

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

KNOW THE TRUTH, OR BE LOST.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 6TH, 1864, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

“Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”—Luke xix. 44.

THERE were two orders of things that belonged to the peace of the Jews as a nation; one of those orders of things they had perverted, which led them to despise and to reject the other. Of course the peace here spoken of is not that peace that Jesus Christ has made for the reconciliation and eternal salvation of his people; that peace stands upon different grounds, and hath in it different purposes altogether. But the peace here spoken of is that national peace and preservation to which we referred last Lord's day morning, upon the Saviour's words of gathering the children of Jerusalem together. Now, first, that order of things delivered unto them by Moses. Just in proportion as they kept to the one God, and to the ordinances and laws which he had given them, so they prospered; and, as you well know, their prosperity was at times very great; but when they apostatized from that order of things, then in came all the penalties of that covenant. Just so in the Saviour's day; they had apostatized from the truth of God, from that order of things by which Moses represented the Lord in the Levitical economy, as a type of eternal things to come; all this the Jews had perverted, and yet at the same time still-trusted in Moses. They thought if they honoured Moses, and exalted Moses, and did cleave unto Moses, that all would be well with them. And I do wish your attention here very closely, because here is a point of vast importance. Observe, that though they had perverted the laws of Moses, they did not think they had perverted those laws, and they still trusted in Moses. But what is the Saviour's testimony? His testimony is this, “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.” Now do mark that—“Moses, in whom ye trust;” and that they did believe every iota of the writings of Moses, in the letter of those writings; but inasmuch as they did not believe in the right meaning of those writings, they are represented as not believing at all. “For had ye believed Moses”—now they did, they did in the letter of them. If you ask a Jew, “Is Moses the author of the five books?” “Certainly, we believe every sentence.” “And are the prophets the authors of the books that go in their names?” “Certainly, we believe every sentence.” But while they believed in the letter, they did not believe in the right meaning; and therefore, not believing in that meaning, they are represented as not believing at all. “For had ye believed Moses”—that is, of course it means rightly believed him; if you had believed in the ultimate meaning of that Levitical dispensation,—“ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” Just so in the Christian sense of the word. You may believe every letter of the New Testament, you may believe every letter of the Bible, and at the same time be unac-

quainted with its spiritual meaning, its right meaning. And if you do not understand its right meaning, and do not receive the truth in the spirit and love of it, and in its proper meaning, then the rule of the Scripture is, that if you die in that state, notwithstanding all your faith in the letter of the word, notwithstanding all your faith in a Jesus Christ, if there be not a right understanding of the truth, and that rightly received, then the rule of the Scripture is, when you come to die you will be lost. Now, then, the Jews made the Old Testament speak everything but that which it really meant; and therefore, having perverted the Old Testament, when the Saviour came the Jews did not understand the signs of the times. And before I enter into the subject before us, I may just remind you of the signs of the times, which they ought to have understood, and which signs of the times, if they had understood, they would not have persecuted the Saviour, and consequently they might have been a peaceable nation unto the present day. But to suppose that the Saviour was weeping over them because he could not save them eternally; to suppose that the Saviour was commissioned to save these people, and that he wept over them because he could not do so,—and some have said that it is God in Christ weeping over the Jews! I really wish men would not use such expressions, for it really does bring into my mind such wrong thoughts of God, that such thoughts are quite a torment to me. But when people say, Here is God in Christ weeping over Jerusalem, the thoughts that such expressions bring to my mind are these. Here are three; here is the sinner, here is Satan, and here is God. Here is the sinner; he cannot help himself, so that Satan keeps the sinner away from God, and Satan keeps God away from the sinner; so that of the three—God, Satan, and the sinner—Satan is the only one of the three that gets his own way. So that here is God weeping after the sinner, and the devil will not let him have that sinner; here is Jesus Christ weeping after the sinner, and the devil will not let Jesus Christ have that sinner; and that God Almighty, God Eternal, is obliged to acknowledge himself defeated, that the adversary has defeated him, and God Almighty is obliged to sit down and weep that he cannot obtain that sinner whom he wished to have, but Satan would not let him have. But if I take the Lord Jesus Christ here as man, and view him as having a commission, not to save the nation, but to preach to them God's word, to give them forty years' space to repent as a nation, that instead of their being subjected to the calamities spoken of here in these words, they should be preserved, prospered, and have peace: at the same time Christ was not commissioned to make them repent; he was not commissioned to give them repentance, and Christ came not to do what he could do, but he came to do what God willed him to do;—if I take this view of it, then I can understand how he could weep over their obstinacy, and that blindness, malice, and enmity that must bring them to destruction. Let us draw a line of distinction, then, between the principle of moral responsibility, which all men that have the light of the gospel can avail themselves of to advantage themselves thereby,—let us draw a line of distinction between this and that principle of regeneration by which the people of God are made willing, by which they are brought to Zion, and by which the sheep have eternal life, and can never perish. Thus, then, he wept over them, not in salvation matters, but merely over their calamities as a nation. But I think I made this somewhat clear last Lord's day morning. Now there were notes of time that they might have understood. First, the Saviour was born; there was the testimony of the shepherds, there was the testimony of the wise men from the east, there was the testimony of Simeon and Anna in the temple; and all these testified that Christ was now born in Bethlehem, according to the Old Testament. This was one note of time which they did not understand. The second note of time was the ministry of John the Baptist; he was the messenger of the 40th of Isaiah, and of

