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SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A GOOD RESOLVE.

A S E R M O N

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 23RD, 1866, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”—Psa. xiii. 6.

DAVID is characterized all through the Scriptures for abiding closely by Jehovah. There is not one instance, happily, in all his life, of his giving way in any shape or form to any other god. That grace that called him while very young kept him in God's blessed truth, and he disdained all others, and abode firmly by that truth. The consequence was that he died that happy death that all must die that are kept in the faith, rooted and grounded, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel. And thus it is we have such beautiful testimonies running through the Psalms, of the deepest experience, and of the highest fellowship with the blessed God, and the clearest displays of the way in which the Lord deals with men, to keep both their lives from perishing by the sword, and their souls from the pit of hell.

Our text, then, taking what it suggests as well as what it expresses, implies three things. First, here is *the person*—“I.” Secondly, *the resolution*—“will sing unto the Lord.” Thirdly, *the reason*—“because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”

We have then, first, *the person*. David describes his experience in this psalm. And none of us doubt that David was taught of God; and if we have the same experience in kind, though not in degree, yet that is a proof that we are partakers of the same life, of the same light, of the same spirit, of the same grace, and that we are one with the same everlasting covenant. This is a matter of infinite importance. While it saith, “He that believeth shall be saved,” people are apt to take such words as standing by themselves; but it doth not mean a faith without power, any more than it means a faith without works; for faith without works is no faith at all, and cannot save the soul; faith without works doth not evidence that it is living faith, and therefore cannot save the soul. Now David then, in this Psalm, describing his own experience, represents himself first as an inquirer after God, and secondly as fearing lest he should apostatize from God, and thirdly lest his enemies should move him away from God's truth, and thereby have advantage over him. Hence his inquiry, “How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?” That is of course a mode of speech after the manner of men. The Lord hath not spoken to me for a long time; I have had no comfort from his word for a long time. There was a time when in his light I could walk through

darkness; there was a time when the dew of heaven rested all night upon my branch; there was a time when the rock poured me out, as it were, rivers of oil, rivers of consolation; when I washed my steps, as it were, with butter, as Job hath it; when I walked in spiritual prosperity and rejoicing. But now the Lord hath not spoken to me, and he now deals with me as though he had forgotten me. And David puts that in the supplicatory form, which the church, as we read in Isaiah, put in the positive form. She said, "The Lord hath forsaken me, my God hath forgotten me." But the Lord's answer showed that that was her infirmity. What do we say to this? Are we content to go on speaking to the Lord without his speaking to us? Are we content to go on coming from time to time to the Bible without the Bible coming to us? Are we content from time to time to go on coming to the house of God without the God of the house coming to us and speaking to us? If it be so, and we are content with the mere form, then we have not the living resolution in our souls.

"I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." Because, if we are content with mere formality, we know not that he is anything to us at all beyond a God of nature and of providence; we have no evidence that he has taken us into his hands graciously or savingly at all. But if, on the other hand, there be this longing after him, then let us bless the Lord that he has so favoured us. "For these things," saith the Lord, "will I be inquired of by the house of Israel." "How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" That is a very beautiful sentence. Various are the states of mind which the Christian gets into when the Lord hides his face. It would occupy all the time we have this morning to spare if I were to enter into a description of the great variety of states of mind that the Christian gets into when the Lord hides his face. One state of mind is this;—your sins shall come to you, and the threatenings of God shall come to you, and the enemy shall come to you, and there shall be a horror, a foreboding, a terror, and a great darkness, a darkness that might be felt, as though something dreadful was about to happen to you. "Horror," saith one, "hath taken hold upon me." And David saith in the 32nd Psalm, "Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." This is one of the best states we can be in under the hidings of his face. But another state of mind unhappily is that of frivolity, carelessness, lightness, and anything and everything but godliness. Another state is worldly-mindedness. Gold appears to be everything, the world appears to be everything, the house of God, the ways of God, the Christ of God, the salvation of God, fellowship with God, all these become mere secondary matters, and the man is immersed in the world. So ready is Satan to take every advantage of God's absence, as it were; not that the Lord is really absent, but he is as to our enjoyment, and realization, and recognition of his presence. Now, says Satan, is my time to make a fool of that man; now is my time to immerse that man in the world. Now, says the devil, I am the god of this world, and if I can exalt in that man's thoughts, affections, and estimation this world, and lower Jesus Christ, and lower religion, I shall gain something. But still there is a secret feeling, a secret dissatisfaction, a secret something that says, Well, I do not like this; I do not feel right; I feel buried in the world. I cannot hear my minister as I have heard him for some time. There must be something the matter. There is a kind of feeble petition, called whispering out of the dust: "How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" And such in that state will sometimes say, Well, I should not like to die in this state, either, and yet I do not know when I may die; I may die to-day, or to-night, and if I died in this state I should die very miserable, though I should be safe if I am a Christian; yet I should not like to die in this state. And so there is a kind of whispering out of the dust. By and by the Lord comes in, throws in a bitter, throws in a thorn, and turns the world, the cup from which

