

THE TRUE GOSPEL STANDARD

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning July 24th, 1864

by Mister JAMES WELLS

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“The chief among ten thousand.” Song of Solomon 5:10

THERE were people in those days, clearly so, that despised the new covenant truth of the blessed God and wondered that people could run after doctrines which in their eyes were so absurd; for the things of the Spirit have ever been foolishness to the natural man. But while there were some despisers in those days, as there are now, there were also some inquirers; some who were concerned about their souls; little ones in the faith; and who had been wrapped up very much in ceremonies, in creature doings, and attaching a saving power to their prayers, and to their works. When they met with the true church of God, met with the true ministers of God, and found that this establishment made the Savior everything, and those things so prized and praised up by men nothing, the little ones could hardly understand how it was they made so much of the Savior, how it was the church in the former verses made so much of the Savior; so that they said, “What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you do so charge us?” You seem to make really so much of him as though he was everything. We are for good works; but you, you are wrapped up in your beloved; can’t think what he can be. It is all very well to come and name Jesus Christ; it is all very well to admit that he is a savior; but then we must do our part. But happy is the man that finds out that the only part he can do is to sin against his own soul; the only part he can do is to sin against God; the only part the sinner can do is to rivet his own chains; the only part the sinner can do is to increase his own guilt, to deepen his own hell, increase the wrath of God due to him; this is the only part the sinner can do. And when he finds out that his supposed goodness is nothing but badness, that his very righteousness’s are as filthy rags, then he will in all sincerity begin to inquire after something better, and to say to those who have been reviled and despised because of their decision for the truth of God, and that decision arises from their participation in that grace, he will say, Come, tell us what is your beloved. The Jesus Christ I have been hearing of seems to be a different Jesus Christ from yours; your Jesus Christ seems to be a different Jesus Christ from the one I have been hearing of and listening concerning him. “What is your beloved?” Then the church goes on to describe in a very beautiful way what he is; only one clause of which we shall notice again this morning. And though it will lead us into the same road we were in last Lord’s day morning, still it will be a mile or two further on, and that will be as good as another road, and better

to, for it is better to keep in the old right road, then to run into a new wrong one. And so, our text this morning, though rather short, lies before us in two parts. Here is first, *the person of distinction*, “the chief among ten thousand;” and then, secondly, *his company*, the ten thousand.

Now the margin says that “he is a standard-bearer among ten thousand.” Our text, or rather the rendering in our text, says, “the *chief*,” it does not say the chief of what. The original, therefore, given I think more accurately in the margin, is “the standard-bearer;” “He is the standard-bearer among ten thousand.” It is, then, under this view that I shall deal with the subject this morning with all my might. First, then, that which was the Savior’s standard; and secondly, that then, that which is our standard; premising before I enter upon this subject, that the words *banner*, *ensign*, *standard*, though those three words are not strictly synonymous, yet they are anonymous, they all in substance mean the same thing; and I shall have, therefore, as I go along this morning, peradventure to use them all to illustrate the subject. First, then, what was the standard that the Lord Jesus Christ had to go by? In other words, if he was the standard bearer, what was the standard that he had to bear up? For if this great standard-bearer should faint, then the whole of his company must be scattered, destroyed, and lost. Let us see, then, what the standard was that he bore up, and then we will see what our standard is that we are to go by. First, then, the standard of the Lord Christ was the good-will of God; that was the standard he had to bear up. Hence the predictions of the Old Testament declare what that will was concerning what he was to endure in his humiliation; that is the chief part we shall attend to this morning. And I may just observe that the word *standard-bearer* means *to stand hard and to bear*; that is the definition that the more respectable lexicons we have, give as the meaning of the word. And so, the dear Savior, he was made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, to redeem them from the curse of the law, and to deliver them from the law, that the curse might be removed, and that the law might be established and magnified. Christ stood hard by that, then. He was therefore made under the law, and it is pleasing to see how he was in every way you could name superior to the law; to see how he not only answered to the law but was superior to it. Now it was God’s will that Jesus Christ should fulfill all things, that he should magnify God’s holy law. He took that law into his hands, he magnified by his life the precept, and he has by his death destroyed the curse. This will of God concerning what Christ was to do then was the standard he was to bear up. What a wonderful thing it is that neither in thought, nor word, nor deed, did the Savior ever fall or stumble, or in any way show the least failure! Now then waiving for a moment the simile here used, the standard, and taking his life, as we always do, as our righteousness; now we will suppose here is a man, the thief, we will take him, and that perhaps will illustrate my point. Here is the thief on the cross; he has lived in all sorts of sin, openly and willingly, and vilely; gone on from one evil to another evil; he comes as we say to the gallows. Very well, this poor man’s eyes are at the last opened, and what does he see? He saw himself, what he really was. And what takes place in order for this thief on the cross to escape the consequence of his sin, to escape the condemnation he is under? It was simply this, that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, made in the manifestation thereof, the life of Jesus Christ his; so that Jesus Christ had taken all the sins of the thief, and the thief by faith stepped out of his sins, and out of the law, and out of where he was, into the faith of Christ, and hence Christ’s life became his. This is the way that he escaped. He saw that he himself had done nothing but fail; but that Jesus Christ neither failed nor was discouraged. Jesus Christ, therefore, did bear up the predictions of the Old Testament, and thus became the standard bearer. God’s will concerning the life he should live was the standard which he decided.

