

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE ATONEMENT.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 19TH, 1865, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

"And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."—Romans v. 11.

THIS is the highest state of glory that can ever be reached by any creature, angel or man, namely, to joy in God. Hence of the redeemed it is said that "everlasting joy shall be unto them; sorrow and sighing shall flee away." To have, therefore, that acquaintance with the Lord that does away with all terror, all slavery, all distance, all antagonism, that does away with everything that is not entirely harmonious; to have that acquaintance with him that shall enable us even now at times to rejoice in him, and to feel with the Psalmist that all our springs are in him; such an object sought is in entire accord with the spirit of the gospel, with the spirit of Christ; for it is said of Jesus himself, that for the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and now possesses that joy, and holds it for all his brethren. And besides, to joy in the Lord is also our strength; and the more we are enabled to rejoice in him the more readily and the more willingly shall we run in the way of his commandments. Hence, is there not a promise that he will bring his people to his holy mountain, and make them joyful in his house of prayer, and that their burnt offerings and sacrifices he will accept, and that his house—Christ Jesus,—shall be called a house of prayer,—the meeting-place for all people, Jew and Gentile?

But my object, this morning, is to make a few remarks in relation to the great theme, the very life of the gospel,—the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, *the inherent value or power of the atonement of Christ.* Secondly, *the bases or foundations of that atonement.* Thirdly, *the effects which this atonement has upon four different worlds.*

First, then, I notice, *the inherent power of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.* I never have held the atonement as being intended as a mere example, as the Socinian sets it forth; nor have I ever held, since I have known the truth, the atonement in that light that would imply, or rather assert, that some for whom he died are lost; this, to my mind, since I have known the truth, is like a denial of the inherent power of that atonement. Now it appears to me that the power of Christ's atonement,—I mean, of course, its own inherent power and value,—lies in four things. First, in the dignity of his person. You will see, as the apostle observes, it was not possible for the blood of calves and of goats to take away sin, and the reason appears very clear; and if you just look at the reason why those sacrifices could not take away sin, then, I think you will see, in the contrast, how essential is the dignity of the person of Christ, who came to achieve that wondrous end. In the first place, those sacrifices could not by possibility, in the nature of them, magnify

the precept of God's law. A sheep or an ox could not obey, preceptively, God's law, which demands a perfection according to its own qualities; that law being holy, spiritual, just, truthful, and good; none of which qualities, in the preceptive sense, could be found in those sacrifices; but all of which qualities were found in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that he is Emmanuel, that he is God and man in one person, a complex person; he has two distinct natures, but he is not two persons, he is only one person. I think to attempt to enter into the subject of Christ's complexity metaphysically, would be presumption; I think it would be something like a spirit of arrogance. Let us accept the fact that God was manifest in the flesh; let us accept the fact that while Jesus Christ was perfect man, he was at the same time, and is at the same time, personally God, equal, underived, in every way equal to the Father; let us accept this great and wondrous fact, but never attempt to analyze it; for it is a mystery far above all human analysis, a mystery that fills heaven with glory, and will for ever and ever. Let us accept these great truths as they are revealed, and glory rather in their incomprehensibility than not; their incomprehensibility ought not to be any objection, it ought rather to be part of our glory. Let us be thankful that we have such a Saviour, too great to be comprehended as to his real greatness; let us be thankful that the mystery of godliness is a mystery not to be fathomed; let us be thankful that that God whom we adore is in every one of his perfections incomprehensible. You will perceive that Jesus Christ was as man all that the law of God originally demanded. Adam was made upright, and made everything that the law of God demanded; he was all that the law of God required; it required nothing more; and he was a figure of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ was as man all that the law originally required; and Adam, by continued conformity to that law, would be entitled to continue in an earthly paradise,—he would be entitled to continue where he was. But we have not the least authority to say that he could ever merit anything, that he could ever raise himself higher than he was; the most he could do, supposing he had not fallen, would have been to have retained his position. Now then, Jesus Christ as man was all that the law originally required. But when we step into a new position, and view the Saviour as the Mediator of a new covenant, and look at the great fact that we, in order to go to heaven, must have a heavenly righteousness; that in order to be safe for eternity we must have an eternal righteousness; that in order to be justified before God, so as to be brought up into that joint heirship which God hath constituted, Christ being heir of all things, and his people joint heirs with him;—now then, Jesus Christ, if he were only man, then he would have met merely the original requirement of the law, and that he would have had to meet for himself, and could not have met it for others; for if he had been merely man, he would have been accountable for himself, and would have had to meet the law for himself. But he was God as well as man, and being God he owed no obedience for himself; he therefore stood perfectly at liberty to obey the law for others. So that whatever Jesus Christ was more than man, that he was above the original requirement of the law. Well, if this be true, which it is, what must be that honour which this complex Person hath put upon God's law? Why, I am such a believer in Jesus Christ as to believe that the righteousness itself—that in his life was included his whole person. I am such a believer in Jesus Christ as to believe that his righteousness is not the righteousness merely of his manhood, but that it was the righteousness of his deity and manhood put together, for he is but one person; and that he is, therefore, called "Jehovah our righteousness." Now the sacrifices of the law could not thus meet the precept of God's law; but Jesus Christ hath in the dignity of his person; so that if you trace out the qualities of that law, as holy, just, good, truthful, infallible,