they have so long been drinking; into bitter waters, into wormwood and gall, and brings the soul into such a state as to increase the intensity of its petition,—“How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?” Ah, then; when the Lord doth re-appear after this bitter he has thrown in, such an one will become consolidated and solemnized, and he will say, in the language of the 116th Psalm, “Return unto thy rest; O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”

Various, very various are the ways in which the Lord hides his face from his people, and teacheth them the vanity of self, the sinfulness of sin, the emptiness of everything, apart from his loving-kindness and his great salvation. Here, then, is an inquiry after the Lord, and after the Lord's presence. And then you observe that the more David reflected the more sorrow he felt. Never mind if your meditations bring sorrow into your heart, it will make way for more joy; if your meditations increase your horror, increase your terror, and make you more uncomfortable, it will only make the manifestations of God's mercy to you the more conspicuous. Hence saith David, “How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily.” Now I like that, David; I am glad that your sorrow is not merely occasional, but daily—constant; I am glad that you begin to be very unhappy without the Lord; I am glad to hear that sorrow is coming on; it is a good sign, for the deeper the sorrow, by and by, when deliverance comes, the louder you will sing. “How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” Oh, an enemy now, is it? Yes, I thought the world was my friend; I thought such and such was my friend; I find it is my enemy now. “How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” There is something that keeps my soul back from thee, Lord, and if there were anything that could keep thee back from me, as there is keeps me back from thee—if thou couldst be hindered as I am hindered, we should never come together again. Who can hinder him? He will come unto us. Here is sorrow, then, in the heart daily, “How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” And then, when the Lord comes in and dethrones this enemy, whatever it may be, and enthrones himself, oh, how it puts off our sackcloth; how it girds us with gladness; how it sets the soul in tune and order! Then we can indeed say, “I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.” David was thus, then, an earnest inquirer after God. Now I do trust and believe that the Surrey Tabernacle is honoured with hundreds of souls that are no strangers to this path; that it is the very language and experience of your souls. It is by these things the Lord humbles you, teaches you, mortifies you, blesses you, and brings you out of self-gratulation, and self-justification, causing you to loathe yourselves in your own sight, and making his dear and blessed truth more precious than ever to you.

But then, again, David was afraid of apostasy—I should think it looks like that. Not that he believed a real child of God could fatally apostatize; but then you all know that when you get into that state of mind the question arises,—

“ 'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought;
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his or am I not?”

If I am not, I shall go off into carelessness, and sleep the sleep of fatal death; and when death shall come, it will find a dead soul, and the dead soul means a damned soul, and damned souls must sink to the regions of the damned. Therefore he says, “Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;” lest while I preach to others, I myself should prove to be nothing but a reprobate—nothing but a dead professor—and that I at last, with the lost, should be cast away. Can we not pray this prayer? Why surely, friends, our profession must be a very hollow one, and a very

