

# A SOLEMN THOUGHT

## A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Morning November 18th, 1866

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the New Surrey Tabernacle, Wansey Street

Volume 8 Number 417

“Vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” Romans 9:22

THE Lord has declared that he will bring the haughtiness of man low, and that he himself will be exalted in judgment. And if we would profit by the word of the Lord, we must listen to it impartially; we must come to it without any theory, without any preconceived notion, and listen to what it says. And if we have that spirit, and take into consideration the utter impossibility of the great God. being wrong in anything, that he knows everything, and that we know as nothing, we shall feel that whatever we cannot comprehend the justice of, or the equity of, or the motive of, it is a good thing to listen to his word, and obey the same. Now I want you this morning to forget as far as you can everything pertaining to this world. You are, by the providence of God, and by what he has done for you as a God of nature, fitted some of you for one sphere of life, some of you for another. We are not all fitted for one sphere of life; we are fitted for what the Lord has designed us for, all of us. But I intend this morning to deal with none of these things, much as I admire them in their place. We bless the Lord for the great gifts, mechanical, scientific, and otherwise, which he bestows upon men, because they conduce most wonderfully to our social welfare, civilization, and ten thousand advantages that soften the asperities of life, and make it not only more bearable, but also more enjoyable. But all this we must pass by, and I must look at you this morning as you stand related to eternity; I must look at you as candidates for eternity; I must look at you simply in your state before God as sinners. For our text is descriptive of the whole human race: “Vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” There is no exception to this rule. We have the authority of the Holy Spirit in the 2nd of Ephesians for thus speaking. It is there declared of those that are called by grace that they were children of wrath, even as others; vessels of wrath, even as others, fitted to destruction.

I will take a threefold view of our text. First, *that we are fitted for destruction constitutionally.* Secondly, *that we are fitted for destruction legally.* Thirdly, *the nature of that destruction, and its near approach.*

First, then, that we are fitted for destruction constitutionally; that is to say, the state into which sin has brought us has fitted us for destruction. May the Lord enable you solemnly to reflect while I

go on to point out the malady and the remedy in each department. Now sin has made us like Satan; sin has conformed us to the great enemy of our souls. And I myself am not aware of any one character by which Satan is nominated that is not applied to man also, to show our entire oneness with Satan. We will trace out some of these, noticing the remedy as we go along. In the first place Satan is called a liar: "he is a liar from the beginning." Now what says the scripture concerning man? "Let God be true, but every man a liar." There is not a natural man under the sun, that is, not an unregenerate man, that can by any possibility speak truthfully of God's truth, or speak the truth concerning God's truth. There is not a natural man under the sun that can speak truthfully of our state by nature. The account that the natural man gives of his state by nature is not a true account; it is a false, and therefore a deceptive account. The account that the natural man gives of God's truth is a false account, and therefore a deceptive account. So that this being the case, men can no more fit a man to be a minister of the gospel than they can create a world. All the prophets that you have in the Old Testament were made by the forming hand of the Eternal Spirit of God; all the apostles were made by the forming hand of the same Eternal Spirit, as independent of man as were Adam and Eve for their original existence. Here, then, all are liars. Where is the remedy for this, that we may be delivered from falsehood, and this fatal, fearful deception? Because to be deceived in relation to eternity, what is so terrible, what is so fearful? Take, for instance, one view of this. View a large number of learned men, as in the Savior's day, all of them without doubt, without fear, without hesitation, without misgiving, concluding that God was their Father, and that they were on the way to heaven. But the Savior viewed them in a very different light; he opened up the way in which they were deceiving themselves, and showed that they were heirs of hell, and on their way thereto. How then shall we be delivered from this deception? Well, it is thus. When the law of God enters, and shows us what we are, it will then lead us to see that Jesus Christ is the truth; and when we are led thus to feel and see that nothing but the atonement of Jesus Christ can take away our sin, then we begin to come out of falsehood into the truth. For when you say that nothing but the blood of Christ can deliver you, then you say the truth: when you say that nothing but the righteousness of Jesus Christ can exempt you from condemnation, then you say the truth; when you see that nothing but God in an immutable promise engaging to be your God for evermore, without alteration, without the least shadow of variation or change, when you are thus brought to see and feel that if this be your condition, and you lay hold of these two testimonies, the perfection of Christ and the immutability of God, you cease to be a liar, you now come out of falsehood into the truth; you stand in the truth of the Savior's perfection. And unnumbered millions now before the throne have proved the truth of his efficacious blood and everlasting righteousness; millions in heaven have proved the truth of God's immutable counsel, of his yea and amen promise. Hence the Savior, giving us to understand that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are the representatives of all the saved, said that God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, that he is not the God of the dead, but of the living; showing that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were in heaven while the Savior was on earth. Thus, then we are delivered from this our state by nature by what Jesus Christ is, and by what the living God is by Jesus Christ. There is a great tendency in man to put that asunder that God has joined together. Now let me tell you that you cannot have God's immutability on your side in any way but by the work of Christ, and if you rely upon the work of Christ apart from divine immutability, then you have only a part of the truth; and if you shut out divine immutability, which is manifested on behalf of the people by Jesus Christ, that leaves a solemn reason to fear that you are not taught of God. For what is the object of Christ's work? Why, to bring us to God. "You are worthy to take the book, for you have redeemed us to God." So then this work of Christ is to bring you into acquaintance with the immutability of the blessed God.