the last of Malachi. The third note of time was the miracles which the Saviour wrought. The fourth note of time were the signs that attended his death. The fifth note of time was the descent of the Holy Spirit. Now all these were signs of the Messiah's time; all these were signs which they did not see, and which they did not understand.

And now, in entering upon the subject, I may just remind you that the rule of the Scriptures is that those that know not the Lord savingly, dying in that state, are to be lost; and that there is a certain kind of knowledge essential to our salvation, so that we may know the day of our visitation. Hence it stands thus — that “cursed be the man that trusteth in man,” and that is just what the Jews did, and what we all do till we are differently taught; “and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord;” and who is taken up with human traditions, human inventions, and human doings. “For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh.” So when Jesus Christ came, they did not see him; he came unto his own, but his own received him not; the light shined in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not. So they did not see when good came. “But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness,” where the judgments of God were, though as yet they did not know it; “in a salt land, and not inhabited” by any living soul. Such was their state; and being in this state of ignorance, the things that belonged to their peace, namely, the things of the first dispensation and the things of the second dispensation—the Christian dispensation, they were both hid from their eyes, so that they neither understood Moses nor Jesus Christ, and consequently destruction must come upon them.

Now I have made these few remarks to endeavour to clear the way; that the Saviour did not weep over Jerusalem because he could not eternally save them; he was not commissioned so to do; but that he did weep over them as a nation in relation to that temporal destruction that should, and that did, come upon them. I cannot myself understand that it has any further meaning than this. To represent the blessed God as weeping over creatures, and earnestly desiring to save them, and cannot, is a doctrine I can never, never receive. But if I take the old covenant, and view them as placed on conditional grounds, they violate those conditions; and their violation of that covenant is no pleasure to God; God's pleasure rather was that they should turn and live, and not die. “Why will ye die?” But they would die; they preferred death to life. But then that mind of God towards that people in that covenant was one thing; and his mind towards the new covenant people, the people he hath chosen in Jesus Christ, is quite another thing.

