

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A PLEASANT LAND.

## A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, MARCH 18TH, 1866, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“To establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.”—Isaiah xlix. 8.

THE preceding parts of the verse show what the Saviour must be in order to bring this about, and that which is said in the first clause of this verse cannot be said of any other person. The Lord saith, “In an acceptable time have I heard thee.” Was there ever a man since the Fall took place, or will there be down to the end of time, that can in his own person and by his own works come before God with holiness and righteousness enough for the Lord with propriety to say unto such, “In an acceptable time have I heard thee”? No, not one. “There is none righteous, no, not one.” What, then, is meant by this acceptable time? The time when the Saviour came before God with righteousness, with which God was well pleased, that was the accepted time; and if we come before God in an acceptable time it must be the time of faith, when we believe in Christ’s righteousness, and plead that and that only before God. An acceptable time because he drew near to God with an acceptable sacrifice, a sacrifice that should put sin eternally away, and bring in a perfection eternal for all for whom he died. ‘This was an acceptable time in which God heard him. And so, when the Saviour is manifested to sinners, then it is called his days. “In his days shall the righteous flourish.” Thus this acceptable time, then, means the time when the acceptable righteousness, acceptable atonement, acceptable name, and acceptable person of the dear Saviour comes before God. “And in a day of salvation have I helped thee;” so the Father did by appearing to him three times successively, and testifying of his Sonship; that helped him, God’s countenance and approbation helped him, the same as with us, God’s countenance and manifested approbation to us help us, because when we feel and see that the Lord is on our side we know that no fatal harm can either overtake us or abide by us. “And I will preserve thee,” the Lord says. “Now we have not been preserved, not in the sense that he was. His human nature was preserved, grace was poured into his pure lips, and as he was born fairer than the children of men, so he lived, and so he died, and so he rose. “Thou wilt not suffer thine holy one to see corruption,” and so he eternally reigns. He was, therefore, in all his purity preserved. And wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth, we have in him the same

purity, for he himself is our holiness, our sanctification, in which we shall appear before God in the precise likeness of the spotless Lamb of God. "And I will give thee for a covenant of the people." Then, if he is to be the covenant it must be a sure one, for there is no uncertainty about him; everything he did he did perfectly; he failed in nothing. And then mark the end, "To establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;" there must, therefore, be something in the language of our text exceedingly great. But before I enter upon the subject just look at the blessedness of the people that are included in our text. It saith, "That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth." So when the Lord makes a sinner feel that he is a prisoner to sin and death, then that man is a suitable object for the Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus, in his own time, says unto such, "Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways"—in those ways that lead them to their ultimate inheritance,—“and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger”—see the blessedness of the people—“nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.” Now these are great things. There are men calling themselves ministers who tell us that there is to be a millennium by-and-bye, when these scriptures will be fulfilled; that there is to be an earthly glory, and that the saints of God are to be politically I know not what, and then these scriptures will be fulfilled. But all such doctrines are fleshly and carnal. Why, we see these scriptures are all fulfilled in Christ Jesus. I have nothing to do but just go to the 7th chapter of the Revelation, and if I could get near enough to have a word of fellowship with them that live there with the blessed God, and could speak to them, and say, Is it so? is it spiritually so with you? their answer would be, Yes, it is, for here we are without fault before his throne; here we are led to living fountains of waters; here we are without hunger or thirst; here we are without a tear, without a sigh, without a cry, without a pain, without anything to regret; God hath wiped away all tears from off all faces. Thus by faith in Christ Jesus this blessedness begins to be fulfilled while we are on earth, and will be completed at the end of time:—

"The hill of Zion yields  
A thousand sacred sweets  
Before we reach the heavenly fields,  
Or walk the golden streets."

Now our text divides itself into two parts, which I must run through as hastily as possible. What are we to understand by the establishment of the earth? By the word *earth* we are not here to understand the earth at large—the globe we inhabit,—we are to understand the word *earth* here in the same sense that we should in another scripture understand the word *land*,—"To establish the land;" and the reference is to the land of Canaan as a typical land, and that Christ was to establish the antitypical land, was to make the antitypical land spiritually to a spiritual people all that the land of Canaan was literally to a literal people. Now that is one part of the meaning, which I will presently amplify. The second part of the meaning is, that our text, the first clause, is also a metonymy; that is, the container mentioned, namely, the land, the earth, but the contained meant. Hence the margin reads it, "To raise up the earth." I will therefore first notice *the establishment of the antitypical land*; and secondly, *the establishment of the people therein*. These are the two things that belong to the first part of our subject.