There you have the truths of mediation and divine immutability; here you may defy all the powers of sin and hell. Such, then, cannot be deceived. The adversary shall, if possible, deceive the very elect, by his feasible religious and irreligious lies, but he cannot deceive these. They know the truth, love the truth, walk in the truth, rejoice in the truth, and view it as that that surpasses in value all things they can desire. Second, the adversary is also called "a murderer." And "he that is angry with his brother" that is, with his brother man. The human race are all brothers and sisters. They do not act like brothers and sisters, we are aware, but it is so. "Has not one God created us? Have we not all one Father?" And but for sin in our nature, this globe would have been a happy, home, and we should have been a happy family in the holy, sacred, righteous, paradisiacal, pleasant sense of the word. But ah! sin, you hideous monster sin, what a curse have you brought in! Now, then, every man therefore in heart is a murderer. "He that is angry with his brother without cause is a murderer," as we all are. There is selfishness enough in every man to make him, when anything comes in the way of his interests, angry with his brother without a just cause. And if we carry this a little further it is worse still. Only see the bloody deeds of olden times. There is hardly a town or village in our land that has not been stained by the blood of the saints. Here was that latent enmity carried out into actual operation in the worst forms that men could devise. Here is only what we are. No, you may take the worst of those direful hypocrites and murderers that have slain from time to time the saints, and you may say to yourself, The worst among them represents only what I am in my nature; and had I been placed as they were, and as graceless as they were, and left as much under Satan as they were, my nature is as bad as theirs, I should have done the same. "Are we better than they? In no way." How, then, shall we escape the penalty of this? how shall we escape the wrath due to this? how shall we escape the vengeance that slumbers ready to awake against such? and the answer is, and we say it with holy and heavenly pleasure, that the dear and blest Redeemer was never unjustly angry with his fellow man, he was never unjustly angry with any one of his brethren, or rather, never angry with them at all. No unhallowed thought, no unhallowed feeling; nothing but pure anger against that that it was lawful to hate did the Savior ever show; not the slightest symptom. No, he was free, entirely free; Ah, then, let me receive this blessed Redeemer, and let me realize by his blood the forgiveness of my enmity let my enmity be slain, let me cease to hate the truth, and begin to love it; let me cease to hate my fellow men, and begin to pray for them; let me cease to hate my fellow-brethren and sisters in the Lord, and begin to love them; let me cease to hate the way of the Lord, and begin to love it, to love the habitation of his house and the place where his honor dwells. If so, then I am severed from Satan, Satan can no more get me into that element of his constitution; the enmity is slain by the blood of the cross, and thus God reconciles us to himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us. Ah, farewell, you liar! we bid you adieu forever, we will return to your lying territories no more forever. Adieu, you murderer! we will dwell with you no more, we will be one with you no longer. We will now, grace enabling us, stand out for the Holy One, the Just One, and confess before the Lord our God that murderous blood guiltiness hangs upon us all, and that nothing, no, nothing but the blood of Jesus could cleanse us and set us right. Here, then, we undergo a revolution of constitution; we undergo this wondrous change, and are no longer fitted for destruction, but become fitted for the highest destiny, the best company, the most noble employment that can gather up the hitherto broken down and scattered faculties of the souls of men. So, we escape, then, by Jesus Christ. Again, Satan is called "the god of this world." He is welcomed in it, he is adored in it, he is followed in it, he is served in it, he is obeyed in it, and his services exactly accord with the elements that are within us. And is this character applied to men? Yes. Just look at the 82nd Psalm. "I have said, You are gods;