and eternal, see all these qualities in Christ Jesus. He met the holiness of the law by his own perfect holiness; he met the justice of the law by his own integrity, for he was "that Just One;" he met the goodness of the law by his own goodness; he met, shall I say, the divinity of the law by his own divinity; he met the eternity of the law by his own eternity. So that this Person, having lived a life of obedience to God under this law, he has thereby magnified the law; and having honoured the law, having obeyed the law with a life of obedience to it, he has reached the end of all its demands, because in his life was the dignity of his divine person. Now, then, this life of Christ is set forth as our justification: here, then, the law is magnified and established; "not one jot," the Saviour says, "not one jot nor tittle of the law shall fail, till all be fulfilled." So you see that in him it was by his life and by his death that every jot and every tittle of God's law, preceptively and penally, is fulfilled. And that is a wonderful scripture where it is said that "he is the end of the law." How sweet the thought, then, that that law that demands perfection of you, and you have nothing but sin to give, Christ met that law, and has brought in a righteousness by which you stand justified for life, for death, for judgment, and for all eternity. Now then, take away the deity of Christ, take away the dignity of his person, then the law is not honoured, then the law is not magnified, then there is no way in which we can be righteous before God; for "by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified." Then, second, if you come to the penalty of the law, as the sacrifices, sheep and oxen, could not meet the precept of the law, and we, through our sinful condition, cannot meet it, for we are carnal, sold under sin, and yet God hath decided that it shall be met, not one jot nor tittle shall fail; just so the penalty. You will observe that neither sheep nor oxen could endure the penalty due to sin; no, saith the prophet Isaiah, who was favoured with as clear a revelation of these things as any Old Testament prophet, — he says, "Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof for a burnt offering." They could not have endured the weight of our sins, they could not have endured the weight of the curse of the law, they could not have endured God's wrath, they could not have endured the fire of hell. Why, the fire of hell, connected with our sins, would indeed consume the cattle upon a thousand hills, and would still look round for something else to consume. But when Jesus Christ came in the omnipotency of his power, when Jesus Christ came in the infinity of his wisdom, when Jesus Christ came in the complexity of his person, he came with a nature that could suffer, and he came with a nature that could sustain, that could compass, and that could and did undergo all there was to undergo, and put an eternal end to the same. So that while, as we say, that which died was man, he who died was God. "Feed the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood." So that Jesus Christ did bear the sins, and did bear the curse, and did bear the wrath, and did drink the cup of condemnation dry, and did meet the sword of justice, and has swallowed up death in victory. And thus, what those sacrifices could not do through their weakness, and what we could not do through our sinfulness, Christ hath done by his mighty power. Now then, to receive his righteous life, and to receive his atoning death, is indeed to be brought into that peace that passeth all understanding. Thus, if you take away his manhood, then you have no provision for the original requirement of the law, nor have you any nature that can suffer. Thus, then, I hold that the first essential to the inherent value of the Saviour's atonement is the dignity of his person. You observe he did not obey the law by others; he did not suffer in mere name; he did the work himself; he gave himself; himself came under the law, himself took our sins, himself was made sin, himself was made a curse; he gave himself, put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself. Now this is the great Saviour whom the Lord sent