I will now, as concisely as possible, work out *the rule that is implied in our text*;—“Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.” The gospel visited them; they did not recognize it, or understand it, or receive it. The gospel has visited us, and it does visit us, and if we do not receive it, and do not understand it, but remain ignorant of it, unacquainted, destitute of any experience of it, then the things that belong to our peace are, at least for the present, hid from our eyes; and if we die in that state we must be lost. I will now mention three scriptures in the Old Testament to which our text seems to refer. The first is that in the 27th of Isaiah. The Lord there speaking of those who have the word of God, but know nothing of it savingly, he says, “It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour.” There is the declaration. Therefore, if I have not a right understanding, if I am not a good-ground hearer, having a right understanding, then the Lord will have no mercy upon me; if I have a right understanding, then he will have mercy upon me; if I have no right understanding of the truth, he will show me no favour; but if I have a right understanding of the truth, he will show me

no disfavour. Now, then, what were the things which the people spoken of in the 27th of Isaiah did not understand? First, the victory wrought by the dear Saviour. "In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent," piercing us through in the fall of man; "even leviathan that crooked serpent," his delusions, to keep us in that state into which we were brought by the fall; "and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea." The sea there is the world, figuratively speaking, and the dragon is the old tyrant the devil; and when Jesus Christ died, he bruised the serpent's head, he put away sin, he swallowed up death in victory, and he brought life and immortality to light. This is what the people did not understand. You, hundreds of you, yea, the greater part of you that are here this morning, do understand. You know that the dear Saviour did by his omnipotent arm slay the dragon in the sea; you know that by his victory he hath made a way for the ransomed to pass over from what they are, and from where they are, to pass over into eternal glory as dry-shod as though there were no wrath; that sin is gone, that wrath is gone, that the curse is gone, that the law is magnified, that the victory is complete. You do understand it, and you cleave to it. Well, then, you do know the time of your visitation; it shall not be said of you, "Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." The gospel hath visited thee, not to bear testimony against thee, but it hath visited thee effectually and savingly; opened thine eyes, and given thee to see the completeness of the victory wrought by the dear Saviour, and you hail that victory with all your heart and soul, and you say, "Here is my life eternal, here is my salvation eternal, here is my escape eternal, here is my pardon, here is my sanctification, here is my justification, here is my glorification, here is my God, here is my eternal all: here the lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, here I have a heritage that is goodly, and can never become otherwise. Second, they did not know or understand the new covenant vineyard in distinction from the old. "In that day," when this victory is wrought, "sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Now the old covenant vineyard brought forth wild grapes; and, as every little boy knows, where wild grapes grow, at least, wild grapes as a general rule are very sour; they were sour grapes they brought forth. Now this can never occur in the new covenant vineyard. Some of you have known Jesus Christ in that victory which I have just now spoken of for some years: and is your mind grown sour towards him? Do you begin to have some antipathy to him in the victory he has wrought? Do you begin to turn somewhat sour towards his person, and work, and achievement? No, your answer will be, Though I am compassed with infirmities and faults, yet, with all the drawbacks,

"My soul still cleaves to him,  
Though prostrate in the dust."

This is what they did not understand, then, this new covenant vineyard, where the soul must remain in love with Jesus, where the soul must remain in love with the truth. The third thing they did not understand was what it was to have peace with God by Jesus Christ, for they saw no beauty in Christ; whereas the Christian, in the spiritual sense of the word, sees no beauty anywhere else. The Lord says concerning those that fight against the completeness of the Saviour's work, against the certainty of this new covenant vineyard, the blessedness and safety of the people; concerning the enemies, the Lord saith, "Fury not in me." "Fury is not in me." That little word *is* ought not to be in there—27th of Isaiah,—and it ought to be put in the shape of an interrogation, that clause ought. "Fury not in me?" "who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together!" Who are the briers and thorns? Enemies to this victory Christ has wrought, enemies and opposers

