

SEEING GOD

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“They saw God and did eat and drink.” Exodus 24:11

THE Scriptures are full of assurances that these things have an ultimate object; and is it any wonder that they should look forward to that greatest of all circumstances, the eternal salvation of a number that no man can number? How worthy is it of the book of God to be employed about such wonderful things! frequently to enter into a description of that which is to be enjoyed, and that forever! I shall, therefore, avail myself of the language of our text in its spiritual and gospel sense, and shall treat the subject as applicable to our present circumstances, and to our daily experience. For, indeed, this is the reason the Scriptures are written as they are, to the end that they may be useful to all nations, to all ages, and under all the circumstances of life and of death.

We have, then, simply two things in our text. The first is that of *divine revelation*, “they saw God:” and the second is *the friendship implied*, “and did eat and drink.”

First, then, *the divine revelation*, “they saw God.” And I shall therefore notice those respects in which these nobles of Israel saw God, or rather shall, as I go on, show that the people of God do now spiritually see God, as the nobles were here favored to see him in vision; for, “Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God;” see him not only ultimately, but shall spiritually see him now; for the Savior has said, “He that has seen me has seen the Father.” And the way in which they saw God sets forth very clearly the way in which the Christian sees him. First, they saw him as the God of Israel by sacrifice; secondly, as standing in a city of riches; third, in the clearness of light; and fourth, in the freedom of the people. “And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also, they saw God, and did eat and drink.”

First, then, they saw him as the God of Israel by sacrifice. Hence, a little farther back in this chapter, you have an account of the sacrifice of the burnt offerings and the peace offerings. Let us, then, for one moment dwell upon this, that to see God, then, acceptably, and to see him so as to be saved by him in the way the Savior speaks, when he said that “this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that sees the Son;” and we can see God, to be saved, in no other way, “has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, and I will raise him up at the last day.” Now, then, here is the sacrifice, the burnt offering and the peace offering. And this is that upon which one can never feel weary of dwelling because, after all, when in our right minds, we well know there is nothing so to be dreaded as the fire of God's wrath; there is nothing so to be dreaded as the fire of

hell; there is nothing so to be dreaded as the fire of his eternal judgments; there is nothing so to be dreaded as that fire that is unquenchable. Oh, my hearer, when we can bring the matter home close to ourselves, and ask ourselves, which every Christian does in his own soul, when his spirit is favored to make diligent search: How shall I do when I come to the swelling of Jordan? What shall I meet with when my body shall presently cease to live, and my disembodied spirit shall leave time, and all its endearments and associations, and enter into an unknown world? What is my real condition? Am I really and truly prepared for that event? Well, then, it is a knowledge of God by sacrifice that prepares us for that great event. So that this sacrifice here is to set forth the end of God's wrath. Can anything be more pleasing, can anything be more delightful to a poor sinner? Ah, he says, sin is the cause of wrath, and therefore, if by this sacrifice there is an end of wrath, there is an end of sin. If by this sacrifice there is an end of wrath, there is an end to my guilt; and the sins of Israel shall be sought for, but they shall not be found. So that if we discover this sacrifice in the infinite importance of it, then here we see God the Father in providing such a ransom; here we see the Savior, in laying down his precious life; and here we see the Holy Spirit testifying of Christ. There are three circumstances connected with the three great patriarchs beautifully illustrative of this. In the first place, Abraham saw Christ as the great High Priest; he saw this in Melchisedek. That is the first step towards seeing God. He says, here is the priesthood. And the business of the high priest was to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. Then the second patriarch, namely, Isaac; he was bound, and the knife ready to slay him; then in comes the substitutional sacrifice; so that Isaac saw God by the substitutional sacrifice of Christ. And then, thirdly, Jacob. And see how beautifully the one follows the other. First, there is the priest to atone; secondly, there is the substitutional sacrifice, that does atone; and then, thirdly, there is the consequence. Jacob saw Christ as the ladder set upon the earth; and Christ's mediation was set upon the earth, and Christ worked in that mediation until it reached to heaven; and he himself has entered heaven by his own precious blood. So that by Abraham I get the high priest, that had no predecessor or successor, in sweet accordance with the immutability of God's counsel. Then in Isaac I get, when Isaac was loosed by the interposition of the substitute, there I get Christ as the substitute. Then I come to Jacob; there I get the same person as the way in which I rise to heaven, as the way in which the promise came down, yea and amen; "I am with you, and will keep you in all places whither you go, and will not leave you till I have done that which I have promised." Now have we thus seen God? If we have thus seen God, what will be the consequence? Why, our affections will be drawn out towards him; our hope will be in his mercy; our souls will side with him; and we shall say, Let this God be my God; let this religion be my religion. Here, is such a religion as this, such a revelation as this, I escape an infinity of woe, and come into possession of an infinity of bliss. I am an heir of God, cannot be an heir of anything greater, an heir of God; so that in the dignity, righteousness, and certainty of that heirship we are said to be joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now here, then, is the end to the wrath, here is the peace with God And then Moses sprinkled the people; and you read in this chapter, you can read it for yourselves. He sprinkled the people. The blood of sprinkling! I cannot tell you all that it says; it says more than I can tell about. It says, Draw near to God: fear not to come near; there is the sacred blood sprinkled on you. This is the covenant that God has made with you, a covenant by sacrifice. And this sprinkling of the blood, what does it mean? It means a sense of pardon; it means a sense of healing; it means a sense, and a realization too, of liberty; "By the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water." It means nearness to God; "we have boldness, by the blood of Jesus, to enter into the holy of holies." Thus, they saw the God of Israel, and were brought near to him. And what will be the proclamation at the last upon this matter of the blood of