into the world ; and I am sure we cannot speak too confidently as to his ability to save. This, then, is one thing that makes his atonement of infinite efficacy. And when I can rest in this, which, upon the whole, I am favoured to do, why, I can smile at enemies and at tribulation, when I am in that state of mind, when I am in Christ. And—I am not going to speak improperly—I was going to say that most of us are very poor believers in God's salvation ; we actually get thinking sometimes that our sins are too great for him to save us, or too many ; and that we are too sinful, and too bad. Why, my hearer, look once more at the person of Christ, look at him once more, that he is God as well as man ; “ My Lord and my God ; ” he is, indeed, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

The second thing that makes his atonement inherently efficacious is the willingness with which he lived and died. For God doth not accept the sacrifice where the heart is not found ; so that if Christ's heart had not been in it, if there had not been a perfect willingness in him, then there would have been a want of efficacy, because there would have been a want of heart. And see how clear the Scriptures are upon this. And what doth the Lord say to each of his children ? “ My son, give me thine heart, ”—and then I shall have you, if I have your heart ; where your treasure is, there will your heart be. See how clear the Scriptures are upon this ; there it is ; “ I delight to do thy will, O my God ; yea, thy law is within mine heart. ” The Saviour came triumphantly down to us in all the infinity and eternity of his love ; he lived this wondrous life in willing-heartedness, in love to God and man, and he died that wondrous death in perfect love to God and man. “ Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ” And he saith, “ Herein doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life : no man taketh it from me. ” He died this wondrous death in love. He must not be dragged to the cross ; no, no ; his heart must be there, his soul must be there, his affections must be there. It is true, in Gethsemane there was a seeming exception, and not an exception either. “ If it be possible ”—which it was not possible, because the matter was unalterably settled—“ let this cup pass from me ; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. ” This, then, appears to me to be another essential to the inherent efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. And I ought to say, and it is evident to you all, that while he was thus willing to die, that we who are sinners might live, they could not take his life from him. And we see, when he rose from the dead, that he was of the same willing heart. Oh, how willingly he went over and found out his disciples ; how willingly he communed with them ; how willingly, in that solemn parting moment, did he lift up his hands and bless them ; how willingly did he send down the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost ; how willingly doth he still plead our cause ; “ And lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world. ” How willingly he abode by the cause which he had undertaken. See how beautifully Solomon's Song represents this, his coming leaping and skipping over the hills. That, then, is another essential to the inherent efficacy of the atonement of Jesus Christ. And as these things stand related to the Christian, I ought just to say, in this part, if we receive this testimony of the dignity of Christ in his life and death, if we receive that as a doctrine, if it does not win our affections to God, our prayers, our praises, our services will not be accepted. But if we so receive the testimony of Christ as to win our hearts to God, to win our affections to him, and to be able truly to say we love him because he first loved us, then, as Christ was accepted for us, we, having this love to him and to his people, will show that we are passed from death unto life, and shall be accepted in him.