empty one, if we cannot enter into the meaning of the apostle, understanding the terror of the Lord.* Saul of Tarsus never knew the terror of the Lord, until the Lord in majesty said, "Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Then his eyes were opened, and he felt the terror of the Lord; he saw almighty vengeance at the heels of every man out of Christ. And David again and again saith, "Thine arrows drink up my spirit." Here, then, he dreaded the thought of sleeping the sleep of death. And you that are brought to know the Lord, it will still be your dread lest you should prove at last not to be real Christians, but only mere professors. The Lord keep us cautious, solemn, and prayerful upon this matter. I say to some of you, if there be any here this morning that I hope are good people, and yet, generally speaking, miserably dead to everything spiritual,—you seem to have just life enough to crawl, and hardly that; as to delighting in the Lord, quite out of the question; as to glorying in his holy name, quite out of the question; as to singing unto him, and realizing his bountifulness, quite out of the question. Now I say to such worldly-minded Christians (for we must not unchristianize some that are very worldly-minded), if you did but once know the blessedness of close fellowship with God—the blessedness of the glories of heaven playing around your soul, as the rays of the sun of eternal righteousness, the delights, the pleasures, the triumphs that it brings into the soul, enabling you to join with the apostle, "Thanks be to God, that always causeth us to triumph in Christ;" and "we are exceeding joyful in all our tribulations,"—if you could have but one hour of this, you would never forget it; you would be a struggler, after that, for a repetition of it; you would be a seeker, after that, for the renewal of it; you would be a solemn inquirer after that, for this liveliness in the things of God. David, then, was an earnest inquirer, and I trust most of you are too. He was very cautious, watched unto prayer, lest he should sleep the sleep of death. There were many expecting him to be moved away from God's truth. Why, surely, he will not always be that terrible *hyper*: surely he will not always deal in such extravagances; surely he will soon moderate the rancour of his tongue; surely he will soon adapt himself to the taste of the age; surely he will not go on with those antique, and with most of the pious folks obsolete, doctrines; surely he will be a little more moderate by and by. What do you think of him, Michal? Well, I will tell you what it is, if he is not more modern, I will not live with him. I will look out of the window, and will just see how he comes with the ark. If he comes extravagantly, if he does not come piously, and if he does not walk delicately, like Agag, but if he comes dancing, as though his feet were like hind's feet, and makes a fool of himself, I shall not like it at all, because it will not suit the taste of the age. And she looked out of the window, and there he was, without his royal robes, dressed just like another man, knowing that his highest honour lay in his oneness with God; and he "danced before the Lord with all his might," and appeared what Michal and the pious people with her would call the greatest fool among all that were there. So she gave her pious address sarcastically, as you know, and David acted very wisely; he had done with her—the best thing he could do. Well, David, if you will be better in future, make some promise.—I promise! The promise I make, Michal, is that I will yet be more vile, if that be vile. And as to the handmaids of whom thou hast spoken, they have spiritualized the scene, and I shall be had in honour by those whose estimation is worth having. So I will yet be more vile, and I will yet praise the Lord more and more. And in order to make the apostle Paul yet more vile in this sense of the word, God sent him a messenger of Satan—a thorn in the flesh. What was it for? Why, to deepen Paul's experience, to heighten his acquaintance with the boundless grace of God, that he might be yet more vile.

Alh, how would those adversaries of the anointed of the God of Jacob,

the man that was raised upon high, the sweet psalmist in Israel,—how would those adversaries have rejoiced if they could have got him to lower his tone and to soften matters down! But no; he still abides by the “I will and they shall;” there he lived and there he died. Therefore he prays that the Lord may so keep him, “lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.” And one taught of the same Spirit, when enumerating and contemplating, and looking around upon the many troubles that had attended, and that did and would attend him, for bonds and affliction abode him everywhere—none of these things moved him. So then, hast thou these three experiences—first, a solemn inquiry after God; secondly, a godly cautiousness, lest thou shouldest sleep the sleep of death, and prove to be a mere professor instead of a real possessor; and third, that whatever thou shouldest be moved from, thou wouldest not for a thousand worlds be moved away from the hope of the gospel? If this be thy spirit, then thou hast the resolution in thy soul, “I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.”

But I cannot enter upon that part without just noticing the remedy that David brought in as his stability. Mark his remedy. “But I have trusted in thy mercy.” Ah! that mercy that pardons every fault; that mercy that swallows up every sin; that mercy that hides every transgression; that mercy that looks upon me as the father looked upon his prodigal son—not as the object of rebuke, but as an object of pity;—“He was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found.” “I have trusted in thy mercy;” that is, the eternal mercy that is by Christ Jesus. Can you say that you are needy enough and bad enough to need such mercy as this? to have no other trust but in the mercy that is by the glorious Mediator of the covenant of sure mercies? Then, when he reviewed the mercy of God as the remedy, as that by which he was to be preserved, he gains confidence, and he says, “My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.” Now, here is mercy; that mercy comes in a salvation form. “My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.” That is David’s twofold remedy to which he looks for preservation; first, the mercy of the Lord; and secondly, the salvation of the Lord: and the mercy endureth for ever, and the salvation endureth for ever also; and here is God in his eternity and immutability.

I will now notice, secondly, *the resolution*—the singing; “I will sing unto the Lord.” I will take a fourfold view of this song. First, that it is a new song—something new. It is that with which we are not born. Some of you were born, perhaps, with an ear for music; but you were not born with an ear for gospel music; you were not born with an ear for spiritual music. The glorious gospel had no music for us while in a state of nature. We were like the deaf adder—however well the minister might have charmed, we were still nevertheless like the deaf adder,—we were deaf to the charming tidings of the glorious gospel of God,—that gospel that dwelt in the pure mind and boundless love of our Creator from all eternity. It is a new song. Brought into a conviction of what you are, in rolls pardoning mercy. And when you are under a conviction of what you are, if you were asked now, Where are you? you would say, Well, I seem to be in a horrible pit, and I seem to be in the miry clay; the more I try to get out by my own doings, the deeper I seem to get in. There I am, and I have struggled till I can struggle no more. I have done duties, and all my duties are miry clay; I sink more and more into despair.