Now then (for I cannot help here digressing a little), the life you and I are to live is not our own life; we are not to live in whole or in part upon what we are, nor upon what we do. You have not, after you have gone through the day, to turn around and say, "Well now, I have done so well today, surely the Lord will be pleased with me; surely the Lord will do great things for me." Now what is this? Why this very sentiment that you are now holding, supposing any of you hold such a sentiment as that, is more offensive to God than all your other sins put together. How do you make that out? Why, don't you see what you are doing? You are setting aside Jesus Christ as your life and putting your own life in part into his place. Why, the apostle says, "The life I now live is by the faith of the Son of God. If I am blessed today, it is by the confidence I have in the life of Christ; if I am taken care of from day to day, it is by the confidence I have in the life of Christ; if I live in peace with God, it is by the confidence I have in the life of Christ; and if I rejoice in spite of sin, hell, devils, men, women, circumstances, life, death, any creature, height, depth, or anything else, if, in defiance of them all, I rejoice, and laugh at all their attempts, it is by confidence in the perfect life of the Lord Jesus Christ. My life is gone; my goodness and badness, it is all gone together, it is all unseen, all taken away; and the life that I live is a life of confidence in God's promise, God's mercy, God's grace, God's goodness, God's immutability, simply by the Lord Jesus Christ. So that the thief and I shall appear upon equal terms when we get to heaven, and so will you and the thief, just so. Hence our friend who some time ago said, "When we meet David in heaven, we shall all know that David was an egregious sinner,"¹ I do believe that that man, in making use of such expressions, betrayed all that devilish and demoniacal pride in his own heart that made him a greater sinner in God's sight than all David's egregious sinner-ship could make him; for of all the sins there is none to equal that which would thrust the Savior aside, and thrust the empty nothings of a polluted worm into the place of the everlasting righteousness of the God-man mediator. Jesus Christ, then, abode by the will of God; and his perfection in bearing up the will of God must be our standing-place. You know what the Lord says when he brings a soul near to him; Hearken, O daughter, and consider; forget your own people," forget everybody, "and your father's house," old Adam, forget the whole of it; it's all gone, let it go; old things pass away, all things become new. Here's our life, here's our youth, here's our strength, here's our God, here's the Holy Spirit, here's heaven, here's glory, here's sin's abolition, death's abolition, Satan's defeat, and our soul's eternal triumph in the name of our God; while we treasure up in our souls all those blessed truths that proclaim the dear Savior as the great standard-bearer that never fainted.