The third thing essential to the inherent value of his atonement, or the power of his atonement, was that of the greatness of his sufferings. A divine who is now in eternity, some time ago wrote several tracts to show

that the efficacy of Christ's atonement did not lie at all in the greatness of his sufferings, but only in the dignity of his person. Why did not our wonderful protesters against error take up such a deadly error as that? Why did they not enter a protest against that? Simply because there was nothing in the propagator to give offence to any one—that is the secret. Now, then, I hold that the greatness of his sufferings was one essential to the inherent power of his atonement. You may compare it to what you please. Compare it, in the first place, we will say, to a surety. Here is a surety worth three millions of money, or as many as you like to name—say ten millions of money. He undertakes the cause of certain debtors; their debts amount to one million of pounds. The creditor comes to him as the surety, and says, "As you have undertaken to be surety, I have come to you for this million of pounds." Now we will suppose the surety should answer and say, "Well, you must remember I am a great man; I am worth ten millions, and therefore you ought to be satisfied with me as the surety, seeing I am able to pay." "Well," the creditor would say, "I am glad you are able to pay, but I shall not be satisfied unless you do actually pay." And so it was; we owed a tremendous debt of suffering, and if Jesus Christ had come to justice, and said, "Well, I am a dignified person, and I am God as well as man; I have infinite ability, and I hope justice will be satisfied with that." But no; "Without shedding of blood is no remission of sin." No, "The wages of sin is death." And this surety must pay the whole debt; he must suffer the whole; so, as the surety must suffer the loss, or part with the whole amount out of his vast resources for the debt, so Jesus Christ did actually suffer our hell; not in the form that we should have been subjected to it, because he was God as well as man; but he did actually suffer for our sins, and that commensurate with the magnitude of their heinousness, and of their guilt, and of the curse. And if the dear Saviour, I say it with reverence, and with a heart full of love to a God who has thus condescended so to reveal himself to us after this endearing order,—if the dear Saviour had not suffered all that law and justice demanded, he would be like the surety undertaking to pay the debt, and trying to satisfy the creditor with his ability, without actually discharging the debt; and it is said of the sinner, "He shall not come out thence"—when once in the prison of hell, until he "has paid the last mite," which "he never can." But Jesus Christ came under the law, and became a debtor to do the whole law,—Mark that! became a debtor to do the whole law,—so that he actually, in his sufferings, embodied all the hell that we could ever have endured. Is it any wonder that solemn scenes took place on the day of his death? And I am sure that while we are on this side of the grave, this side of eternity, we can know but very little of the depth, the intensity, and the greatness of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ah, though he was God as well as man, yet the very border of those sufferings, the very threshold of them, yea, just the very commencement of them, so pressed upon him that he sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Thus, then, when I look at the dignity of his person, when I look at the willingness of his heart, when I look at the greatness of his sufferings, I feel, if I had ten million souls I could rest them all upon such a Saviour as this, I could trust them all in the hands of such a Saviour as this. We must, of necessity, be victorious with such a Friend as this

The fourth thing essential to the inherent power of the atonement of Christ is that of entire conformity to the will of God. Let the Saviour once deviate the whole is ruined; but never did he deviate, no, never. He did not come to do what he could do; he came to do what God willed him to do. And you know again and again he impresses this upon our minds: "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me; yea, it is my meat to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Wondrous Son

of God! conformed in perfection to the good, acceptable and perfect will of God. Never in thought, never in word, much less in deed, did he once deviate from the will of God; he did the will of God in thought, he did the will of God in word, he did the will of God in life, he did the will of God in death, and now he hath ascended up on high to carry out ultimately the will of God as described by himself. "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." These are a sample, then, of the reasons that I hold for the inherent efficacy of the atonement of Jesus Christ—the dignity of his person, the willingness of his heart, the greatness of his sufferings, and his entire conformity to the will of the blessed God; that conformity to God's will still continues, and will do for ever.

