

THE WAY TO BE GOOD

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

John 5:29

IT is not the last great day, with its solemnities and wonders, that I shall this evening attempt to dwell upon. There are two things that I think will occupy the greater part of our time; and the first is *the good that we must do in order to obtain that world*; and then, secondly, *the judgment to which the others shall rise*. We have then set before us the good and the evil.

First, then, *what is the kind of good that we must do in order to be saved?* For you must not forget one thing, that the whole human race are in the word of God declared to be evildoers; that there is none righteous, no, not one; that there is none that does good, no, not one. And yet my text says, “They that have done good shall come forth unto the resurrection of life.” So that in taking this verse into consideration, you will at once see the kind of good that we must do. It must be a remedial good; it must be a good that does away with evil; that is the kind of good that we must do. And what is that kind of good? Why, it consists in this, in receiving the truth as it is in Jesus, and abiding by it, after that order I will presently make as clear as possible. In the first place, then, it is a self-evident truth that all of us by nature are evildoers; and we are reckoned as such; God has concluded us all under sin; God has concluded us all in unbelief; it is God’s testimony. This being the case, then, I say the kind of doing essential to our welfare is a remedial kind of doing. We want that kind of good that will do away with the evil; and if we do that kind of good, then we ourselves are good, and we shall have done good, and shall be received into this everlasting life. It is, then, in the first place, to receive the truth as it is in Jesus. As the Savior here says, “He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” So, then the first thing, the first good you must do, is to receive a remedy for all your evil. Thus, if we explain our text in this way, we shall explain it scripturally; for you know it is written, and the reasons suggest themselves very clearly, that without faith it is impossible to please God. Our text, therefore, the first part of it, must be explained not upon legal grounds, but upon gospel grounds; not upon the ground of creature works, but upon the ground of Christian works; not upon the ground of fleshly works, but upon the ground of the works of faith. First, then, you must receive that that is a remedy for all the evil. So, then,

here is the Lord Jesus Christ. The best thing a sinner can do is to receive Jesus Christ in what he has done; and if you receive him in his sacrificial perfection, then you receive that by which all the evil is put away; you get rid of sin, you arrive at the end of sin, you come into good, entire freedom from sin, perfect in Christ, complete in him. And then if you receive his righteousness, you hereby come out of condemnation into justification. "He that believes," says Christ, "on him that sent me." A word upon that presently. Now, then, in receiving Jesus Christ as the remedy; only we must receive him in his sufficiency; we must receive him in his sacrificial sufficiency. And you cannot, my hearer, have too much confidence here. Remember (and I must tell you again and again of this truth) that you are but a creature; but that your Savior, where your hope is, while he is man, he is at the same time Immanuel, God with us; he is God, and therefore there is an infinity of sacrificial excellency and efficacy in his precious blood. So that in receiving this delightful truth of the atonement of Jesus Christ, you do good; you do good unto your own soul, and you do the best thing that can be done, as we shall presently see from some other scriptures upon this matter. For let a man receive what he may, if he does not receive Christ Jesus, he has not received anything that will do him good. But if you receive Christ Jesus in his sacrificial excellency, why, his sacrificial excellency will do you all the good you can need; receive his righteousness, and it frees you from all condemnation, and you stand eternally justified before the Lord. Now, then, it is worthy, this sacrificial perfection of Christ is worthy of all acceptance. "He came into the world to save sinners, of whom," said one, "I am the chief." Now this is the work of faith to receive this delightful testimony of what Christ has done. "He that believes" thus "on him that sent me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Not only to receive the testimony of what Christ has done, but also to believe on him that sent him. To believe that God sent Christ because he loved the world; to believe that God sent Christ because he verily foreordained that Christ should come; to believe that God sent Christ because nothing else would do. And in believing thus in God the Father, we shall see the love of God, we shall see the mercy of God, we shall see the goodness of God; we shall see here the truth of the holy scriptures, that he has of his goodness prepared for the poor. Now, then, as we have lately had to observe a little farther back in this book, "Unto as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." Now, this is the foundation good, this is the essential good. This is that good that Abel did; he received the truth as it is in Jesus, and, to represent what he received, brought the more excellent sacrifice. This reception of Christ's righteousness, this believing in Christ Jesus as the expression of God's eternal love and mercy, and, in connection with thus believing in Christ, believing in the immutability of God's counsel by Christ Jesus, this is receiving what Cain never did receive; this is doing that good thing that Cain never did do; this is doing that good thing that Ishmael never did do, he mocked at this gospel; this is doing that good thing that Esau never did; this is doing that good thing that the mere professor, the stony ground, or way side, or thorny ground hearer has never really and truly done.

