

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

## THE THREE BIRTHRIGHTS.

### A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 3RD, 1861, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

\* Thus Esau despised his birthright."—Genesis xxv. 34.

ESAU was a profane-minded man, alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in him; and, therefore, the birthright here referred to, was that which he could not understand the import of or appreciate. For in that patriarchal age the priesthood in the family was the birthright of the elder son. Esau was the elder, but the typical priesthood was that which he could not, in its final import, understand, and therefore could not appreciate it, but easily parted with it and despised it. And, as the typical priesthood was connected with the temporal blessing, the result of his despising his birthright was that he also lost the blessing. And thus you see how this priesthood was a type of the spiritual priesthood; that the priesthood of Christ, which is eternal, is inseparably connected with an eternity of blessedness, so that he who despises the priesthood of Christ is sure to come short of the eternity of blessedness into which those shall be brought that receive the dear Saviour in the perfection of his eternal priesthood. And hence it was the right of Cain to be the priest in the family; and Abel would have followed Cain, only Cain did not know the right way; Cain did not know the way of faith in the promised seed; Cain did not know the way of sacrificial substitution; Cain did not know the way in which God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. And, therefore, Cain not knowing this right way, and the Lord opening the eyes of Abel to enable Abel to see and understand the way of access to God, the way of deliverance from the wrath to come, the way in which he was to be righteous with God, Abel's eyes being opened, he would not follow Cain, which of course would be offensive to Cain. And we see how Cain's anger and wrath increased, and when he discovered that Abel's way after all was the right way, then Cain's countenance fell, and he was wrath, and, as you know, the first opportunity he had he slew his brother Abel. Now the Lord said to Cain, "Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?"—or have the excellency,—“and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.” But if you do well, by following out your birthright properly, as the priest in the family, by virtue of your being the elder, then the desire of thy brother Abel shall be unto thee, But then, if you run away from that which your brother Abel knows he cannot be saved without, then your brother Abel's desire is not unto you; but if you go in the right way, then your brother Abel's desire would be unto you, he would follow you, and you, as the elder brother, would rule over him, so that he would not then rebel against you. But as you rebel against God's truth, Abel is justified in refusing to join with you in that rebellion, and to go the other way. Just so here with Esau, Esau said of this priesthood, this birth-

right, "Behold, I am at the point to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" Here is the carnal mind, that looked at this priesthood as a mere ceremony without any ultimate meaning, whereas Jacob, who was a spiritually minded man, he could appreciate this priesthood, not merely in itself as a ceremony, and not merely as connected with the temporal blessing which Jacob afterwards obtained, but especially in its spiritual and typical meaning. In the light of this typical birthright or sacrifice, Jacob could look forward through all his life and see that God would be with Him; he could look forward to his dying hour, and see God would be with him; he could look forward to the end of time, and see that he should rise in perfection by the antitypical priesthood of Christ Jesus, and that he should hereby enter into eternal glory. Jacob, therefore, was anxious to get this birthright which Esau despised.

Now there were four things that I thought these words of our text seemed to suggest. The first, perhaps, not very spiritual, but as we do, through the kindness of our excellent reporter and through the press, speak every Sunday morning to hundreds, if not to thousands, of those that are absent, as well as those that are present, I think perhaps my first proposition this morning may not be altogether useless, namely, to show *what the birthright is of every one that is born in the land of Bibles*, which our land is. I think a word or two upon that may do no harm. Secondly, to show *what the Saviour's birthright was, and how he did not despise that birthright*. Thirdly, to show *what the Christian's birthright is*. And then, lastly, I might—though, I dare to say, time will not permit,—show *how the professor, the mere professor, is sure to despise that birthright which he holds professionally, but which he hath not vitally*.