I come now hastily to a very difficult department, *the bases of that atonement*, which is a very difficult subject to handle. Now when we speak of the basis of the atonement of Christ in a plain way there is no difficulty, because we know the love of God to be the main basis of that atonement. But that is not what we mean; what we mean as to the basis is, first, the necessity of that atonement. Here lies the difficulty. There are two theories among divines as to the necessity of this atonement, and unhappily I am unable to conform entirely to either of them; unhappily I am obliged to hold that question as a question undecided by the word of God; there I am obliged to leave it. Now what are the two theories? The one theory is, that God, though he be eternal, and though he be infinite, and though he be omnipotent, and though there be no limits whatever to his wisdom, his knowledge, and his understanding, yet that God himself could not have found out any other way in which he could, consistently with his holiness and justice, save a sinner and bring him to heaven. That is one theory,—that God himself could not have contrived any other way, he could not have found out any other way, and therefore, if he had a way at all, it must be this way; he could not help himself. Well, I do not see with that. They may be right, I do not say they are not; it is a subject, when I look at the inconceivable God, what he could do or what he could not do, a subject of such infinite mystery, I dare not go beyond the word of God, and the word of God nowhere asserts what these men assert—that God could not contrive any other way. I think the word of God is rather against them than not,—I think so. I will be careful here, because it is a matter of wonderful difficulty. The apostle does not say, "If there could have been a law given," implying there could not, but "if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." And then, again, it does not say that of necessity there never could have been, that God himself could not contrive any other way; it does not say that, but it says, "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Well, my opinion is, that a question so profound is better left; let us bless God that he sent a Saviour at all, and let us bless God that our eyes are opened to see that there was an infinite necessity for that atonement. As to whether God could or could not have contrived any other way, we all believe this was the best way that infinite wisdom could have contrived; we all believe that; we believe that the greatest love will seek the best way to gain the noblest end, and so the love of God has sought the best and most glorious way to accomplish its noble end. But what he could have done and what he could not I must leave to logicians and men that have very little to do but dream two-thirds of their time away; themselves very little use, employing their time in trifling with those that are of use. The other theory, which I do not altogether see with, is that God could, consistently with his moral perfections, have saved without a mediator, and that salvation by a mediator was a matter merely of God's will, without any necessity whatever. Well, I do not see with this either; I am obliged to leave it; I can fall

in with neither; all I can say is, I know not what God could have done, and I know not what he could not have done; but I do know one thing, that it is clear to us all that the dear Saviour answers very beautifully to all the perfections of the blessed God, and that he is the gift of the love and of the good will of God. That is the way I must leave that matter, after I have made one or two remarks. The theory that holds that God could not have himself contrived any other way, so that two-thirds of the being of God are mere fatalism; that their system is little better than fatalism, and semi-atheism. Give me a God that cannot help himself, and I cannot help myself, and God cannot help himself, only in some very minor respects—it is a system that I do recoil at and rebel at. Why, my Bible, according to their system, if I understand their system, ought to read thus, that “He worketh all things after the necessities of his nature,” whereas my Bible shows that Jehovah lives in the freedom of his will, and “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” And the Saviour did not say, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thy necessity, be done; Father, thou canst not help thyself, and therefore it is wrong for me thus to appeal.” No, the Saviour refers to the will of God. Then again, that same theory that binds the Lord so down, by what they call the law of his nature, as to appear to me to be little better than fatalism and semi-atheism, that same system tells us two very curious things, one of which I have noticed lately, and shall notice again. First, that the punishment of the sinner—that is, in plain terms, the damnation of the sinner—is the will of God’s nature, and this same person’s answer is that God cannot deny himself. Very well now, follow it out; the damnation of sinners is the will of God’s nature; but he has somehow or another denied the will of his nature, created another will, and loved sinners, gave his Son for sinners, saves sinners, and receives them. If that is not denying himself, I do not know what is. So that the damnation of the sinner is the will of God’s nature. I believe that God proceeds to the punishment of a sinner according to that which is just in his sight, and not according to the necessity of his nature.

And therefore away with your logical curiosities and devices, and let us come to God’s own blessed word. To represent the Lord to me as naturally willing the damnation of a sinner, and yet so denies himself as to have another will, and to carry out that will, saves the sinner!—so much for a theory, then, upon these matters. Now then, to be plain, the bases of the atonement of Christ are these, in my estimation. First, the perfection of God’s nature, to which sacrificial substitution answers, thus maintaining all the honours of holiness and righteousness; at the same time, as to whether God could have found any other way, or whether he could have saved without a Mediator, I do not say whether he could or could not. Second, the love of God; he was pleased to love poor sinners. Now, as I love them, what shall I do for them? In infinite wisdom he went to work, and found out a way; in the omnipotency of his power he has accomplished the great end; the work is done, the Conqueror returned on high, enthroned in glory, gathering in sinners, and in that glory he shall reign, and they with him, and that for ever. His choice is another basis of the atonement; if he had not chosen a people, there would have been none to mediate for. His immutable oath is another basis. So that, to sum up the whole, the whole of it originated in the good pleasure of the blessed God.