Again, it is not only the will of God that Christ should live this life, and that the church by that life should then be accepted without let, hindrance or drawback, but also it was the will of God that Christ should die that death that should take, eternally take, the life out of a sin and defeat all our foes. Hence the Savior says, "Now is the judgment of this world; now is the crisis of this world;" that is literally the Greek word there; the Greek word literally is *crisis*, from which we get our English word *crisis*; and "now is the crisis," when Christ was about to die. Now we come to a crisis; either sin must conquer me, or I must conquer that; either death must be too much for me, or I must be too much for that; either Satan must be too much for me, or I must be too much for him. And the dear savior knew which way it would go. "Now is the crisis, now the prince of this world be cast out." "I if I be lifted up," to achieve this victory, "will draw all men unto me." Yes,

¹ James Wells is here referring to The Reverend W. Lincoln's "Sermons on the coming of Christ" Published in London: Partridge and Co. Robert Banks and Co. 182 Dover Road S.E. Possibly in 1859 or close to that date. These are pre-millennial in nature and appear to be very unscriptural for the most part. Some information on these sermons can be found in "The Earthen Vessel" for 1859.

the wild beast, the four-footed beast, the creeping thing, the fowl of the air; all men, men of all shapes and forms of sinner-ship, the highflying Pharisee, the low-crawling profligate, the fierce persecutor, the devil-let man; let him be what he may; when his eyes are opened to see what Jesus has done, the vilest sinner out of hell may say, With safety I may go there; with safety I may look for eternal salvation there. And when the Holy Spirit unfolds to the soul the achievement of an incarnate God and reveals to it how the dear Savior bore out in perfection the good will of God, the sinner when he sees this can never, no, never despair. I am not an enemy to experience, I love experience; there is no saving acquaintance with the Lord only by experience; but at the same time, when we put our bad feelings or good feelings into the place of the Savior, we err. There is a tendency about us to think that the Lord looks at our feelings. If I could feel more humble, feel more loving, feel more spiritual, if my heart was softer, if I had better feelings, then I should think I was a Christian. And what would you do? Why, fall down and worship your own supposed excellences; that is what you would do. But instead of this, as Mister Newton said:

“He makes me feel the hidden evils of my heart,
And lets the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part.”

What is the result? You loathe yourself more and more, and he in his wondrous life, he in his atoning death, becomes dearer to you than ten thousand such mortal lives as you have in the flesh. He then is the standard-bearer. God willed him to magnify the law; Christ bore up that good-will and carried it out; we shall be justified by it. God willed him to accomplish the warfare; he never fainted, never failed, achieved the victory, rose from the dead, reigns triumphant, and shall do until all his foes be made his footstool. Now that was Christ's standard, God's good-will, in thus magnifying the law. I have not gone a quarter so far in these things as I desire to do before I die. Think you, that in our poor little thoughts we can compass the infinite worth of a Savior? Think you, with our short sounding-lines, that we can fathom the depths of his love, the depths of his agonies, the depths of his atonement, and the deeps of his grace? Think you, with our telescopes, I was going to say, that we can range over the new heavens, and scan the innumerable wonders embodied in Emmanuel, God with us, the great standard-bearer, that accomplished thus the good will of God? Ah, says one, I do not think so much of Jesus Christ. Then you will be a damned man at the last, if you die with that language in your soul. There is nothing in heaven but Christ, Christ in God, and God in Christ. And when Christ looked to the ultimate end of his people, he summed it all up thus, “They in me, I in them, you in me; that they all may be one, even as we are one.” We seem to be losing sight, somehow or another, in the day in which we live, in the professing world of the truth that we must be made new creatures; we must be brought into a new existence, and into a new righteousness, into a new name, and into a new world. And into a new covenant, into a new life; and there is not a particle of the elements belonging to the old state that can be brought into the new elements; all things new; the soul must be made anew; the body at the resurrection must be made new; everything new. Here, then, the church might well be enraptured with such a Savior as this. So then, if the standard means the victory, and that God willed the victory, who shall carry that good-will out to victory? Christ did it; yes. And on the cross that was the moment of Satan's defeat. Instead of the Savior dying in confusion, and agony, and struggle, and sighs, and groans, Why say you did he not? No, no; I deny that he did. He underwent all his agonies before death could touch him; he underwent all that he was to suffer before death could touch him! and when he had undergone unfathomable agony, when he had endured more than all the damned in hell to eternity can endure; for Christ was God, remember that; what must such a

