the cross. Ah, how near it was! There was the lictor's battle-axe raised to strike the blow, and to break the legs of all three; but there is One of whom it was quietly written (for it is not enlarged upon; it is mentioned simply there, and not spoken of afterwards), "Not a bone of him shall be broken." Oh, how near, how great the danger, apparently! but it was only in appearance. Ah, so the Lord will take care of us. It shows the peculiar care, the special care the Lord exercised over the blessed manhood of the dear Redeemer. And his people are members of his body, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone; all are loved and shall be taken care of. But I am going away from my point. Now it is the voice of strength, then; I need not remind you here of the strength of this voice on the day of Pentecost. What was it that enabled the apostles to bring so many to Christ on that day? The voice of Calvary; the loud voice, the mighty voice of Jesus, "It is finished." What enabled the martyrs to endure what they did? The same thing. And how is it the gospel has quickened us, and kept us to this day? By its strength. Hear the apostle's testimony, that bears out what is here meant by the loud voice, strength. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." That is a magnificent scripture; don't lose sight, if you can help it, of the beauty of it. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is," the power of Christ? No. First it is the gospel of Christ, and, then, second, that Christ is God, and that gospel has in it the eternal power and Godhead of Christ. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God." The power of God. Ah, if he were not God, our hope would make us ashamed; we should lie down in despair and shame. But "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes." Believe you, then, my hearer, in this voice as neutralizing all that is against you? Believe you in this voice as the voice of perfection? Believe you in this voice as the voice of Almighty strength, that there is no strength like it? It can melt the adamant heart, unfetter the fettered soul, set the prisoner free, and do wonders that nothing else can. The apostle might well say that this same gospel is foolishness in the eyes of human learning, but unto us it is the wisdom of God and the power of God. A mighty voice, there is no weakness in it. Stand up and tell people that there is a sinner there that Jesus Christ has made several attempts to save, and he cannot do it! How ashamed I should be to be the representative of such a Christ as that! How ashamed I should be to own that my Jesus Christ was so weak! How ashamed I should be that it was the will of the Father that the sheep should all come unto Zion, and that he committed the carrying out of that will to Christ, and Christ has to return and say, Father, I have got some here; I would have had them all, but they would not come! How ashamed I should be of such a gospel! and so would the apostle be, too. The reason he was not ashamed was because it was the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

But, lastly, *unity*. It is the voice of unity with God. We are naturally severed from God without Christ, and without God. But here is the voice of unity with God. "It is finished." How beautifully the apostle traces out this unity in the 8th of Romans! "It is God that justifies;" that is, by Christ Jesus. "Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died," there is the voice of unity, uniting us to God; "yes, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." Well now, as Jesus Christ has by his work formed this unity, it is an indissoluble unity. I do not like to be rash, but it is hard work to keep from it; I was going to say, what a tremendous liar you must be, that hold the doctrine that you may be a real Christian today,

and severed from the love of God tomorrow! What a tremendous liar you must be! Why, you will never go to heaven in that belief; you must leave that lie behind, or else you will, never go to heaven. Why, you red-hot free-wilier, and you duty-faith man (you are nothing better, you are only a free-wilier in disguise), you fly in the face of God's truth. Thus, the apostle Paul brings in the voice of the Savior's work, and concludes with saying, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" And then he imagines all possible circumstances, peril, nakedness, sword, famine. Nay, so far from severing us, all these circumstances are only as so many trade-winds wafting us to our ultimate desired haven, working together for good. For "in all these things," though we are killed all the day long, and are accounted as sheep for the slaughter, yet "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded" here is the unity, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Here we have, then, in this loud voice, first, the neutralization of all that is against us; second, the perfection by which we are accepted of God; third, the strength by which the whole is maintained; and fourth, the indissoluble unity with the blessed God. Here his love shines in its eternity; "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore in lovingkindness have I drawn you." And such a God becomes such poor sinners as we are.