Now, then, what are the signs that follow them that rightly receive the Savior? Why, said the Savior, these signs will follow them. "They shall cast out devils." The word *devils* there, taking the original word as my guide, means *demons*, or *mediatory gods*, There are two Greek words, as I have often said, different Greek words, translated *devil*, but the two different words have a very different meaning. And so there the original word refers to the heathen gods, or demons. In ancient times the heathen had a great many mediators. And hence it is that the mediators of Roman Catholics are nothing but of human invention. So he who is taught of God, the first thing he shall do is to cast out all these mediators, all these false religions, all these false gods, and to be brought

to feel and see that there is but one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; he shall reject all others, and be brought to him. And he also shall speak with new tongues. He shall speak of his sinner-ship, that man shall, in a way he never did before; he shall speak of Jesus Christ in a new way; he shall speak of the new covenant; he shall speak of the new heavens and the new earth, he shall speak of the delightful truth that here, in this great matter of salvation, all old things are passed away, and all things are become, new. "And they shall take up serpents" that is, they shall overcome serpents; take them up, and cast them out of their way. "And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. By serpent's we are to understand enemies; let the enemy be what he may, yet they shall even take these up, and shall overcome them. "And if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them." That is, the Lord's people have their troubles, a great many troubles, troubles that would ruin a natural religion. Now, for instance, if my religion consisted in fleshly quietude, and fleshly humility, and fleshly piety, and smooth, and quiet, and good behavior, why, I am brought, into trouble, and I am so provoked, and I so kick, and I so rebel, that I am like a beast of the earth. Why, my religion is gone, sir; I have not a bit left; it has torn my religion all to pieces if my religion lay in the flesh. But if I have to drink these tribulations, and they make me kick, and rebel, and curse the day of my birth, why, that shall not hurt me, as I stand in Christ; and even my very rebellions shall be under the Lord's management, subservient to the humiliation of my soul before God, and to the making way for the coming in more of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, then, if your religion consisted of your own doings, why then your troubles would kill your religion, and you too. But then, as your religion consists of faith in Christ, your religion may be tried, but it cannot be destroyed; it may be tried to the very uttermost, but it shall be found like Job's faith at last; it shall be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." The meaning of all this is, that those that receive the Lord Jesus Christ rightly, that they shall thus cast out all other mediators, and cleave unto the one Mediator, Christ Jesus the Lord, and cleave unto the Lord their God by him. And that "they shall speak with new tongues," the Lord has given unto them a new language; and that "they shall cast out serpents" enemies, they shall overcome them; and that whatever deadly things they have to drink, they may kill a great many of their natural comforts, a great many of their worldly comforts, they may kill and blast a great many of their, worldly and fleshly hopes; but those deadly things shall not touch them as they stand in Christ, shall not hurt them, and that they shall recover all their sicknesses. Now, then, to do good in the essential sense of the word is thus to receive the truth as it is in Jesus. And it is a remarkable thing that David speaks of the Lord's people as being good people in their reception of, and decision for, these truths of eternal salvation. See his 125th Psalm. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed;" as that Zion which Christ has founded, as that kingdom which he has founded, cannot be removed, so they that trust in the Lord, shall be like the kingdom, that kingdom cannot be moved, and they shall be like that kingdom, they cannot be moved. And "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth, even forever." Now in that same psalm, David calls these people who trust in God after the order of this immoveable Zion, these same people who trust in God after the order of this eternal security, for "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth, even for ever;" and those who are thus reconciled to God, and receive these testimonies, are in that psalm called *good* people. "Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good." It is that that makes a good man, believing in Christ; the man is good by faith in Christ.