sprinkling? Those who are brought in this way to see God by Jesus Christ, and to see how, by the sacrifice of Christ and by the blood of Christ, we escape the curse of the law, escape hell, and escape all the consequences which sin has entailed. And what will be the ultimate proclamation? "Gather my saints together." Saints, Lord? Why, your holy word declares there is no saint, your holy word declares that there is none righteous. A saint is a righteous man; a saint is a good man; a saint is a holy man; a saint is a heavenly man. Why, Lord, your holy word declares there are none; and yet it says, "Gather my saints together." How shall we find saints? By what are they distinguished? How shall we distinguish them from other people? "They have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." There is the secret. It is by the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing from all sin that they become saints. So, then, it is by faith in the blood of the Lamb, by faith in the blood of the covenant, by faith in the blood of Christ, by faith in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Here they become holy, here they become righteous, here they become good; here they are everything that God himself approves. Hence the sweet song, as you know, runs, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." That is the way, then, the Lord is the God of Israel by sacrifice. If you go up into eternity past, you will still find the same truth. You must have election by sacrifice: for if you were chosen, you were chosen in Christ, where the sacrifice was; and you must have God's love by sacrifice. If you are loved, you are loved in Christ; and you must have life, and everything, by sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ; and you must have access to God by the sacrifice of Christ; stand on the vantage-ground of victory by the sacrifice of Christ; all must be by that sacrifice. And the more we are acquainted with the wide range acquired by that sacrifice, the more we shall love the Lord our God. It is when we look at God apart from the sacrifice; it is when we look at God apart from Christ; it is when we look at God through the medium of the dark clouds of our experiences, that seem to testify against us, and through the dark clouds of our infidelities and sins, that seem to testify against us; and through the dark clouds of tribulatory circumstances with which we may be connected, when we look at the Lord through these, we are inclined to rebel, and we say, Why is this crook? Why is that deep valley? Why is that great mountain? Why is that solitary desert? And why is this, and why is that and the other? And we get fretting, and are made unhappy. But when we can lose sight of all these, and see the Lord only by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, there we recognize the great truth that God is love. Hence the apostle, when he would have us run with comfort and with decision the heavenly race, he says, "Looking unto Jesus, who is the author and the finisher of our faith." Thus, then, they saw him as the God of Israel by the sacrifice of Christ.