First, then, let us look at *the birthright of every one born in the land of Bibles*. In a word, we have three birthrights to attend to,—the birthright of those born in the land of Bibles, the birthright of the Saviour, and the birthright of the Christian. You all know that I do hold the doctrine of responsibility, but not that kind of responsibility which some hold. Now let me say just a few words this morning to young people upon that which I may call their birthright. Born in the land of Bibles, your first right is to remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years when thou shalt say, "I have no pleasure in them." When a young person regards his Creator in the days of his youth he thinks of the sabbath day. Shall I fly in the face of my Maker, and despise the public ordinances of his house? Shall I fly in the face of my Maker, and despise the public preaching of the gospel? Shall I despise the assembly of the saints? No; let me fear God. Shall I despise my Creator, and join with wicked children, and wicked people, and profane people, and run on from sin to sin, prepare myself for the worst of crimes, and I know not what I may come to? No; let me remember my Creator in the days of my youth. Oh, it is a great mercy when those that are young have these feelings, because there is also connected with this, this one thing. Such an one will say, However people may despise religion, and even some old people, wicked old people, despise religion, yet, after all, I shall never do in the world without the care of my Creator; I shall never do well in the world without the kind care and providence of my Creator; I shall never prosper in anything without the care of my Creator. And therefore let me praise my Creator that I was born in the land of Bibles; that I have a reason, a conscience, and an understanding; and he, when I thus serve him, will accept my services as an expression of reverence and of homage unto him, although this my service forms no part of the salvation of my soul, nor do I conclude from such that I am a real Christian; yet for what it is, the Lord will accept it, and that therefore he will be with me, and will prosper me. Now, you young people, think of this; you may depend upon it, by thus revering your Creator, and

severing yourselves from a wicked world, and walking in the ways of the Lord, this is your birthright; one part of that birthright, born in the land of Bibles. Do not despise this. You know not, in thus walking in the ways of the Lord, how many calamities you escape, how many advantages in the Lord's own time you will reap, even taking this natural view of the matter. I do not hold with that barbarous mode of handling God's truth that would drive young people away from the house of God; as though, because they cannot serve God spiritually, that therefore they can serve him in no sense at all. It is an error. You look through the Bible, and you will always see, that those that have paid respect to God, God has never let them go unrewarded. Why, even the sons of Rechab, in obeying him, and abstaining from wine and intoxicating drinks, even that did not lose its reward. The Lord, therefore, will be with such, and prosper such. And you young people, you wish to get on in the world; and if you wish to get on safely and surely, then fear God, then remember thy Creator. And remember, whatever skill you may have, or whatever you may try at, that without the blessing of the Lord you can never succeed. The second part of the birthright of such is to obey their parents, to pay particular attention to the advice given by their parents. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." That, I am aware, is a proverb, but the idea is this; if young people thus despise the advice of their father, and despise to obey their mother, their minds shall hereby become so blinded and so perverted, that this one sin prepares them for other sins, this one perversity prepares them for other perversities, this one rebellion prepares them for other rebellions; and children that will make light of, despise, and disobey their parents, heaven alone knows where they will run to; it always betrays a very dreadful state. May these remarks sink down into the minds of any youth to whom they may be sent. "Honour thy father and thy mother," which is the first commandment with promise, "that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Now there is, of course, an exception to this rule of obeying parents; and that is this, that where parents are wicked people, or where they are not wicked people, and yet do not understand God's truth; and if the children are brought to know the truth of God, and the parents forbid the children to go where the truth of God is preached; in that case the children are justified in reasoning humbly and submissively with their parents, and going to the place where the truth of God is preached, though it may be contrary to the will of the parents. And if the parents on this account cast them out, drive them from their home, and say they will have no more to do with them, then such youth, being conscious that they are moving in the fear of God, may say, "When my father and my mother shall forsake me, the Lord will take me up." This, then, I say, is an apparent exception. So then, you that are young, whatever you do, listen to your parents. Be thankful you have parents to counsel you. And however much they may thwart your plans, you will find that their plans in the end will answer your ultimate purposes, and be altogether the best. Despise not thy birthright: Esau despised his birthright, and his mountain and his heritage were laid waste. And you would not like your Creator to hate you; for "Esau have I hated." And then those that have not parents, obey those that stand so related to you, whether as masters, or teachers, or friends, that have your welfare at heart. Lay aside your own wisdom; don't run against the notion, Ah! my father, and my mother, and my teachers, they belong to the last generation. Well, I don't think the present generation is much better than the last; and I am sure the precocious children that we now see—girls at twelve or thirteen; boys about the same age assuming the man, I don't mean