First, then, *the establishment of the antitypical land*. Now the antitypical land, friends, is the gospel. To "establish the land" means to establish it in its harvests, its pasturages, its vintage, in its universal and abundant products; that is the meaning of that expression. Now when the temple was building, and the people began to neglect the temple, as

though they had no particular desire that the Lord should dwell among them, the consequence was that they sowed much, and brought in little; that they did eat, but none was satisfied; that they did drink, but none was satiated; they were clothed, but none was warmed; and that they earned wages only to put them into a bag with holes. And why? saith the Lord. "Because of this house that is waste." You think you are to have the blessings without the mercy-seat, without the priesthood, and without my dwelling among you. That is the idea intended. Just so spiritually: if we would have the blessings of the gospel, it must be by the mercy of God, and that mercy of God must be by the great High Priest of our profession, and that mercy of God must also be by the dwelling of God; just as the land was not productive without the priesthood, and without the mercy of the Lord, and without the presence of the Lord. Now, then, it is by Jesus Christ that the gospel is made all that spiritually which the land of Canaan was literally. Let us name a few of its terms of distinction, and ask ourselves, as we go on, whether the gospel is to us spiritually what the land was to them literally; because if it be, then we are a spiritual people, and the inhabitants of that heavenly land wherein the people ultimately shall not say that "I am sick; for the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." Now in the first place, then, that land was called a holy land. "The Lord shall inherit Judah, his portion in the holy land." And so the gospel; in that gospel we have a dear Saviour, we have a wondrous Mediator, we have a great High Priest; sin is really, virtually, legally, entirely, and eternally, ended—gone, and gone for ever. The gospel-land is holy land. The moment I set my foot upon that land my sins drop dead, as it were, at the presence of the Saviour; my sins lose their voice, they lose their power, they lose their life. And the gospel brings me holiness, as my holy land—the holy gospel. "Now ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you." "Sanctify them through thy truth." Ah, then, as that land was to be to the Israelite the end of Egyptian slavery, and the end of the golden calf, and every other kind of idolatry, and the land was to be as white as snow in Salmon, a scene of pure worship; so is the glorious gospel of the blessed God unto us. Oh, how endearing is this one feature of the gospel! Talk of your native land, oh, my hearer, if thou hast a feeling that makes this gospel your native land, your fatherland, your own country, your own home, your own place of abode, and all that that is indicated in its being called a holy land; if this be thy feeling, how great the privilege vouchsafed unto thee! How glorious, then, is the work of true gospel ministers—to bring poor sinners into that land where their sins are freely forgiven, where their sins are entirely ended, where they are all put away; where sinners, convinced and pardoned, have new light, and become new creatures—a new scene opened up altogether! But except a man be born again, he cannot enter into this land of holiness; and if, therefore, this gospel be to us thus sanctification, holiness, reconciling us to God, then it is to us spiritually as the land of Canaan was to the right-minded Israelite literally.

Secondly, the land was called a pleasant land; "They despised the pleasant land." When I come to this gospel land, what am I met with? I am met with this:—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore in lovingkindness have I drawn thee." "I drew them with cords of a man"—the man Christ Jesus,— "with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." Again, "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!" Then in steps a divinely inspired apostle, and throws a pleasantness over the whole scenery of the land by one concise but infinitely significant declaration,— "God is love"— "God is love;" nothing for his people but love, nothing in all his dealings with them doth he mean