And they dwell there, too. Now, then, “Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.” As for such as turn aside from this mount Zion, as for such as turn aside from this eternal certainty of truth, for “the Lord is round about his people from henceforth, even forever;” and as for such as turn aside from this God of Zion, “this God is our God for ever and forever, and will be our guide even unto death;” as for such as turn aside from that, “and they shall come and sing in the height of Zion:” “as for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity;” they belong to the mystery of iniquity, a system of hostility against God’s truth: “the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity; but peace shall be upon Israel.” Here, then, they that have done good are they that have received Christ Jesus, have received the truth, and have abode thereby. Let us have a word upon that; we will come to the practical part presently; not going to let you off, no; you shall have it. But decision. You must not only receive the truth but abide by it. But let us amplify, before I come to the outward part, a little more upon this. Now, Rahab, what are you going to do? Why, the best thing I can do. What is that? I am going to receive these messengers of God, and in receiving those messengers I shall receive God, and in receiving them God will receive me, and I shall not perish with them that perish. For I know that their God has given them the land; I know he has; I know he is the God of heaven and of earth, of the sea and of the dry land. I know what he has done in Egypt; I know what he has done in the wilderness; and as neither Egyptians, nor Amalekites, nor Amorites, could stand before him, how can the Canaanites stand before him? All the inhabitants of the land faint because of him. And therefore, I will receive his servants, let them out another way, and I will give a good evasion rather than utter a bad truth; I will say they are not here; I won’t betray them. Was not Rahab justified in receiving the spies and sending them out another way? thus justified by works. Rahab did the best thing she could. Now, says the Holy Ghost, I will put you into the first chapter of the New Testament; there you shall be. And so, she is. You read, you Pharisee, the genealogy in Matthew. Rahab. Ah, ah, how came that Rahab here? By faith, sir; by a faith you Pharisees never possessed. The Holy Ghost has put her there; the blessed God has put her there: and there stands her name to adorn the first page of the New Testament, in order that the New Testament in its very commencement may sound out by an example of grace that Jesus Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And God put her into the title-page, as it were, that she might be the first instance of this. She did the best thing she could do; she did good; and she is in heaven.

So, then, the people that have done good essentially are the people that receive Christ Jesus in what he has done, are the people that receive the truth after the order of Zion’s eternal stability, are the people also that abide by it. Let us have no shuffling, no turning, no twisting, no underwork; come right out, stand right out; no free-will, no Popery, no duty-faith, no fuller’s earth, no Baxterian sand; let us have none of it. Let us stand upon Zion’s elevated hill, and there stand with the challenge on our lips, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died.” So he has done all the good for them, and they receive the good that he has done, and the good that he has done is imputed to them, and they are dealt with as though they themselves had done it. God imputed our sins to Christ and imputes his work to us. When I enter heaven by his atonement, I shall be treated according to that atonement; when I enter heaven I shall be dealt with according to that righteousness, as though I myself had paid the price of my own admission, as though I myself had done all the good that Christ has ever done. Oh, what a life, what a light, what a liberty, what a peace, what a joy, what a glory, is that into which each man shall rise that has done this essential good, to receive the truth, and to abide

by it! Truly, truly said one, "This is our victory, even our faith." Now some of you Pharisees don't like it, but you must be damned if you don't like it before you die, for "except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven," And there is but one righteousness that can exceed their righteousness, and that is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, if you receive the truth rightly, so as to know the value of it, "he that hears the word, and understands it," you will abide faithfully by it. How firm were the patriarchs! You move good old Noah from the plan of the ark if you can. No, no. You advise him to have two windows, and three doors, and make some accommodation for the people. No, no, says he; I have my orders from God, and it shall be God's ark. And in faithfully abiding by it, now, Noah, as you have thus done good, done that which is right, I will deal with you accordingly. And so, the Lord did, and carried him through the flood. Now, Moses, as you have done in Egypt as I have commanded you, both in the ministration of the judgments, and in the paschal lamb, I will deal with you according to your works; your works are works of faith, and so you shall pass triumphantly through the sea, which the Egyptians on essaying to do shall be drowned. And so, David; nothing could kill him; there was not anything could kill David, neither his own sins nor anybody's else. He did live, and must live, and would live, and abode firmly by the truth. And the Lord directed all the after kings to David as an example of decision; a decided man, lived and died in the truth, and his song at the last was a covenant ordered in all things, and sure. Thus then, my hearers, to do good is to receive the truth, and to abide by it. This is the good that will carry you to heaven. They that have done good. And they that have not done good, though they might have removed mountains, though they might have given their goods to feed the poor, and their bodies to be burned, yet if they have not this faith, this reception of Christ, and decision for the truth, their religion is a thing of nothing. Oh, my hearers, nothing could save you but this precious faith; and all real good in the sight of God must arise from this oneness with Christ Jesus. "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

The second thing is you must come out of the world; you must not belong to the world. You must have done, with the pothouse, and the theatre, and the card-table, and your concerts, playhouses, all your parties, done with the whole. "Come out from among them, and be you separate, and I will receive you, says the Lord God Almighty, and you shall be my sons and my daughters, says the Lord." Separation. "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." We live in a day when many people give way to the recreations, as they are called, parties, and concerts, and various things of that kind, a great deal more than they ought to do; coming crawling home at twelve, one, or two o'clock in the morning from some sort of concert party, and ill the next day, and can't come to chapel next night. That is religion, is it? That is the way to hell, sir, not to heaven. "Come out from among them, and be you separate, touch not the unclean thing. I will receive you; I will be a father unto you." What can you want more? "and you shall be my sons and my daughters, says the Lord God Almighty." They that have done good, then, first, in receiving the truth and abiding by it; secondly, letting your light shine before men, that they may see that there is a difference, that they may see that you are not with them. They may sneer at you because you run not with them into their excesses; never mind; "if you be reproached for righteousness' sake, happy are you;" if you be reproached for separation from the world, happy are you; if you be reproached for the Lord's sake, happy are you. They may try to heap slanders upon you; never mind, bear it quietly, leave it with him who judges righteously. You know you are safe in your religion. You have done good; you have received the truth, and abode by it, and have come out from the world, and stood out for God in the world; been his witness in the world.