In the third place I make just a remark or two, though I should like to have said much, upon *the effects which this atonement hath upon four different worlds*. First there is the world of fallen angels. I know not how it is—lost man does not seem to desire the damnation of his fellow-creatures; a man in hell expressed no desire that others should come to where he was, but rather the reverse. Yet fallen angels seem to delight

in the damnation of man. Satan—that liar, that murderer, that accuser of the brethren—sets all hell to work to ruin man eternally, and tried to ruin the Saviour. Hence said the Saviour, “Now is your hour, and the power of darkness.” But the atonement of Christ conquers every devil in hell; the atonement of Christ throws Satan down like lightning from heaven; “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.” So that devils cannot forget this atonement, for they are all conquered by it. Talk of its inherent efficacy! I hold that the atonement of Christ derives its efficacy merely because it was appointed, and that it has no *inherent* worth, or value, or power—I hold such a doctrine! Let my breath be stopped before such an infamous piece of falsehood as that should ever have a lodgment in my mind. No; I know too well the power of his wondrous work to dream such a thing. I should be beneath the devil himself, for the devil himself knows that he is cast down, cast out, conquered, fettered, held and bound, by the inherent power of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan may accuse us, but never can prevail, because the blood of Christ speaketh on our behalf. Secondly, the effect it has upon unfallen angels, how they admire it; there they see more of the glory of God than in any other way; there they enjoy more of God than in any other way. Angels desire to look into these things. See the 9th chapter of Daniel; with what delight did Gabriel there show to Daniel what this true Messiah should do. See the angel’s announcement to the Virgin Mary, with what delight he spoke of the certainty of the Saviour’s kingdom and the eternity of his reign! See the angelic hosts descend at the Saviour’s birth, with that wondrous song, “Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, and good will toward men.” See the angels attend the sepulchre; see the countenance of one like lightning with gladness because Jesus had risen from the dead, conquered his foes, saved his people, and obtained for them eternal redemption. See the angels watch his sacred footsteps when he for ever left the earth; and the angel said unto the disciples, “Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go.” - And to all eternity will the angels glory in God by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thirdly, the effect it has upon a dead world. I suppose you will hardly find a man in this kingdom—very few—that is not sometimes obliged to say a good word or two concerning Jesus Christ. Why, even the Jew, that does not believe for a moment that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God—“Well,” saith the Jew, “he was a wonderfully benevolent man, he was a wonderfully kind man, he was a wonderfully good man. We do not believe he was the Messiah, but he was a wonderfully good man.” And this atonement of Christ has something in it that the natural man perceives in it a goodness in God towards man, and it wins the sympathies, morally and literally, of thousands upon thousands. There is something in it that human nature likes; I know the carnal mind is enmity against God; yet you must see it in the world, the civilizing, socializing, refining, softening, moralizing effects of the atonement of Christ, even where we have no reason to believe it has been brought savingly home to the soul. I have often thought (and a child will sometimes in simplicity utter a truth that will contain more substance than a philosopher’s week’s study would) of a little child whose mother was always setting before it the terrors of the Almighty, and the threatenings of a sin-avenging God. When the little child was taken to spend a few days with its grandmother, the grandmother began to tell about Jesus Christ, and how Jesus Christ took up little children in his arms, how he blessed them, how he noticed them, and declared that of such was the kingdom of heaven, and how he died. When the little girl got back home again, the mother began the old story. The little girl began to cry. The mother said, “What are you crying about, my dear?” “I want to go back to my grandmother.”