Some of you perhaps have not gone far into this. It is now more than forty years ago since I was in that horrible pit and miry clay; but if I were a thousand years old, instead of being the age I am, I believe it would be as fresh to my memory then as it is now. I shall never forget it. And I found out while I was in that state that if the Lord did not

come in and lift me up, and lift me out, and show me mercy, and seal home pardon, I must be there till I died, and be lost at last. That was my feeling then. I should not have been lost, because I was born of God, but then I did not know that; I speak now of what my apprehensions were. But the happy evening (for it was at evening time) came when the word of the Lord lifted me out, sealed home pardoning mercy, and I was then more happy than I had before been miserable. Ah, I said, this is something new; it is altogether new; this is the new song, the new creatureship, the new covenant, the new and living way; old things are passed away, all things become new. Now I see that I need nothing as a Christian that is not found in Christ Jesus; I need nothing to make me eternally happy but that that is found in Christ Jesus. Hence saith the Saviour, "I make all things new;" and he that overcometh shall inherit all these new things—the new kingdom, the new heaven, the new earth, the new glory, by a new covenant; it is all new together. It is therefore a new song. But, secondly, it is also a melodious song; or it is both a harmonious and a melodious song. It makes melody in the heart. And where is the difference between harmony and melody? There is this difference. Harmony simply signifies the adaptation of the several parts one to the other; an agreement in all the different parts, so that they all harmonize together. So in our salvation how beautifully one part harmonizes with the other! How mercy and truth are met together; how righteousness and peace have kissed each other; how the law of God is magnified; how sin is righteously and graciously put away; how God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus! There is no discord; all is concord, all is harmony; there is no jar; one harmonizes with the other beautifully. And then if you look also at the adaptation of the gospel to us as sinners, and our adaptation to that—yea, trace it out where we may, we see how beautifully adapted one part is to the other. This makes up the harmony. So here is eternal harmony; no jarring, no unpleasantness can ever get in to mar the song. Then it is also melodious. Now what is melody? Melody is nothing else but a succession of pleasant sounds so expressed as to be pleasing to the musical ear. Hence, let a man in singing have what power he may of harmony, if he has not at the same time the power of melody, the succession of sounds in his voice injures the melody, and those that understand nothing about it can feel there is a fault somewhere, but they hardly know where.

Now the glorious gospel of God, then, is a succession of pleasing sounds. The love of God is a very pleasing sound; that is one, we may say. Electing grace is a sound that succeeds that, and that is a very pleasing sound. Divine predestination to eternal life is another sound that succeeds that, and a very pleasing sound. The coming of Christ to obey the law, his righteousness,—“I will sing aloud of thy righteousness,”—is a pleasing sound. And “he hath by his one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified,” that is a very pleasing sound. Then succeeds his triumphant resurrection—pleasing sound. Then his ascension, then his enthronement, then his intercession, then his reign, then his conquest, then his re-appearing, then his entering into glory; these are pleasing sounds. But these are not all. I have passed by the voice of the Son of God, by which the soul lives. I have passed by the “Loose him and let him go.” I have passed by the “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins.”

This song of everlasting love is a new song; a song harmonious and melodious. “Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.” Now, of course, we know when these qualities are carried out they help the service of God, the outward part of it, very pleasantly. And we desire to be thankful for the gifts the Lord has bestowed upon some of our brethren and our sisters, by which that part of the service is conducted properly and advantageously. For there are

many reasons why I like singing, I mean in congregational worship. And one among all the rest, is because all can join in it. Bless the Lord, then, for good hymns, and for gifts by which to sing them; but above all, for grace by which to realize their spirit and meaning. And then, it is an everlasting song,—every other song must end. When the Lord speaks of the termination of the world, under the figure of mystic Babylon, there we see the musicians, singers, and all the devices of the sons of men, come to nought. But Zion's song will never, never pass away.

“Believer, here thy comfort stands,
From first to last salvation free;
And everlasting love demands
An everlasting song from thee.”