and all of you are children of the Most High” so you are, as creatures. “But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” You know what prince that is that is to fall. Go to the Savior’s own words; they will explain the fall of the prince. “The prince of this world comes,” said the Savior, “and has nothing in me.” “He shall convince you of judgment, because the prince of this world” namely, Satan, “is judged;” cast down to rise no more forever. And you, the gods of this world, shall die in like manner; shall come to the same defeat, the same perdition; Satan and all his servants. Peter, you were a god of this world. “When you were young, you girded yourself, and walked whither you would.” You did not fear God nor regard man. Number one was everything; you had your plans and had your ways, and you were determined to reign all you could. You cared not who went to the wall, if you could get on well; nor who were poor, if you were rich; nor who were unhappy, if you were happy, all self. So, every man by nature is his own god; a very important personage; reigns in his own wickedness, his own ungodliness, his own covetousness. His gold is his god, his pleasures are his god, and his time, he says, is his own, and he has a right to do as he pleases. Such is Satan, such we all are by nature. But when the Lord brings one of these gods down, what does he say? Why, he says this, that “the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing.” And so that poor sinner, convinced of what he has done, down he drops. Ah, he says, I am nothing but a poor dependent creature; my Maker can stop my breath in a moment. I may not live another hour, for I am a poor, dying creature, and may be in hell the next minute, for aught I know. “And he does as he pleases in heaven.” I do not care for that, says the natural man, if he does not interfere with me; he may do as he pleases in heaven. Ah, but also “among the inhabitants of the earth; and who can stay his hand, or say unto him, What are you doing?” Ah, then your reign is over, your kingdom is numbered and finished; you become dethroned, and you are now, when convinced of your state, broken to pieces as a potter’s vessel, like an old skin bottle in the smoke. I am a poor, worthless, helpless, miserable creature; what is to become of me? Here I am, I never saw it before, never felt it before, without Christ; that I rather gloried in, now I see it is an awful thing to be without him. A stranger to the commonwealth of Israel; that I rather gloried in, now I see it is damnation to be a stranger to these eternal things. Without hope; that I rather gloried in, now I see that I must be lost if I so die. And without God; that I rather gloried in, but now I see if I so die, I am lost. Now, then, such a one comes out of his independence, and cries as the publican did, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Lord, Satan told us we should be as gods; Adam and Eve believed it, and I believed it; but now I am made to feel I must die as a man, made to feel that I am but a poor, helpless worm of the earth. God be merciful to me a sinner. And now such a one becomes a creature, a mere creature. But then he becomes a new creature; his feelings are new, his prayers are new, his pursuits are new. What a revolution is now brought about in eternal things! What he was once unacquainted with and unconcerned about now becomes his everything. Ah, he says, if the Lord will but make me one of his! What a happy people are they! made to depend upon him. They are nothing in themselves, and find their all in him; all their springs are in him. And so now you will feel from time to time your dependence and instead of looking to number one, looking to self instead of living in that devilish selfishness that you did live in before, to your own damnation, if grace had not prevented, instead of this, your language now will be, “I will look unto the hills, whence comes my help.” My help comes not from my policy, and plans, and doings; “my help comes from the Lord, that made heaven and earth.” And while you are thus speaking the Holy Spirit steps in and says, “He will not suffer your foot to be moved.” If you are thus brought down, made to feel your dependence upon him, and to take your stand upon gospel promises, “he will not suffer your foot to be moved: he that keeps Israel, will not slumber nor sleep.” Now you are fitted for heaven, now you are fitted for God, because you can now begin to join with the saints to