in their worth and worthiness; but in vices of one description and the other—I think you had better abide by the old school until you have some proof that the new school is the better of the two. And rest assured, the man that has lived many years in the world must know more about it than those that are hardly yet crept into it, and have not had time yet to be much acquainted with it. Now the third part of the birthright of such is to be diligent in business. There is an old saying, that “Hard work is the best fun in the world.” And when you young people have something every day to go at, why, you will never be so happy at anything else. Hard work will not hurt you. Holidays! you don’t want holidays. I never had a holiday. I have been at work thirty-six years, never had a holiday all the time, not one. That is a part of your birthright, to work and be diligent in business. Have no association with idle, lazy, worthless youths, that run about, and break their parents’ hearts, and would bring themselves and their parents, if their parents would let them, to beggary. So then, you young people, set your minds upon work; it will do you good, and make you happy, and give you to be independent of others. Work must be wonderfully hard in order for it to hurt people. I am sure hard work has never hurt me, no, nor you either. That which hurts is the worry, the agitations, the provocations, the trials and troubles we meet with, that won’t let us go on in peace. If I could go in my ministry in peace, without the devil, and without busy hypocrites, and without one thing and the other agitating and trying me, why, I could preach fifty sermons that would not do me so much harm as one hour’s agitation. And so you will find. Don’t be afraid of work; that will not hurt you. Despise not, then, your birthright. Remember the good old adage, that your calling, however humble, will never disgrace you if you do not disgrace that. One more part of the birthright of such is, you young people, to do all the good you can. Only think, now, of your parents, who are very aged and decrepit. You will say, Dear, how glad I am I have obeyed my parents, and taken their counsel; how glad I am I have worked hard now, and I can spare two or three shilling a week to my poor dear father or mother. They are aged and decrepit, and poor, and oh! what a pleasure it will be for me to help them. We had an instance of this some time ago, which I mentioned from the pulpit here, which I was very delighted with, and perhaps the young men are now present; when their mother, whom they had for years supported, departed this life, they felt their loss as much as though she had supported them, instead of they supporting her. And the Lord will look upon such, and will honour such. And then, not only parents; perhaps an afflicted brother, an afflicted sister, an afflicted friend; or, if no relatives, there are old people, and you will meet with many circumstances in which you may do a great deal of good. This, then, is your birthright. And therefore despise not your Creator, but remember him; despise not your parents, but obey them; despise not your calling, but work at it diligently; despise not doing good, but do all you can.

I come now to the next department, namely, *the birthright of the Lord Jesus Christ*. Jesus Christ might well have despised one part of his birthright; he might well have forsaken it; he might well have departed from it; he might well have said, This is that which I will refuse. But no; bless his holy and dear name. He was born under God’s law, and by virtue of being so born he was a debtor to do the whole law; “For to this end I was born,” saith the dear Saviour. And he was born for adversity. All that we owed to the law was set to his account; he was debtor to do the whole law; and not a jot or tittle did he fail in that,—magnified the law from the beginning to the end, including that part of the law, “Honour thy father and thy mother.” His reputed father and his mother did not clearly understand what his mission was; he said, “Wist

ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" What an example he is, then, of diligence, of obedience to parents, and everything good that you can name! "And he went down to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." Now then, I say, he did, in every sense you can mention, the whole law; has brought in by his obedient life that which has made my soul happy many times, has exalted my soul into the light of God's countenance many times, has saved me from black despair many times. And what is that? say you. Why, that his obedient life is that righteousness by which I am freed from all law-demands, that I owe the law nothing, that I am not even under the law, that the law is dead to me, and I am dead to the law; an eternal separation has taken place, and I stand in the righteousness of the blest Redeemer, where God justifieth, and where the challenge is, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." Honour to his dear name, then; he lived this wondrous life, a life of sorrow, a life of grief, a life of labour: weary with his journey, sat on a well; and sweat at the last, great drops of blood. He did not despise this, but walked his birthright out until he had lived down every demand of the law, and set us eternally free. Then, again, our sins, and the curse due to them, also became his birthright; they came upon him by virtue of his position. He was made under the law, and what the law saith it saith to them that are under the law, and what the law said concerning us it said unto him. So that he bare our sins in his own body on the tree; he was made a curse for us. Here, then, was his birthright. Bless his dear name! he took the bitter cup, and has drunk it dry; he himself hath thus put an end to all evil, to all adversity, brought in eternal freedom. Never despised his birthright. I am speaking now of the laborious, the solemn, and the sorrowful part of his birthright. When I come to the other part, there we have that which is glorious beyond description. And yet, while he took the grief, we are to have the glory.

"One with Jesus; by eternal union one."

"Heirs of God, joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ." People laughed him to scorn, and loaded his name with all the reproach they could, in order to make him ashamed of his position; the same as an ungodly world may laugh at you about your religion. Never mind that; they laughed at one greater than you. "Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall weep." But all that which men did to try to make him ashamed of his position he despised. As though he should say, Make me ashamed to be the Man of Sorrows for my brethren? Make me ashamed to be the Mediator of the new covenant? Make me ashamed to occupy this position, and thus to obtain eternal redemption? He despised it; it was contemptible; he thought nothing of it. Also the world tried to shame him out of his disciples. The Pharisees, like the modern Pharisees, were eternally finding fault with his poor disciples. If they rubbed a few ears of corn out on the sabbath day, that was wrong. And if they did not conform to the traditions of the elders, that was wrong. And if they did not fast according to the prescribed rules of the Pharisees, which they had invented, that was wrong. And the poor disciples were always wrong, and so the Pharisees were constantly coming with accusations to the Saviour, and trying to shame him out of his disciples. But he was not ashamed to call them brethren, and so they could not do it. He despised it. You think to shame me out of my disciples, do you? You are making a great mistake; for "He who sanctifieth," that is Christ Jesus, "and they who are sanctified," that is the people, "are all of one," of God the Father; and on the ground of that eternal oneness I call them brethren. All the faults that you can find with them, whether true faults or false faults, will never move me out of that. He despised the shame; he endured the cross, and is now set down at the right hand of God,