but lovingkindness. And though that love is often hidden behind dark clouds, and men see not the bright light, yet when the wind, the Eternal Spirit, cometh and separateth those clouds, and he again shines upon us, we once more see his lovingkindness. The psalmist prays upon this very point, "To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." What is your reason? "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life," therefore "my lips shall praise thee." It is, therefore, a holy land and a pleasant land; there is not an unpleasant thing in it; the Lord has not an unpleasant thing to say to us; at the very gates of the land are laid up all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old—New Testament promises and Old Testament promises; and they are none the worse for being old, but rather the better, for those promises have stood the test for thousand of years, yet they have never broken down, and not one vital believer in them has ever broken down, or ever will. Thus, then, it is a holy and a pleasant land. There are many more reasons why it may be called a pleasant land. The people, when in their senses, are pleasant, and the climate [is] pleasant,—everything is pleasant; and the presence of the Lord doth make things pleasant; as saith the psalmist, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" It is a land flowing with milk and honey; something to sweeten and something to nourish. Is it not so? Doth not the gospel nourish us? doth it not nourish our hope, our faith—nourish, in a word, the new man within us? "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Milk does not impart any particular joy, as wine does; but it nourishes, gently and carefully. And so sometimes you will hear a sermon, and you will say, Well, I did not hear with much joy, but there was something very soothing, and very endearing, and very encouraging, and it seemed a little like that scripture where it saith, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." The word sometimes thus quietly nourishes us, and we feel all the better for it. And I will tell you where unbelief and Satan will sometimes try you upon this point. For instance, you are in a little trouble, perhaps a great deal of trouble; but be that as it may, there is a kind of despairing feeling comes into your mind; some scripture comes just suited, and it comes with just power enough to encourage you a little, not with power enough to give you the complete victory, or to make you very joyful, or to enable you to triumph, or to feel that there is a very great deliverance wrought; but it nourishes you a little. Ah, says Satan, that scripture cometh to your memory, but if it had come from the Lord it would have come with more power. But then I read of assurance, and of much assurance, and of full assurance—different degrees. If it come with assurance enough to make me feel it is the word of the Lord, then if I cannot rejoice in it I will hope in it. David saith, "I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more." And then there is much assurance; the word shall come with a little more power, and make you almost sure that all is well. Then there is full assurance; that is when the Saviour comes in with such triumphant power that you cannot doubt if you would. So then do not despise the milk—that is, the little nourishment. Oh, saith one, I am not a babe. Well, friends, in nature when a person grows to maturity of course he cannot be a babe again; though even then men are babyish sometimes. But spiritually you may be a strong man to-day and a little babe to-morrow. I am sure I feel very much of this. At one time I want strong meat, and to rejoice in the Lord; at another time I am glad of any little encouragement I can get to hope in his name. Thus, then, a holy land, a pleasant land, a land that floweth with milk and honey. I do not know how many times my spirit, my soul, has been most dreadfully embittered since I have known the Lord. I do not know how many times I have exclaimed with Naomi, "The Lord hath dealt bitterly with me;" many, many times; but just the same number of times has the word of the Lord taken that bitterness



away, and filled my soul with everything sweet and pleasant. Honey—"with honey out of the rock will he satisfy thee." Ah, when he drops a sweet word, as saith one, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; they were sweet unto my taste, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb,"—when he doeth this, how encouraging and precious it is. Ah, Christian, the loss of a wife, a husband, a brother, a sister, a parent, a friend, the loss of property, affliction, darkness of soul—let it be whatever it may, the Lord sees your trouble, he sees your bitterness of spirit, he sees you have in your hand the bitter cup, and that cup you must drink; but then when you have drunk that cup he will drop in some sweet word, he will put a cup of sweetness into your hands, all the bitterness shall go, and you will be ready to say, I would not have been without that trouble for ever so, for it prepared me—as John Bunyan says, it makes the sweet the sweeter when that sweet shall come. Thus, then, by Christ Jesus the gospel is a holy land, by Christ Jesus it is a pleasant land, by Christ Jesus it is a land that floweth with milk and honey.

Again, was the land of Canaan "a land in which thou shalt eat bread without scarceness; thou shalt not lack anything in it"? Just so the gospel. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Again, "Eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." The gospel land can never be exhausted; Christ the bread of life, Christ the water of life, Christ the wine of the kingdom, Christ the green pastures, Christ the flowing river, Christ as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land; Christ the wondrous vine that produces all we can need; Christ our all in all. Take Jesus away, the gospel is a barren scene; but let us have Jesus, and God will supply all our need according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus our Lord. Again, it was a land with goodly cities which the people built not; so the gospel is a land presenting to us a city which we have not built; it hath twelve foundations, it hath salvation for its jasper walls, it hath gates pointing to every point of the compass, to receive poor sinners, let them come from east, west, north, or south. "Thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; they shall ever be open to welcome every poor runaway creature that has run away from the devil, run away from sin, run away from the world, run away from his own works, and wants to find a refuge in the city of God." Again, was it a land full of good things, which the people filled not? so there are doctrines full of good things which we filled not. Why, election is full of good things; predestination is full of good things; adoption is full of blessedness; perseverance is full of blessedness; resurrection is full of blessedness, and eternal glorification is full of blessedness. Who filled them? Some people do not find anything in election; the real Christian finds everything there—"filled with all spiritual blessings." Some people do not find anything in divine predestination; but the Christian blesses God that he was not appointed unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. Some people do not find much in Jesus Christ in his mediation, and so they come down after good works to be done by them to make up the deficiency, whereas the Christian finds all fulness in Christ Jesus,—“Ye are complete in him.” And were there wells which they digged not? So in this gospel land; the deep wells of salvation, God's love, and mercy, and grace, and goodness, what deep wells they are! and sometimes out of them with joy we draw the water of eternal life. And were there oliveyards, and gardens, and vineyards, which they planted not? Just so with the gospel. But time would fail me to multiply them. Was it a land that the Lord God Almighty cared for? As the Lord liveth, there is nothing in the whole range of existence that God cares for more than he does for his truth, his dear Son, and his people. "O Lord," said Jeremiah, "are not thine eyes upon the truth?"