You must practically sympathize with the poor of God's people, and with the cause of God. If you grudge your money, and you have not a heart to give, there is something the matter with your religion somewhere. "He that has showed no mercy shall have judgment without mercy, and mercy rejoices against judgment." "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled; notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful to the body, what does it profit? What, does it profit, my brethren, though a man says he has faith, and has not works? can faith save him?" No, not a dead faith; for if your faith does not lead you to do a few good works, it is not very likely to take you to heaven; that is what I think about it; and if your faith has not love enough in it to lead you to sympathize with the poor of the Lord's people, and with the cause of God, I should very much question whether such a faith as that would take you to heaven. "Will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" and that devils believe, and yet their faith will never take them to heaven? And hence, then, the people of God are doers of good works. And so, the Lord will say at the last; he will recognize these good works, not as any part of their salvation, but as evidences on their side. "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And how does the Lord distinguish them? He could have distinguished them, as he sometimes does, by other features, but he is pleased there to distinguish them, by the very thing upon which I am now speaking: "For I was hungry, and you gave me meat: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came unto me." And the righteous shall answer, Lord, when saw we you in these necessities? we have been poor creatures all the way, we don't seem to have done anything. "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, in as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me." Ah, there are but few that can give a cup of cold water really and truly to a disciple as unto a disciple. A lady about thirty miles from London, such a dear pious creature, a lump of sugar would not melt in her mouth, the very essence of kindness. Presently here is a poor man ill; she visits him, and gives him sixpence, and then a shilling, and then another shilling. But presently, "Ah, h'in, h'in; the last time I was here I forgot to ask you, are you a religious man?" Well, ma'am, I don't know about religious; I believe I know the truth." "Why, what do you mean by the truth?" Why, that we are complete in Christ, and chosen in him before the world was; and that God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation." "Why," she says, "that is that dreadful Calvinism, that dreadful high doctrine." And she went away, did not give him a halfpenny; and went to the church parson, and told him what a bad man this was; and so, neither the church parson nor the pious lady went near him anymore. So much for your piety. And yet these are the people that will say, "Lord, when saw we you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto you?" Why, that poor man, with all your doing, when you found out he was a high doctrine man, what did you do? You gave him up directly. I know a case where a gentleman of our congregation has been allowing three or four shillings a week to a poor man for the last two or three months. The man was brought to know the truth through reading our Sunday morning sermons, and as soon as it was known all the charities round were withdrawn. But the Lord stepped in, and by the instrumentality I have mentioned, and by other means, is maintaining the poor man notwithstanding. It is not enough to be benevolent; let the *principle* be right. "He that gives a cup of cold water to a disciple, *as a disciple*," from real brotherly love, not from mere fleshly benevolence, but let it be done from the right principle, and then it will be found that those people that do really give to a true disciple are very few.

So, then, they shall come forth that have done this fourfold good: first, receiving the truth, that is one good you must do; second, abiding by it; third, separation from the world; fourth, practical sympathy towards the people of God, and, indeed, towards all men as well, as far as we can. Certainly, that is our motto, according to the Lord's own word, "Do good unto all men, especially unto the household of faith." Let us look to them first and do good where we can. Now this, then, is what I understand by our text. So that, if I am not a receiver of God's truth, then I shall be lost. Let me be what I may; I may be as pure as an angel in my own eyes, and in the eyes of men, but if I am not a receiver of God's truth, I shall be lost. All must be damned that receive not the love of the truth. If I do not abide by it, that will prove that my religion is not right, and I shall be found at last among the hypocrites. And if I am not severed from the world but go with the world, and am one with it, either profane or empty professing, that again will lay a foundation to question the reality of my religion. And then, again, if I am like the young man in the gospel, "All these have I kept from my youth." Have you? And yet you have great possessions. "Love your neighbor as yourself." There are a hundred people round you starving, and you have so much money you don't know what to do with, and you have not given them a halfpenny, and yet you boast of keeping the commandments. A pretty keeper of the commandments you are, certainly. Always kept them from my youth. Yes, you have kept them, sure enough; you have kept them in your pocket, as the folks do their prayer-books; that is all, and kept your money with them; so that both your religion and your money have been in your pocket, and there you have kept them. No wonder that he went home with sorrow. There are a great many people make a great deal about religion, and are very fond of it if it don't touch their pocket; but as soon as you touch them there, you touch them in a tender place. As an old minister said some time ago to a lady on the occasion of a collection, "Now, Mr. Tite," she said (for that was his name), "if you want to get to my pocket you must get to my heart first." "Ah," he said, "I know your pocket and your heart are pretty close together, and I know I shall not be very far from your pocket if I get to your heart." And I thought it was a very good answer, and I hope the lady felt it and acted upon it. This, then, is the fourfold good: the receiving the truth in the understanding and love of it; the abiding by it conscientiously and faithfully; separation from the world and ministering to the necessities of the saints, as far as the Lord shall enable us to do so. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labor of love; in that you have ministered and do minister unto the saints." May the Lord keep us, then, in this path of truth, decision for it, separation from the world, and in every good word and work to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