The next point we notice is the richness of circumstances. "And there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone." This sapphire stone represents richness; we will look at this in more detail presently. Our God is rich unto all that call unto him, and every poor sinner that is brought to receive the testimonies I have named is also rich in faith, and an heir of the kingdom. But let us look for a moment at this precious stone. This precious stone represents riches, as we shall presently see, perhaps more clearly, after I have made a few remarks upon this. Now, then, he stands on riches, amidst riches. He does not stand in a scene of poverty: no; our God has at command infinite riches of all kinds. Let us view the precious stone, then, and let us get two or three scriptures just to help us out, just to see that he is the God of Israel not only by sacrifice, but by those endearments that follow the sacrifice. Take that scripture in the Proverbs, that "a gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that has it; whithersoever it turns, it prospers." What is this gift but the Lord Jesus Christ? and he is precious in the eyes of him that has him. See him in his

person, in his perfect work, in his suretyship responsibility. If he is not precious to us, then it is because we do not possess him. But if we do possess him, if we do believe in him, if we do possess him in our understanding, so as to understand what he has done, and to possess him in our affections, and to possess him in our confidence, and to possess him in our desires, and to possess him in our prospects, then I am sure, as the apostle Peter well observes, “unto you that believe he is precious.” I have often thought what a privilege that is; “Unto you that believe;” not unto you that *disbelieve*; not unto you that are not quite so bad as others; not unto you that have done your part, and done your duty; nothing about the creature; but “unto every one that believes;” “unto you that believe he is precious.” From the lowest to the highest, from the least to the greatest, they all come to that conclusion, that Jesus Christ is precious. Can you say, I feel he is far too precious to be parted with? Who that knows his dear name would part with him? Who that knows his precious sacrifice would part with the testimony of God concerning that sacrifice? and who that knows the preciousness of his righteousness would part with the testimony of God concerning that righteousness? and who that knows his love and compassion, his infallible faithfulness, and his momentary watchfulness and care over us, would part with that testimony? Therefore, if he is so precious to you that you cannot part with the testimony, though you may have a thousand fears whether it be really yours or not, yet, if it were not divine, it never would be precious to you. “A gift is as a precious stone in eyes of him that has it.” Another scripture in Proverbs says, “A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men.” And I have been brought before great men by this gift. Dear, say some, what great men have you been brought before? Why, Moses, and Noah, and the prophets, and the apostles, they are great men, all of them. And, do you know, I can talk with them, and walk with them. When Moses tells me of the work of Christ, that it is perfect, and that he is a rock, and that the eternal God is my refuge, Moses is a great man, and we agree very well together. So, of the prophets. When I get among the prophets, and talk with them, they are great men, and we agree very well together, by this gift of Christ; they receive me, and I receive them. And so, the apostles were great men; and this gift brings me before them, and we walk together, and talk together, and agree very well together. And it will bring me before some other great men by-and-bye. I read of a great man in the Bible, so great that John thought it was the Master, and fell down at his feet to worship him. Why, John, you will be brought before these great men in heaven by-and-bye, and you will be as great a man as they are. “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore, the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” Oh, if he be great, we shall be great also. It brings us before great men; bless the Lord for this! Now, then, “a gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that has it.” The infallibility of this precious stone, call it a sapphire, jasper, or what you like, “whithersoever it turns it prospers,” to denote the infallibility of it. Did Jesus ever fail? No. Did he fail in his life? No. Did he fail in his death? No. In his resurrection? No. In the ingathering of his disciples? No. In his promise to send down the Holy Spirit? No, he did not fail. Did he fail to be with his apostles? No. Does he fail effectually to plead our cause? No; my Bible said of him that “he shall not fail” ever blessed Jesus, what a remedy for my failure! “He shall not fail nor be discouraged.” Why, I am always failing, and always discouraged pretty well; where is my remedy? “He shall not fail nor be discouraged.” Whithersoever he turns he prospers. Whether it be towards the law, he will magnify that; if it be towards our sins, he will atone for them before he has done with them; if it be towards Satan, he will bruise his head; if it be towards the world, he will overcome that; if it be towards death, he will swallow it up in victory; if it be towards a Magdalene, a thief on the cross,