Not only did Jesus not despise his birthright, or that mission on account of which he was born; not only did he not do so; but he never forgot his birthright, he never forgot his position. Can you say that? You may, I dare not say it. I have forgotten my position as a Christian times without number; I have forgotten my position as a minister times without number; I am a poor forgetful creature, and feel I can appreciate my high and noble birth, my heavenly birth, and can appreciate the things that belong thereto, only as the Lord enables me; I can appreciate my position as a minister only as the Lord enables me. But, as I said just now, it is the agitations, and the many things that ministers have to encounter, that is it that tries them, and makes them exclaim, with Jeremiah, "Then, said I, I will speak in the name of the Lord no more." That, I say, they are brought into sometimes. But apart from that, what a glorious position is that of the faithful minister of the gospel, to be the means of doing, from week to week, so much good to the souls of men, and consequently to the bodies of men; doing a vast amount of good, spiritually and temporally, which God alone can understand. Reproach from the world and empty professors is the reward that they get. Never mind; they are not to look to man, not to seek to please men; they are to seek to please God, and to show themselves workmen that need not to be ashamed before God, or before those that know what vital godliness is. But the dear Saviour not only did not despise his birthright, and never forgot it, but he delighted in it. Never did Jacob delight so much in the typical birthright as the dear Saviour did in his birthright. He obeyed the law cheerfully; he died willingly; he delighted thus to do the will of God. And we who know our need of him rejoice in him, because by faith in him we get rid of all that is against us, and by faith in him eternal life is our birthright. But the things that belong to our birthright I shall have to touch upon presently; just making one allusion to some, of a duty-faith cast, speaking of our love to the truth as they do. They are always despising us because we are, say they, so fond of "the five points." I see in the *Earthen Vessel* this month (I can tell where it comes from) a quotation in which the writer says, "These high doctrine men's five points are as dear to them as their five senses." And a great deal more dear to me than my five senses. What do you mean by the five points? Why, "Whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate; called, justified, and glorified." They call them "five points." What do they do that for? Why, to make them as *little* as possible; that is what they do that for. We don't call them five points; I call that order of truth the line of life, the line of eternal mercy. "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them," in that line of things,— "whom he did foreknow, he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son; them he also called; whom he called, them he also justified; whom he justified, them he also glorified;" that in that line of things "hath he set a tabernacle for the sun,"—a dwelling for the sun, namely, Christ Jesus; he is the sun rejoicing as a strong man to run a race—"his going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." That is Christ Jesus. You take the foreknowledge of God; Christ sets out there; he did not come without God's knowledge!—No. "Them he also did predestinate"—that is the path the Saviour travelled—"to be conformed to the image of his Son;" there he is in heaven, the pattern of what they are to be. "Them he also called," the Saviour keeps in that path. "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, that there may be one fold and one shepherd." "Them he also justified;" and Jesus keeps in that path. "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many," he knows who they are; never justifies the wrong person. "Them he also glorified," and Jesus keeps in that path. "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold

my glory." Thus, then, we would not have the youth of our population despise the birthright, as I have set it forth. Second, we glory in the dear Saviour, seeing that all our woes were his birthright; he hath taken all those woes away, and now there is nothing left but eternal blessedness, which he possesses, and which those brought to know him and receive him shall possess; never did deviate from that line of things laid down in the eighth of Romans. Some men, as I have said, call them five points, and they tell us we have no right to be always thrusting these five points into the side of Christianity. But the apostle in the Bible does not call them five points. Do you know what a point is in Euclid? A point in geometry means *nothing*. Well, but say you, do they mean that these five points, as they call them, are five nothings? I believe they are five nothings to them. So I believe God's foreknowledge in the election of his people is to these men nothing; I believe to them divine predestination is nothing; I believe to them divine vocation is nothing; I believe to them justification by the righteousness of Christ is nothing; I believe to them new-covenant glory is nothing. So they may well call them five points—that is, five nothings. But to us they are the line of truth in which the Saviour lives, and which he hath established, and in which we glory; they are our birthright, and we will not despise them, but glory in them.

Now, then, Esau despised this order of things; but Jacob did not despise this order of things. Now let us hear the apostle upon this. The apostle gives us to understand the awful destiny of the man that lives and dies a despiser of the gospel. He says that Esau was a profane man, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. And perhaps you have sometimes thought within yourself, when reading that twelfth chapter of the Hebrews, what connection is there between Esau despising his birthright and the thunders of Sinai there brought forward, and the glories of Zion there brought forward?—what connection is there between the two? I will show you what connection there is. First, that Esau for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. What must such an one come to? That which the true Christian doth not come to. "Ye," implying Esaus, will come by-and-bye to that; but "ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire." For they that are under the law are under the almighty and eternal fiery indignation of that law; and the man that despises sacrificial perfection is under the law. There are but two places for people to be in; either under the law or under the gospel; they must be under the one or under the other. "Nor unto blackness"—oh, how black is the destiny of the man that lives and dies without Christ, without hope, and without God. "And tempest"—one eternal tempest. "And the sound of a trumpet"—waxing louder and louder, because your sins cry louder and louder as you go on, and the trumpet of the law sounds louder and louder. "And the voice of words"—which the sinner will have to endure; "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "Moses, so terrible was the sight, said, I exceedingly fear and quake." That is the portion of Esau; that is the destiny of all that live and die without Christ, without God, and without hope in the world. But then they see it not, they feel it not, they regard it not; but stumble on the dark mountains until they lift up their eyes in hell. May this not be the unhappy lot of any of you; may it be our lot, all of us, to escape this; fearful indeed thus to fall into the hands of a sin-avenging God!