I now go to the other class, they that have done evil. I will not occupy your time in describing the evil; I have already done that in effect. My hearer, if you are not found in the faith you will be reckoned an evildoer, if you are not found in Christ you will be reckoned when you die, and at the judgment, an evil doer. If you have not the Spirit of Christ, you are none of his; if you are not born of the Spirit of God you will be reckoned an evil doer. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. Thus, then, they that have done good in the gospel sense of the word, only mind, let the foundation be right; it must be the truth received after the order I have stated, "these shall come forth unto the resurrection of life." Their sins at the last great day, not one will be named; not one sin will be present, not one will be named. It is their Ascension Day, it is their coronation day, it is their wedding day, it is the day in which they enter upon the glorious liberty of the Sons of God. There is nothing in death for the Christian but peace; there is nothing in the judgment day for the Christian but peace and universal congratulation. Unto each it shall be said, "Well done, you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful," there it is, the truth, "over a few things, I will make

you ruler over many things; enter you into the joy of your Lord.” Now our text says of the others, that “they shall come forth unto the resurrection of damnation.” In the time of King James I., which was the time that we had our present translation given to us, this country was a very swearing country; the king himself was a dreadful swearer, and the aristocracy swore also. I am very glad there is a great reform in our aristocracy in this respect now. And therefore, the word *damnation* was a part of their daily language, and one result is they have often put it into the Scriptures where they ought not to have done so. I admit the word is a kind of weighty word, but I don’t think the word damnation ought to be in our text; I think not. I think the Greek word *kriseos*, which means test, or trial by judgment, I think we ought to have had instead of the word *damnation*; not, I admit, but it is included, condemnation is included, of course, but still, I think we ought to have had the word *judgment*, that “they that have done evil shall come forth unto the resurrection of judgment,” that is, they will have to be tried then; each man out of Christ will have to be tried by the nature and magnitude of his sins. For I do not happen to believe that any man will suffer in hell for what he has not committed. I believe there are degrees in hell. God will not condemn one for the sins of another, but each will be condemned according to the nature and magnitude of his personal sins. Hence you do read of some receiving a greater condemnation than others; and you do read of the wrath of God coming upon some unto the uttermost. Therefore, I think the text would read more consistently with the original if we had the word *judgment*, that “they shall come forth unto the resurrection of judgment.” That is the day in which for the first time they shall be brought to judgment. Now the people of God are brought to judgment here, while in this world. God takes them in hand, convinces them of sin, brings them unto judgment, and they are judged of the Lord that they should not be condemned with the world. And therefore, my hearer, unless we are brought unto judgment now, we cannot escape judgment then. I will not here enlarge upon the scenes of that day. We are lost when we think of it. The whole human race! What the numbers will then be; the thousands of miles of space that they will occupy; and both the lost and the saved all suspended in the air, and their ranks for thousands and thousands of miles will be extended side by side. What a scene will that be! It is not to be on earth; the judgment is not to be on the earth. We are told that the dead are to be raised, and then the earth from under their feet will pass away by fire, and that we are to meet the Lord in the clouds in the air. And the ungodly shall he suspended in the air on his left hand; thousands of miles, I should say, the lost will reach; and thousands of miles, I should say, the saved will reach. Here will be then two mighty worlds; here will be the lost world and the saved world. Oh, how inadequate is language, and all the similes that we can use, to set forth on the one hand the terrors of that day, and on the other hand the glories of that day! And yet you will witness it; you will be there, and I shall be there; not one will be absent, not one can escape. Says my text, “They *shall* come forth; they that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and they *shall* come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life.