acknowledge that all these things by which we are saved are of God through Jesus Christ, that no flesh should glory in his presence. No, if you glory now, it shall be in the Lord, and in the Lord alone.

Again, Satan is also called a wild beast; he is spoken of as a roaring lion. Did not Peter see in his vision wild beasts? Do not misunderstand me here. I wish to be clear because of the little ones that may be just peeping out of obscurity. When we speak of men as wild beasts we mean as it pertains to eternal things. You may be a highly civilized man, a man of a very refined mind, highly educated, and everything that could be desired in you as man, mind that; but at the same time all your thoughts may be wild as regards eternal things, and you may know no more spiritually of eternal things than the wild beast knows of rational things; and, with all you are, you are an enemy to your own soul. Saul of Tarsus was of this stamp. He was a highly educated, a very refined-minded man, and, as you know, wonderfully zealous; but what was he to the lambs of Christ but a wolf, a wild beast, a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour? Such is Satan's character such is our character. But when the Lord met with this roaring lion, when the Lord met with this prowling wolf, when the Lord met with this wild beast, and thundered into his soul, what a revolution it wrought! Ah, how was this lion brought to lie down with the lamb! how was this bear brought to feed with the little ones! "And a little child shall lead them." Such was Ananias; a little child spiritually, a little child in eternal things. And this little child is very timid, and he is afraid to go to Saul of Tarsus. "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil, he has done to your saints at Jerusalem: and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on your name." Ah, but go to him; little child as you are in eternal things, go and tell him a very simple tale, a very straightforward one; I will tell you what you are to say to him. "Go your way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me." Ah, then, Lord, if election has got hold of him, he will hear me; if election has got hold of him, he will listen to me. And so, he went. Saul of Tarsus, "Brother Saul, the God of our fathers has chosen you, that you should know his will, and see that Just One, and should hear the voice of his mouth. For you shall be a witness unto all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you tarry? arise, and be baptized, and wash away" figuratively, "your sins;" baptism denoting the putting away of sin by the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus Christ, he rising to carry out the glorious consequences of that death. Here, then, the roaring lion was stopped, turned into a lamb; and now just listen to him. Now it is, "I endure all things for the elect's sakes." All, you once detested them, Paul. I did, but now "I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Here, then, is the mighty change. He no longer bears the semblance of Satan, but the image of the Savior. "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." And again, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, then, how the Savior is a remedy for it all. Again, Satan is called a dragon. What is a dragon? A tyrant. And are we not all tyrants over our own souls by nature? I think so. I know I was, and all by nature are. "I will not have this man to reign over me," is the language of everyone. Hence, in Isaiah, "The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls." There we are called, while in a state of nature, dragons, "because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen." These people that were thus tyrants over their own souls, had no feeling for their own souls, no feeling for their own destiny, no sympathy with the groans of Calvary, no sympathy with the glorious truths of the gospel, these, that were dragons, "shall honor me, because I give waters in the wilderness" namely, the promises of the gospel, "and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth

my praise.” Thus, you come out of this dragon character into the character of submission, sitting down at Jesus’ feet, clothed and in your right mind. Again, man strutting about, and thinking himself he is something, when at the same time he is not a bit better in the sight of heaven than Satan himself. What a mercy to be made to know this! Ah, it will indeed make you see and feel that “except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God;” except his old constitution be taken away, and a new constitution planted in him, the stony heart taken away, and a new heart given in its stead. “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision,” touches only the body, “but a new creature.” So, he will deliver you from this dragon-like character also.