Now the apostle goes on to describe *the birthright of the Christian*. And if thou art a real Christian, thou wilt not despise one thing I am now going to say. And that birthright, in its several parts, which the apostle places before us, with that I must close. "Ye," who appreciate what Jesus hath done, that lean and rest upon him, and love him, and are believers in him,—“Ye are come unto Mount Zion.” What have you

there? The blessing of the Lord, where the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore, Dost thou despise that? Oh no, say you; here is my hope; here I can look and see that I shall live, and shall not die. Another part of your birthright, and which, if you are a real Christian, you will not despise; if you are not a real Christian, it is your birthright only in profession, not in reality,—“Unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” And what does that city mean? It means all that is set before us in the 46th Psalm. God is there our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Violence shall no more be heard in it, wasting nor destruction within its borders; they shall call its walls Salvation, and its gates Praise. “In that day shall this song be sung,” in this heavenly land “we have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.” Despisest thou this life, or dost thou love this life? Despisest thou this city, or dost thou rather look to it as Abraham did, and see it as a city which hath eternal and immoveable foundations? And another part is “an innumerable company of angels.” We know but little of angels; but so far as angels appear in association with the gospel, we see they are all free-grace angels. There is not an Arminian angel among them, nor a duty-faith one. When one appeared to Daniel, in the 9th chapter of Daniel, see what a testimony that angel bore there of what the Messiah should do; and that one angel represents the multitude. So that if Gabriel should be the first person I should meet when my soul enters heaven, I shall agree with him in a moment. I shall say, Gabriel, I read the 9th of Daniel; I liked you before I saw you; you are a thorough free-grace angel. Then the same angel, between five and six hundred years afterwards, did not alter. You find the very angel, that in the 9th of Daniel showed what the Messiah should do, came to Mary, and he saith to her, concerning Jesus, “He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end;” free-grace angel still. Then with the birth comes an angel, saying, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” So that wherever angels appear in gospel matters, they always appear after our order. You duty-faith people, they would not agree with you, and you would not agree with them. As for you free-willers, you have to go into Job’s ditch before you get to heaven; you have to go into Jonah’s hell; you have to go into some wilderness; you must be stripped of all your supposed free will; you must be stripped of the whole, in order to prove that you are born of God; you must be a child of God by faith, and by faith only; in what the dear Saviour hath done. “An innumerable company of angels.” How pleasing, then, is it to see the harmony of the angels with free-grace people. I should be exceedingly uneasy—for they are ministering spirits to them that are the heirs of salvation,—I should be exceedingly uneasy if there was an instance of any angel bringing a testimony of a free will kind, or anything contrary to the gospel. But they all, when they appear in gospel matters,—I am not speaking now of their appearing at Sinai, that is another matter; nor in the old covenant, that is another matter,—when they appear in gospel matters, they all appear after the order of that grace that is free, and that truth that is yea and amen. This is the birthright, then, of Christians. And, saith the apostle, “to the general assembly,”—you know where that is, that is in Christ, all gathered together in him;—“and church of the first-born;” he is heir of all things, we joint-heirs with him. Another part of your birthright is eternal election.