to this new covenant blessedness we have in Christ. "Or," if one of these brambles should be convinced he is but a bramble, but a thorn, a poor worthless creature, fit only for the fire of hell; if such an one should be convinced of his state, "let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me!" And what is God's strength? Jesus Christ. To take hold of God's strength is to believe in Christ, to let your confidence be in Christ, and to let your hope be in Christ, and to plead the dear Redeemer as being able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Oh, I like that description, a bramble. I can say this morning, in all solemnity, if the blessed God were to ask me what I am, I would answer him in his own words, "Why, I am but a bramble, I am but a thorn, Lord; that is what I am, as worthless as sin can make me, as worthless as Satan can make me. I am a poor worthless bramble, a brand plucked out of the fire. Now, then, let such a worthless one "take hold of my strength," that is, Christ Jesus, that is God's strength; "that he may make peace with me,"—come into reconciliation; all his sins shall be blotted out, all his enmity shall be forgiven and forgotten, and instead of that man now being a thorn, he shall be a fir tree; instead of being a bramble, he shall be a myrtle tree; and he shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off. "Christ the power of God." Then, if Christ be the power of God, Christ is the strength we are to lay hold upon. Now this is what the Jews did not understand, and this is what is understood now by, I believe, comparatively few in the professing world. Thus, then, if I remain unacquainted with this that Christ has wrought, unacquainted with this new covenant order of things, unacquainted with that peace that is in him, and it is an everlasting peace, then there is no mercy for me. "It is a people of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them." But if I do understand the victory Christ has wrought,—ah, look at it,—if I do understand the victory Christ has wrought, there is by that victory for me infinitely more mercy than I shall ever need while I live, if I live a thousand years longer. My God, by the victory wrought by the dear Saviour, is able to do abundantly above all that I can ask or think. What a blessed life to live is this! what a blessed death to die! what a blessed God to meet! It may well be called "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour." If I am brought into this vineyard, I am content with my wages there; I would not for ten thousand worlds be removed from my standing there. Then, if God be for me absolutely, not conditionally, but absolutely, and is as much engaged to carry on the work of faith in my heart, and to keep me from becoming an unbeliever, as much engaged is the Lord to do this, as the Saviour was to work out a righteousness and to obtain eternal redemption, and to rise from the dead, and to appear at God's right hand, and to govern all nations, and to intercede for his people, and raise them, and present them at the last. Therefore here it is the Lord undertakes everything. The vineyard is not let out; the old covenant was let out to husbandmen, but the new covenant vineyard is kept in his own hands; his children are in his own hands. "Thy saints are in thine hands; thy sheep are in thine hands." Thus, then, in order to get to heaven, you must know Jesus Christ in the victory he has wrought, in the covenant he has established, and you must know him in the reconciliation he has brought about by his work; "God reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Now the Lord did favour some of the Jews to enter into these very things, for "to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." And they would not have savingly received him, which they did, had they not been born of God, as the next verse of the first of John shows. That is one scripture I think, then, referred to in our text; "Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." Your ignorance proves that you belong to