or any poor sinner, he will conquer, for his arrows are sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies. Whithersoever he turns he prospers. So, he does in his providential dealings. He has placed you by his providence where you are. Says one, I am not exactly where I would be. Well let it be your comfort that you are where he would have you to be. Don't let us turn infidels, and leave the Lord out of our circumstances. Whenever you do that, you get away directly from the path of God's truth. Ah, well, if I had lived somewhere else this would not have happened. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother had not died." Well, never mind; the Lord will put it all right. Well, but said one, there are some crooks in my lot. Well, they will come right, they will. Will? I cannot see how. But the Lord can; he can see how. There are some wounds will never be healed. Yes, they will. There are some troubles I shall never get over yes, you will. There are some things I shall regret to all eternity. No, you will not; no, you should have a better opinion of Jesus Christ than that. Why, your covenant God will wipe away all tears; he will not allow one tear. And how will he wipe tears away? By removing the cause. He will make your heart happy, make your soul and mind happy. There will be no outward expression of grief, because there will be no inward grief to express; but God shall be all in all, resting in his love, and reigning over the people with singing. Now this is indicated by the stone, this precious stone, Christ Jesus. Go a little farther, and you get the pearl of great price. Let me repeat an old idea here. You part with, renounce, all confidence in the flesh, and receive Christ as the pearl of great price; and whatever he is worth, that you are to have. Do not you see that? The Lord's people are said to be worthy of heaven: what makes them worthy? The pearl of great price; he is their worthiness; they are named after him, and whatever Christ is worth, that you are to have. Well, then, say you, I am quite satisfied. Of course, you are and will be. Some of the people of God lately, that have crossed the Jordan, conscious of this very truth, that they have lived in Christ's worth, that they are dying in Christ's worth, that their entrance into heaven will be by the worth and worthiness of Christ, that their continuation there, and the lofty rank they shall have there, their welcome there, their safety, their everything there, by the worth and worthiness of Christ, what has been the consequence? Our brothers and sisters that have lately departed have most of them been exceedingly happy in their last moments. Bless the Lord! it is a nice thing to die in the Lord, a nice thing to live in the Lord! One more scripture, and then we will go on again. You know the Lord Jesus Christ said, "To him that overcomes will I give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows, saving he that received it." What is the white stone? Oh, some would say, it is faith; some say it is love; and some assurance; some one thing and some another. That is not the way to handle it. The white stone, sir, is Jesus Christ. First, he is the precious stone, infallible in all his undertakings. Second, he is the pearl of great price, to entitle you to eternal blessedness. And, third, he is the white stone of perfect purity, or purity in perfection. Therefore, if you lay hold of the work of Christ, he becomes your perfection. That is meant by the white stone, perfection of purity. But it says, "a new name written in it which no man knows, saving he that received it." I will give you a scripture to explain that. I always caution you against my explanation, but you may rest upon the Lord's explanation. "A new name written, which no man knows, saving he that received it." Now, friends, let us go to the 1st of John, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Now mark that; "As many as received him. to them gave he power to become the sons of God." There is no one knows what it is to cry, "Abba, Father," and to feel that God is his Father, but he that is favored to receive Christ Jesus as his all, and in all. There is no one knows what this new name is, for they are named after him, what it is to come into this adoption, into this liberty, into this peace, no one knows what it is but he that receives it. Ah, said

the man that received it, this is my elective name in Christ; I know what it is, it is dear to my heart. Here is the name, then, and if your heart be filled with these blessed truths you will love to hear them from time to time. The reason that professors generally do not care to hear these truths is because in their souls there is no vibration, no correspondence, no response. If a man has not a sight and sense of what he is as a sinner, and knows not his need of Christ, he cares nothing for these things. But when men are convinced of their state, then when they hear these truths there is a response in their souls. If I were to personify in my plain way the wounds of the man among thieves, why, would not every wound welcome the wine, welcome the oil? would not every bruise welcome the oil? If the wound could speak, would it not say, "Oh, how gladly I drink you in! for by your mitigation my pains, and griefs, and agonies will all pass away, and I become perfectly whole, perfectly sound"? So it is the Lord said, "I am the Lord that heals you;" and where the Lord wounds, where he makes sore, where he humbles, there the soul drinks in the remedial testimonies of everlasting love, and it knows then what none can know but those that are taught of God this secret, this realization of mercy, as the secret of the Lord that is with them that fear him.