What do you say to this? Can we that are here this morning say that we hope through grace we have obeyed solemnly, that we have obeyed prayerfully, that we have obeyed understandingly, that we have obeyed decisively, the two exhortations the Saviour gives upon this? One is, "Take heed what ye hear." It makes no difference to some people, they say it all means the same thing. What! those doctrines that constituted the Pharisees a generation of vipers, and those doctrines that constituted Christ's followers acceptable to God, was there no difference between the two? The end of one is, "How can ye escape the damnation of hell?" The end of the other is, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven." "Take heed what ye hear." It is a land the Lord thy God careth for. If you do not care whether what you receive be truth or lies, you will find the God of truth cares though. There is not one particle of gospel truth that is not baptized in Immanuel's blood; it is all confirmed by the blood of the Mediator. God's eyes are upon every particle of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. It is a land the Lord thy God careth for. You all know the fearful faults which God never tolerated, sanctioned, or approved, with which David was overtaken; but notwithstanding those faults, David was scrupulously and conscientiously decided for God's truth, and that truth which he held fast buried all his faults, and he is in that decision for God's truth held up as an example to all after kings. "Ye have not followed me as did my servant David." "Take heed what ye hear." "To establish the earth," the land. Did not Christ come to establish the truth? "The God of our fathers," saith the apostle, "raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." "Take heed what ye hear." Then the other exhortation is, "Take heed how ye hear." Not only *what*, but *how*. Get a right hold of the truth; see that your hold of it is experimental; see that you receive it as a matter of necessity; see that you receive it as a matter of infinite importance. Out of the four characters there was only one in the parable of the sower, namely, the good ground hearer, that so understood the value of the word that he would not part with it; he therefore took heed what he heard, and how he heard. Thus, then, the holy land, the pleasant land, the land of milk and honey, the land of pleasantness, the land of truth, that the Lord thy God careth for. His eyes are upon it from the beginning of the year to the end; his eyes are upon the truth to-day, and if there is a word comes with any power into your soul to-day, it is because the Lord's eyes are upon that word for you. Though that word may be a sentence uttered by the minister without its being scripture, yet it will be scriptural; it is not essential that it should be scripture if it be but scriptural. Our hymns are not literal scriptures; you are to judge for yourselves, and as far as they are scriptural sing them; they are of no authority whatever any further than you feel and see them to be scriptural hymns. You may get comfort from that which is scriptural; if it is not in the direct letter of scripture, still if it is scriptural it is the spirit of the scripture, the grace of the scripture, the life of the scripture, the Christ of the scripture. One more, and that is this, it was a land in which the Lord dwelt; that is self-evident. And I know he dwells in the truth; I have found him there many a time. He dwells there, he dwells in the gospel land, and he dwells there for ever; he will never leave it, he will never forsake it, and I am sure if we are in our senses we shall never wish to leave such a land as this gospel land.

Before I leave this part, mark two or three purposes for which the Lord dwelt in this land. First, it was for the good of the people. I wonder how many of you have noticed, and trembled at, and prayed against a certain scripture—I have done so in my time—where the Lord saith, "Woe unto them when I depart from them!" Ah, I have said,