- the law and not to the gospel, that you belong to hell and not to heaven, that you belong to sin and not to salvation, that you belong to the lost, those of you that die in that state, and not to the saved. Knowledge, then, is indeed power—life eternal. “He shall take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The second scripture referred to, I think, in our text, is in the 49th of Isaiah. “In an acceptable time.” My text says, “Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation; but there were some that did, as I have said; they knew it by the grace of God. “In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee.” When was the acceptable time? In the fulness of time God sent forth his Son, that was the acceptable time; so that Christ had to do the right thing at the right time. “In a day of salvation have I helped thee.” There it is put in the past tense, though in reality it stands in the future. Does he appear at Jordan? “This is my beloved Son;” that helped him. Does he appear in the north of Canaan, in the mount? and there comes his transfiguration, “My beloved Son!” that helped him. Does he appear at Jerusalem? Again, “My beloved Son;” that helped him. Does he appear in the garden of Gethsemane? An angel is sent with a message to him, that strengthens his manhood, while he is sweating as it were great drops of blood in agony, those drops of blood falling down to the ground. When he was on the cross, and Satan hard at work to get them to pierce his side before his work was finished, and to break his bones after his work was finished,—“Ah,” says Satan, “if I can but falsify one prediction, the whole fabric will fall to the ground.” But no, the enemy’s neutralized; his side could not be pierced until he had done his work and yielded up the ghost; and though the lictor stands with his battle-axe on his shoulder, ready to smite, yet not a bone of him shall be broken; and so he was helped. And now what shall be done with this wondrous body, this body that bare our sins on the tree, this sacred body that had embodied the sorrows of our sins? Shall God now leave him? No; Joseph of Arimathea shall be inspirited by the living God to go in boldly unto Pilate and crave the body of Jesus, lay it in his own new tomb, according to prediction, that he made his grave with the wicked, but was not buried with them, merely with them in his death. “In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee.” And so he was preserved. I wish I could see even good men make a little more use of that truth of Christ being preserved; preservation, the entire preservation of the Saviour; that he never had a wrong thought nor a wrong word, never took a wrong step. If that were not the case, damned to eternity must every soul of man be under the canopy of heaven. There is no perfection of preservation anywhere but in Christ. There was a nature pure, and it was preserved from being defiled. We cannot be preserved from being defiled; it is impossible. We are defiled from the fall of man, conceived in sin, shapen in iniquity, gone astray like the wild ass’s colt; all are unrighteous; none righteous, no, not one. But there is a fountain never defiled; there is a substitute, a representative, that stands before God, the way of acceptance with God; and here, and here only, can a sinner be approved of the blessed God. This is another thing to understand, then, which the Jews did not understand. “And I will give thee for a covenant of the people.” Covenant; he is called the covenant because he is the substance of all the covenant is. You cannot find out any feature in the covenant that Christ does not answer to. If it is a covenant of life, he is that life; if it be a covenant of salvation, he is that salvation; if it be a covenant of purification, he is that purification; and if it be a covenant of eternal possession, of eternal inheritance, he himself is the way to it and the essence of it. “To establish the earth.” The earth there is a metonymical form of speech, at least I think so—the container put for the contained; and that

the earth there does not mean this earth, but the new earth, and that it means that the people shall be established in the new earth. "To cause to inherit the desolate heritages." What desolate heritages? Why, the people had gone away from Christ, and he was a comparatively desolate heritage; the people should come and inherit him. The people had gone away from the truths of the gospel, and those truths of the gospel were lying, as it were, in solitude, and were desolate heritages. But in the apostolic age, east, west, north, and south, according to the Saviour's word, souls were brought to inherit these blessed truths, to inherit God in his love, and in this gospel order of things. Now, then, these blessed truths were what they did not understand; they knew not this salvation of the gospel, did not recognize it, did not understand it. Happy for us if we are made to differ, and that we do understand something of Jesus Christ's acceptance, of his being the covenant, of his being the way in which we are established, and in which we are brought to inherit that which the world knows not of.

The third scripture (and that, because of time, must be the last) to which our text seems to refer, and which the Jews did not understand, is that in the book of Daniel, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people." That seventy weeks must not be understood literally. If you take the seventy weeks as the learned take it, a day for a year, that is, 490 years, it does not stand good that way. The delusions—I can call them by no better name—that we meet with in church history, and that are still advocated of men, undertaking to tell us the times when certain events are to take place. They tell us now that Jesus Christ is coming this year, and they are quite sure that the time is very near at hand when he is going to appear personally. And they reckon up the several dates in the Bible, and bring it to a certain time, and conclude it is so; whereas all those dates do refer to spiritual things. Not the periods that refer to literal things, certainly not. If I am told that the Israelites were in Egypt 400 years, I take that literally, because it was a literal circumstance. If I am told that the Jews were in Babylon seventy years, I take that seventy years literally, because it was a literal circumstance. But if I am told that the Messiah is coming, though there was a literality about his coming, still it refers to spiritual things. And the seventy weeks is a period of time that God alone knows the length of. And it turned out to be nearly 600 years, the period from the time the words were given till Christ came. So the 1,260 days in Revelation, you must not take that literally, you cannot measure any of those mystic times that God has kept in his own power. So the thousand years, or as I take that to be the gospel dispensation, none but God knows the length of it. Therefore it is positive delusion when men assume such things. Many of our divines had predicted the year 1860, that was to be the year. Well, the year 1860 has gone, and 1864 will soon be gone, and 1865 will soon come; and all their predictions are falling to the ground. The Lord deliver us from those as well as from all other delusions. It is not for us to know the times and the seasons; which mystic times, and seasons, and periods God has kept in his own power, and will do. Let us look, therefore, at the facts; what was the Messiah to do at the end of that period? He was then to put an end to sin; well, he did do so. My repentance, and my faith, and my doings have nothing to do with that, only as the consequence of it. He put an end to sin. Endeavour to persuade you that, because you have got so much sin in you, there is something more to do to put an end to sin. It is done, it is done, you stick to that; do not move away from it, mind that. Why, say you, I have not left off sinning altogether; I sin every day, in my own heart at least; I am such a poor creature. Well, but it is finished all the same for that; you must stand fast, stick to it, do not give that up. Well, but then I am such a poor creature. The greater your need of what Christ has done, to be