Is it any wonder, therefore, that the saints of old should say, “Unto thee will I sing for ever. I will sing of the mercy of the Lord for ever?” Ah, there is harmony and melody there. How adapted is one to the other; how pleasing the succession of sound! There is no unpleasantness in the sound. When spoken of in the singular, the whole is called a “joyful sound;” and in heaven in perfection every heart and every tongue shall roll our Great Emmanuel's praise along. It is indeed, then, an everlasting song, because it is upon an everlasting salvation, everlasting love, and to the glory of the everlasting God. Never, never, never will the dear Redeemer cease to be surrounded with the hallelujahs of his saints, rolling forth as the sound of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, and that for ever and ever, as mighty as his victory and his power can make them. So, then, as John Berridge says,—I suppose he understood singing,—

“Strip me of this house of clay,
I'll sing as loud as they.”

Lastly, upon this part; it is not only a sacred song—that I need not touch upon,—but it is a secret song. It is a song that none can learn but the Christian. None others understand what it is about. Take these two scriptures. “Sing ye praises with understanding;” that is one scripture; and the second is that in the 14th of the Revelation, “No man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand,” representative of the whole election of grace, “which were redeemed from the earth.” And so it goes on to describe the faultless state in which they there stand before the throne of God; for they are without fault before his throne. None but a child of God can understand what eternal redemption is, what justification is, what sanctification is, what salvation is, what the victory of Christ is, what pardoning mercy is, what gospel liberty is, what the mercy of God is, and what the covenant of God is. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are spiritually discerned.” So we are to sing praises with understanding. Hence the Christian sometimes, when a hymn is given out containing language of stronger assurance than he feels he has, is apt to say, “Well, I do not feel I can sing that; I can understand it in a measure, but I do not feel that I am brought to it yet.” Well, there is a cautiousness about the man not to take that to himself that the Lord has not given him—not to take that to himself that does not seem to belong to him. So then this secret of the Lord, the understanding this covenant ordered in all things and sure, is confined to the saints, and to the saints only. “The world knoweth us not.” “A brutish man”—that is, a natural man,—“knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this.” Those that are made wise to salvation, they do understand it. Here, then, is the resolution of the Christian,—I will sing this new song, this harmonious and melodious song; I will sing this everlasting song, this secret song; and honour to his dear name that ever he has made my poor

heart glad with these wondrous tidings, of which I was once utterly ignorant, but now brought out of darkness into his marvellous light.

But lastly, *the reason*;—"Because he hath dealt bountifully with me." There were four or five scriptures came to my mind while prayerfully meditating upon this text, which I have not now time to name, to illustrate this last point. And those scriptures indicated this—that the people of God are sometimes brought into positions in which they think that the Lord deals anything but bountifully with them. Their language is, "He deals very bitterly with me;" and that "all these things are against me;" and "He showeth them hard things." "He breaketh me with breach upon breach." All the time you have any carnal defences, the Lord God will go on breaking down, and breaking down, until you have nothing but himself left to defend you. But if I were to give one proof of the Lord's dealing bountifully with us, that would be quite enough, and that is all I must give. Well, say you, what is that? No doubt all of you are beforehand with me. I think, friends, that the gift of his dear Son to poor sinners is quite enough to authorize us to say, "He hath dealt bountifully with us." And in giving us his dear Son he has given us himself, he has given us everything. All the grace that is in the Saviour, and all the joy he now possesses, all the glory he is ever to have, his people are to be one with him in. "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one." Thus, then, going no farther, we may well say, "He hath dealt bountifully with us." Whenever the Lord shines upon your soul, and refreshes you, and you can see that Jesus Christ has loved you, and given himself for you, that he was sent to be your Saviour; looking at that, connected with bringing you to know him and trust in him only, you may well say, "I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." There is nothing wanting in the Saviour, there is nothing deficient; no : full redemption, infinite ability to save, sufficiency of grace, entirety of conquest, stability of kingdom. And you see here how I may employ my imagination—and imaginative power is a good power when rightly used. I will employ my imagination here for a moment or two. Look at the believer at the last, and hear an angel say to him—not that the angel need ask, because he would know already, but we will suppose it,—the angel says to the believer at the end—Why, you have got an everlasting kingdom; how came you by that? My Father's good pleasure has given it. Why, you have got everlasting life; you were a sinner, death was your portion, and yet you have got everlasting life; how did you get that? The gift of God. Why, you have God's Son with you. I see, you are one with him; how came that? God so loved me that he gave his Son for me, brought me to believe in him, and so he is my portion. Why, you have got an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; how came you by that? Oh, elect according to the foreknowledge of God; God chose me. Why, you have eternal joy, and so of all the rest, of all the glory, the angel might say, How came you by this, that, and the other? And the Christian would ascribe every part of it to the Lord, and say, He preserved me, kept me by his almighty power unto eternal salvation.

But though my subject does not fail, nor I fail, bless the Lord, yet your time fails, therefore I must say no more.