person be to stem the torrent of hell? What must such a person be to compass all the flames of hell? What must such a person be to compass sins that God alone can number, measure, or weigh? Yet this wondrous Person compassed the whole and when there was no more to suffer, peace entered into his soul and in sweet repose he bowed his head, and with a loud voice said, "Into your hands I commend my spirit," and "It is finished;" died in tranquility, in dignity, in majesty, died in peace. Ah, says Satan much as I have troubled him, he has got to the end of the war before he lets go his breath; he will not suffer his life to expire until all is done.

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

My beloved, the chief standard-bearer, he bare the will of God, and carried out that will, he achieved the victory; and if you are favored to take your standing there, you are safe for ever.

But then, what is the standard to us? I have partly anticipated this. The standard to us, as a standard to us, will mean, in the first place, ingathering; and we are to abide by that to which we are ingathered. It is whether we take it as a military standard or as a pilgrimage standard. Let us take it for a moment as a pilgrimage standard. We are going to a certain region, and there is only one that knows the way; we are to be gathered into that one, and, when we are gathered in, we are to keep close by the standard, and that will guide us to our destined end; guide you to the promised land. "There shall be a root of Jesse," you know who he is, "shall stand as an ensign to the people," the same thing as a standard in substance; "to it," in what he has done in his life, what he has done in his death, "shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious." As I receive him, there I am righteous as he is righteous, free as he is free, can no more go to hell than Christ can go to hell, and can no more be subjected to God's wrath than Christ again can be subjected to God's wrath; and can be no more thought light of by heaven than Christ himself can be thought light of. There I stand, not in myself, for what have I to do with self? Self is gone virtually and will actually presently; I shall bid an eternal adieu to self; and Christ is my other self, and he will be my own self, that I shall forever possess. "His rest shall be glorious." It is astonishing what you may do when you are brought into this rest; how you can read things, that is, as the Lord enables you, of course. But for these truths that I have just stated this morning, but for this standard, Christ, you would never have had the 11th chapter of Hebrews. How was it that those worthies did such wonders? Because God was with them by what Christ had done. If God had been with them according to their doings, would never have been with them at all; no. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb;" there was their watchword, their standard, their defiance, by which they defied their every foe. I had intended to have a little upon this ingathering, but there are other things I must notice, and so I must pass by it. Now, then, the scripture to which I have just referred, the 11th of Isaiah, the name of Jesus Christ is our standard; we are to be gathered into his name, and to bear his name and abide by it; and when his standard, Christ's name, shall fail, then we consider ourselves beaten. You must not consider yourself beaten when you are knocked down; you know, if you are down, you are not beaten all the time the standard is up. Why, you say, say you so? Yes, you know what one of old said; "when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." He knew, though he was down, the standard was up; he knew that. We don't seem half such good believers in that standard as the ancients were.

Now then, let us have two definitions of the name, the name that we are to abide by; the twofold