But again: now the Lord stood, as it were, upon a pavement of sapphire, sapphire stone; what is the meaning? Perhaps I had better not take up the meaning here, but embody the meaning in the next clause, "and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness." What are we to understand by "the body of heaven"? What is a body? A body is the substantial and orderly construction of things. The body of heaven, therefore, they saw here, was heaven's order of things. And the sapphire pavement will guide us to the explanation, 49th of Ezekiel; Ezekiel is carried in the Spirit into the land of Israel, to a very high mountain, very high. Thanks to the Lord that I am high doctrine, thanks to the Lord for that. Very high; and on this mountain, on the south, was the frame, the body, the outline of a city. And then Ezekiel is led by the Holy Spirit to work out in detail this order of things, this construction of things; and after the prophet had worked it out, the whole of it, what is his conclusion? his conclusion is, "The name of that city is Jehovah-shammah, the Lord is there." By the body of heaven, therefore, I understand the construction of the new Jerusalem. Here you get the precious stones; here you get the riches. And we have nothing else therefore here but that which Abraham saw; for Abraham saw a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God; and this is the body, the very framework, the very essence of heaven. Ezekiel's words are very beautiful, "A very high mountain;" and the frame or the body of the city not on the north, exposed to storms, but on the south, meaning that it stood on the gospel side, where God would shine, shine and shine forever. But we have said it means an order of things, and it is right that you should understand this order of things. Where will you go to, what part of the word of God? I had almost said all parts; but I go to the 46th Psalm, and we see the stability of this city "God is in the midst of her;" and everything must give way to him. You may come with your battle bow against it, but God will break it; you may come with a spear, God will cut it in sunder if you do; you may come with a chariot, God will burn it in the fire if you do. Smile? oh yes, these citizens that live in this city, this body of heaven, this order of things, why, they may laugh at their mightiest foes; they go singing along very quietly that they have "a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks; open you the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in;" That is what I understand then, friends, by this body of heaven, the order of this city. If I go to the 54th of Isaiah, there I get again the blessedness of it: the foundations laid with sapphires, the windows of agates, the gates of carbuncles and all the borders of peasant stones; and there I get the promise, "No weapon:" it you are a citizen of this Zion, which you are if you are in Christ, he is of the city, "no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise

against you in judgment you shall condemn;" and they must remain eternally righteous, because their righteousness is of the Lord. Ezekiel says, "a very high mountain;" too high for the world. John, will you moderate it a little? They think your brother Ezekiel has gone too far. Oh, said John, "he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain." Why, you are worse than Ezekiel; Ezekiel says it was very high, and you say it is a great and high mountain. Bless God for that. It is a mountain that lifts us above Satanic reach, Satanic power; we dwell on high, our place of defense, the munition of rocks; bread of eternal life is given us there, and we drink of that river that flows upon the high ground of new covenant settlements, from the throne of God and the Lamb.

But let us look at the clearness for a moment, "in its clearness." So, John says, "Her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal." Now let us look at some of the things that are clear. After John reminding us of its majestic walls, its pearly gates, its rich foundations, he then comes on to give us a clear representation of what it is. "I saw no temple therein." Five times is the Lamb of God mentioned in connection with this body of heaven, this framework, this city, this new building, this new Jerusalem, in a few verses. "I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty", who would be afraid to live in such a temple as that? "the Lord God Almighty" almighty power underneath, almighty power to encompass, almighty to defend, almighty to reign, "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." How paltry the typical temple in comparison of the anti-typical! Not ten thousand Nebuchadnezzar's, not ten million times twice told Roman armies, can touch the temple in which we forever are to dwell. Is it not clear, then? Dwell in the Lord. What poor, weak, silly creatures we are! Fond of these mud cottages, rather stop in these tents of Kedar than go home to that wondrous temple in which there are an infinity of mansions of all that variety of adaptation that shall astound, astonish us, for which our souls shall glorify our God forever. Again, clearness: need no sun, nor moon, nor candle to shine; "the glory of God did lighten it;" that means God's salvation; "and the Lamb is the light thereof." And the people of God, the sanctified of God the Father, sanctified by the Savior, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, cleansed by the Savior's blood, shall enter into that holy city undefiled. "You are all fair, my love; there is no spot in you." Not anything that defiles; therefore, it must be by faith in that blood that cleanses from all sin. "And there shall in no way enter into it anything that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." Here, then, is the heavenly Jerusalem in its clearness. Is there a river? It proceeds from the throne of God and the Lamb. Is there to be no more curse, and are the people to reign for ever and ever? It is because of the throne of God and the Lamb. There is the Lamb mentioned five times in these few verses: first, to show the order of the temple; second, to show the order of the light; third, to show the order of the entrance, by eternal registration; fourth, to show the order of the Father's proceeding; and fifth, to show the entire abolition of the curse. Now I have not fully reached the words, "They did eat and drink;" but your time is gone, and so I must not enter upon that subject, but hope to do so on Lord's day morning next.