Lord, that it will be woe unto me! I shall be a wretch undone if that day should ever come; better for me I had never made any profession at all, than to be one of those empty professors that the Lord by his providence will seem to so forsake, that the mask will fall off, and I shall turn out to be an enemy to his truth, tread under foot the Son of God, and Satan and my sins will carry me just where they like. Who shall undertake to describe the magnitude, the awfulness, of the "woe unto them when I depart from them?" Many times have those words brought the prayer out of my inmost soul, "Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." The Lord be with you in your families, in your souls, in your business, in the world, in the church. You cannot talk to everybody about this, but you may think of it secretly; you may pray unto your Father in secret, and he that seeth in secret will reward you openly; and your enemies will say, I can't think how that man gets on so well; I thought that circumstance would have stopped him for ever, but he has got over it; I can't think how it is. You know how it is. We made sure when they cast those three men into the fiery furnace they would never come out again; but they have, with not a hair of their heads singed. We made sure, when we got that Daniel into the lions' den he would never come out again; but he has. We made sure when that Jonah went down into the sea he would never come up again; but he has. We made sure when we got Paul and Silas into prison they would never come out again; but they did. So the Lord dwells with his people, then, for good. "I will not give sleep to mine eyes"—it is a noble decision,—"or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for Jehovah, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." What shall I do without him? So David rejoiced and danced before the ark when he brought in the symbol of God's presence. Michal, his carnal wife (for she was of the house of Saul, and not of the house of David), despised him; she did not understand what was meant by bringing in the ark—that it signified the presence of the Lord. So the Lord dwelt with them then, for their safety, their welfare, and their happiness; so far so that they arrived at earthly perfection; only, of course, when the picture was finished the colours began to fade, the frame fell to pieces, and the picture was laid aside. They sat every man under his vine and under his fig tree from Dan to Beersheba, eating and drinking, and there was not an adversary nor evil occurrent; but that did not last long. But here with the saints of God, in this gospel land, it will last to all eternity. There is another point; there was another purpose for which the Lord dwelt in Israel, to receive every poor Gentile sinner that forsook the land of his nativity and came from afar because of the name of Jehovah. "Moreover concerning the stranger, that is not of thy people Israel;" and none was rejected. Ruth was received;—I may go back even farther than that—even Rahab was received; Naaman was received; the centurion was received—every poor Gentile sinner. Why, this is one of the purposes for which the Lord dwells with his churches now, not only for their welfare, but to fulfil that promise, "I will gather others." When the Lord gathers them we shall keep them, depend upon it, keep them very easily; but if we gather them ourselves, we gather them by mere human suasion, and they soon go off again. When God gathers a man, how does he gather him? I will tell you; he gathers him just the same as you would gather a sheaf; you go in and cut the sheaf down, gather it up, and off you go with it. Can that sheaf replace itself upon the roots from which you have severed it? No, it cannot. When God gathers a sinner he cuts him off from his first roots, his first confidences, his first hopes, and gathers him into the garner where they are eternally saved. This, then, is the land that is established.

Now I must hasten to notice the other part. The margin of this text saith, "To raise up the earth." Here I should come to the people in

order to carry out what I believe to be meant; the container mentioned, and that is meant, and also the contained are meant. He raiseth up the land; that is, he raiseth up the people. In conclusion, I must just have a word upon this. Now he lifts up the people. How does he do it? Let a mother in Israel describe how he does it. "The Lord killeth:" "Sin revived," saith the apostle, "and I died;" he died to all his fleshly confidences. "And maketh alive;" so he became alive to Jesus Christ. He had been dead to Jesus Christ hitherto, the same as we were; but when God convinced him of sin, and killed him to his former state, he became alive unto God; like the publican then it was, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up;" so he brought us down to the grave, that is, spiritually so; "his life draweth near to the grave;" so that we were spiritually just as a man is literally when he feels he cannot get over his disease; he says, I shall die, and not live; the physician tells me so; yea, the word of God tells me so:—"Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live." When God said that to Hezekiah, God spake then according to the disease; and so when God saith to a sinner, "Thou shalt die, and not live," he speaks according to the sin of that sinner; the sin is the disease. Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord; then the Lord spake after the order of mercy; "I have added to thy life fifteen years;" but to the sinner spiritually the Lord gives eternal life. Fear not, ye shall not die. "Because I live," says our increasingly dear and triumphant Redeemer, "ye shall live also." Well, you see, here is killing and making alive. "The Lord maketh poor." Ah, the longer you know what religion is, the more poverty you will recognize in yourself. He will strip you, he will make you feel your destitution; he will make you glad of that text wherein it is said, "He will hear the cry of the destitute, he will not despise their prayer." "And the Lord maketh rich," that is, when he has taken your own confidence from you, he will give you a faith, and a hope, and promises, worth having, and make you rich, not in the flesh, but in faith; "rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom." "The Lord bringeth low." What, again? say you. Yes, again. You must not think you have had your last down yet; oh no, you have some very deep pits to go into yet, I can tell you, some very low dungeons. Some of you will find it worse by-and-bye than you ever found it before. Now, saith the aged Christian, I think I am worse than ever; I don't think I was ever so low before since I have known what the gospel is. Really I seem to be as miserable as a beggar on a dunghill; no hope for me. Yes, there is; for it is added, "He lifteth up; he raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory." Thus he raises them up. "For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's;" and the Lord's people are the pillars of the earth, "and he hath set the world upon them." Thus they shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.

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SERVICES ON GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 30.

MR. JAMES WELLS

WILL PREACH

In the MORNING, at Eleven; and in the AFTERNOON, at Three.

A PUBLIC MEETING will be held in the Evening at Half-past Six.

COLLECTIONS IN AID OF THE BUILDING FUND.

DINNER AND TEA WILL BE PROVIDED IN THE VESTRY.