name setup as the standard; you open the New Testament and in the very first page there is the standard here. Say you, there is a standard, I will follow in that way. "And his name shall be called Jesus," a Savior; "for he shall save his people from their sins." When did he do that? On Calvary's cross, then was salvation wrought. And when you and I were dead in sin, God looked at us then by what Christ did at Calvary's cross. So, when we were enemies, how came we out of that enmity? By the death of his son. When we were ungodly, and had not that faith that wraps the soul in the mystery of godliness, how came we to be godly? "In due time Christ died for the ungodly." When we were nothing but sinners in ourselves, had no saintship, no faith that purifies the heart, unites to God, how came we out of that? "God commended his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." But do not let us take half his name; that of a Savior is only one part of his name; let us take the next. "They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, "God with us." Now, put these two together. First, he appears as a Savior between me and my sins; my sins are gone, the demands of the law gone, the curse gone, the devil is gone, for any fatal or final power he will never get over me; and all human works gone; it is all gone, and I am left with Jesus only. So then by his being Jesus he becomes Emmanuel; he must be the Savior first, Emmanuel afterwards, represented in the manifestation thereof. What, do you say, Can you give him the credit of having saved you entirely? Do you believe his salvation is entire? And what is my business now? If I am taught of God, my business is to receive the testimony of what he has done, and to rest upon it. As a writer very well observes, "The business of faith is to believe that we are not what we are, and to believe that we are what we are not." That is as good a definition of faith as I have heard for some time. Why, say you, it is flat contradiction. True faith is to believe that we are not what we are; why, how do you make that out? Why, we are poor sinners, helpless sinners, and faith is to believe that in Christ we are perfect saints, and as free from sin as he is. Real faith is to believe that we are not what we are, and that faith also is to believe that we are what we are not; that is, what we are not in ourselves, but what we are in Christ. Bless the Lord for this distinction between the two Adams, the first and the last; between what we are in ourselves and what we are in Christ. Now, for instance, take the body; what is your body in itself? Well, say you it is a tabernacle wearing out petty fast, and that will be taken down very soon; that is what it is. But what is it in God's promise; what is it in God's purpose; what is it in God's Christ; what is it in God's counsel? For that is what it will be ultimately. The Holy Scriptures will show you what your body is there; "Change our vile body, fashion it like unto his glorious body." Why then should I not already reckon upon the blessedness of the resurrection? But you have not attained to it, say you. But I shall; there it is; "The counsel of the Lord shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure."

Thus, then, Jesus having wrought entire salvation, thus becomes Emmanuel, God with us. God the Father is with us by his dear Son. I was going to say, you that love the Lord, you all ought to have by heart these words in the beginning of the 21st of the Book of Revelation, "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Let us abide firmly, then, by this twofold name, the name of Christ as a Savior and the name of Christ as Emmanuel. Bless the Lord, the weakness of the church, I mean her weakness in faith, are recorded, or else I should almost despair; but I am sure Zion never made a greater mistake, bless the Lord, it was a mistake; bless the Lord, it was infirmity, than when she said, "The Lord has forsaken me; my God has forgotten me." And that's just how I feel at times, and as one of old said, "This is my infirmity." And so, it is my infirmity; I hate myself for it, I hate

to be in that state. "A woman," the Lord says, "a woman my forget her child," not very likely she will,

"Mothers may monsters prove,"

her kind affection may fail, "but I will not forget you; I have gravened you upon the palms of my hands;" so that when I am going to do anything I look at my hands and see whether what I am going to do will be for your good or not. I have got you in my hand, and whatever I am going to do, I will not do it if it be not for your good, nor will I let anybody else do it if it is not for your good. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose." And "your walls" of salvation that surround you, lofty and impregnable, jasper walls, "are continually before me;" I forget neither you nor the citizenship into which I have brought you; I forget neither you nor the ultimate destiny to which you shall come. The name of Jesus, then, is our standard, and in this name, we will lift up all our banners. Everlasting love is a banner, "His banner over me was love;" election is a banner, divine predestination is a banner, the new covenant is a banner, all the promises are banners; we will lift them all up in the name of the Lord our God.