sure. Why, he has done it; he hath made reconciliation for iniquity. Ah, but I mean to do a little by-and-bye, and be better. Well, I am not going to say anything against such good resolutions; all very well for what they are; but Christ has made the reconciliation, the reparation, it is done. What does the apostle say upon this? After running over the several aspects of Christ's atonement, what he has done, in the 5th of the Romans, he says, "Not only so,"—not only is Christ's atonement adapted to us in every shape and form,—“but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement;” we have received it; it is done, and done for ever.

Now, then, you Jews, what should I preserve you for? You know me not; you despise me, you hate me; what should I preserve you for? Perhaps—I speak now to those of you that know not God, and obey not the gospel,—perhaps you go to places of worship out of mere custom, mere form; do not care about God, do you? No. Do not care about Christ? No. Do not care about the word of God, it is no concern to you, is it? No. Hell never troubles you, does it? No. Nor heaven either? No. Then why should the Lord take care of you? You have no reason to believe he will take care of you; you may be hanged in a month's time, for aught I know; you have no guarantee of your life, or circumstances, or anything else; you are completely at sea; you are without Christ, and without hope, and without God in the world. I do not know what will become of you; cannot say; you have not the slightest guarantee for anything; you may be in hell before the sun goes down to-night, for aught I know. You know not the day of your visitation. The gospel comes, and by-and-bye, when you die, the gospel will bear witness against you, that you were its enemy; your sins will bear witness against you; the law and your own conscience will bear witness against you; God will bear witness against you; earth will bear witness against you; heaven will bear witness against you,—no guarantee whatever. Is it any wonder, when a sinner's eyes are opened to see his real condition, that he trembles at it? Is it any wonder, when God is pleased to minister life to the soul, and waken man up to a concern for eternity; is it any wonder that, then, while before this eternity was nothing, now that he is awakened up, it becomes everything?

“I shall ne'er forget the time,  
The wormwood and the gall,”

when the Lord opened my eyes to see this my sad condition. Then I began to understand the day of my visitation; then I began to seek the gospel; then I began to pray; then I began to wonder that I had not been long ere this cut down as a cumberer of the ground. Why was I thus spared? But God had secret purposes of mercy. And I speak thus to you that know not God, because you are where I once was; God grant you may soon be where I now am. I do not mean as regards my position as a minister. I would hardly wish any man that position, unless he makes up his mind to be shot at every day of his life, and cursed, and torn to pieces, and live the life of a downright drudge. But I mean my position as a Christian, an experimental knowledge of the truth, and that love to the Saviour that shall prove you do recognize the visitation of the gospel. Then you will be enabled to say, with one of old, “Thy visitation preserveth my spirit;” or to pray, with another, “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation, that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.” I have not half finished, but I have time to say no more.