Now we are to be gathered, then, into this name of Christ as the Savior, and as Emmanuel, God with us, and then we are to abide by it, abide by this twofold name. And that name, in what it embodies, will guide us through the wilderness. Hence, in the Old Testament age, when the Israelites came out of Egypt, there was a standard to which they were gathered, and that standard was to guide them. That standard was the cloud; such a standard as no other people had. It is one object of a standard to distinguish one army from another, and to distinguish one caravan travelling in the wilderness from another. And the Lord had such a standard for his people as no others by any means could have, that of the mystic cloud; they were all gathered to that. And Jesus Christ was the standard-bearer there, he bore up the cloud; yes, and that cloud I take to be a type of God's truth, a dark side, and a light side. And the truth has a dark side to the world, and a light side to the people of God. The people of God are on the light side, the salvation side; the others are on the dark and enmity side; the one that's on the light the saved, the one on the dark, dying in that state, is lost. Now, simply by abiding by that standard they got through the sea; and so, you, simply by the name of Jesus, and his truth concerning that name, whatever there is in your way, you will get through it. Second, in abiding by this standard, the name of Jesus and God's truth, you need not fight in the battle, the battle is the Lord's, "Stand still, and see the salvation of God. The Egyptians whom you have seen today you shall see no more forever." Third, for I must trace out now some of *the advantages of Jesus Christ as the standard*, we are to abide by the cloud, a type of his blessed truth. He was in the cloud, and he is in his truth, shining one way upon his people, and darkening the others, and taking their chariot wheels off when they are coming rather too fast. There is Pharaoh and his host in full gallop; the Lord says, You are coming rather too fast; you will get on too far if I do not mind. So, he just took some of their chariot wheels off, and they had to stop to try to get them on again; and while they were getting those on some more came off, and then they crawled along again; could not get on any faster than the Lord intended. So, you, your foes may gallop after you very fast, Oh, they will overtake me, I am sure they will; I do not know what will become of me. Ah, the Lord sees their efforts; and has promised to by our reward; that is, he has promised that his goodness and mercy shall follow. Simply abide by the cloud, leave the matter with the Lord, he will conquer his enemies, overwhelming them all in the Red Sea, and

those who abide by the victorious standard stand upon the opposite shore, and sing the happy song. “The horse and his rider has he thrown into the sea; he has triumphed gloriously.” Now come, come now, the Lord has done all this for you: I should think you can trust him all through the wilderness, cannot you? Yes, we can; and they did too, those that were right-minded; the Pharisees’ that liked to be something, could not trust him, and so they died, could not enter in because of unbelief; but those that had faith in the Lord, they all entered in. Then, third, they also got plenty to eat and drink, simply by abiding by the standard, by the cloud. So, you, abiding by the truth, you will be fed, and you will drink of that spiritual rock that shall follow you, and that rock is Christ. You will not starve. Well, I do not fare well very often. Ah, but you will sometimes, and if you get a meal once in forty days, think yourself well off; for gospel food is not like natural food; we eat three or four times a day, some of us that can, at least; but in spiritual things, if I get a meal not more than once in six months, God will make it last out and strengthen me, and I can go forty days, or forty thousand days, if the Lord is pleased still to bless me, and to keep my faith and hope up all the time. Simply abide by the truth. But stray away from the cloud, then some stray Egyptian will overtake you and kill you. Stray away from the cloud, then you will be drowned in the sea of perdition; stray away from the cloud, then you get no manna; stray away from the cloud, then you get no water from the rock. Again, enemies meet them in the wilderness; but simply abide by the cloud, and Amalekites, and Sihon, and Og, mighty as those kingdoms were, yet a handful of believing Israelites prevailed over them all. Again, in abiding by the cloud they had access to God, from day to day, by the high priest. And so, in abiding by the truth we have, by our High Priest, Christ Jesus, access to the mercy-seat from day to day. The mercy-seat is open:

“The door of his mercy stands open all day,
For the poor and the needy who knock by the way.”

And if the poor and the needy do not go to knock at God’s door, what then? Why he comes and knocks at their door, and wakes them up, and says, Why, you have not called upon me for a long time. Why, Jacob, you have not called upon me; “you have brought me no sweet cane with money.” Why, you would never have called upon me again if I had not called upon you. Do not think I should Lord. Well, then, I call upon you, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” I was asleep, Lord. The Lord knocks, and asks, Who is within? Little-faith jumps up, and answers, Here I am Lord. Little-hope jumps up, Well Lord, I have been waiting; and Patience says Lord, I was almost done; and Love says, I was almost extinguished. Ah, his presence brings forth all the inhabitants of the town of Mansoul, as John Bunyan calls it; when the king comes it is a day of blessedness and a day of glory. So, bless the Lord, when we forget to call upon him, he does not forget to call upon us. Why, that is almost making out the name of the Lord too good say some. Well, if you do not need the mercy of the Lord, I do; and the longer I live the more I feel my need of it. Here, then, simply abiding by the covenant, the Lord was with them, they had access to him, there was the mercy-seat.