I shall mention only one more, which is very mortifying, very humbling. Satan is called a serpent, and this is the character of us all by nature. Some have said that the Lord’s people were never serpents. Well, of course not in the sense that Satan is, because he is a serpent finally. But we certainly are, all of us, by nature serpentine. What is the character of a serpent? Take only two characters of the serpent; low cunning and poisonous; those two. Now I will pass by the former, or else much might be said upon that. Why, the highest schemes on earth are like low cunning in comparison of the high counsels, luminous purposes, and glorious motives of eternity, as exemplified in God manifest in the flesh, and our eternal glory thereby. But we will keep to the other, poisonous. Every unconverted man exercises a poisonous influence. We see it sometimes where men herd together. How they poison each other’s minds until the worst of language becomes their very element, and they hardly know when they use that vile language! And women, I of course refer now to low women, where you find a company of them working in a factory or other place, it is wonderful how they corrupt and poison each other, and adopt language, become accustomed to language, almost if not quite surpassing that used by men. How frightful is this! What is it all but serpentine poison? And then, if we take a religious view of this poison, what are Popery, and Puseyism, and other isms as well, with which I will not trouble you this morning, what are they but poisons, poisoning the minds of men, poisoning them especially against God’s truth? “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?” would read with equal propriety, “Who has poisoned your minds against God’s blessed truth?” What infinite mischief is done by idle gossip and infamous slander! Such is the character of Satan. You see I have said nothing of him as the hater of light, prince of darkness, and many other characters. I think these are quite enough. How, then, shall we get away from this poison? Ah, what a change is wrought when grace begins to reign! I recollect some time ago being in a railway carriage, and there came in a company of young men. They were laughing, seemed all very cheerful and joyful; and I began to shudder and feel unhappy. I thought, There will be some language presently that would make an angel tremble. Well, presently the Bible came out, and I found that at least they were under the moral influence of the Bible, and that such a company of young men would not use bad language; so that I soon got easy, opened my Bible, read on, and went on comfortably. And I said, Thanks to the Lord even for the moral influence of the Bible; we desire to be thankful for that. Now what, friends, is the business of the minister but to bring in words that shall extract the poison, take the poison out? and those words are the truths of the gospel. They will take the poison away, and make the mind sound and sane, and healthy and good. And hence that man out of whom the poison is taken, hear that man speak of his experience, it does you good; hear that man speak of his soul’s struggles and troubles, it does you good; hear that man describe how he first obtained a hope in eternal things, it does you good; hear that man speak of the pure realities of eternity, it does you good. And is it not so, that when we assemble sometimes, some of you, your minds are full, as it were, of the poison

of this world, the infidelities of your heart, one thing and the other, so that you seem a poor, crawling creature altogether, a poor reptile of the earth, and you feel there is no epithet too degrading to describe what you feel. Perhaps before the sermon is half over your mind is taken out of it all, it is driven away, and you are brought into a savory, spiritual, holy, healthy state of mind, and you will say, What is this but a foretaste of heaven? I would not but have been there for ever so; it has done me good; it has made my faith stronger, my hope better, my love greater, so that I love the Lord more than ever. You come now out of the poisonous influence of Satan, under the divine, and sweet, and saving influences of the pure Spirit of God. David seems to refer to this when he says, "Your word is very pure: therefore, your servant loves it." Thus, then, Jesus Christ is the remedy for all these maladies. We are fitted constitutionally for destruction, but the Lord recreates us, forms us anew, and how mighty is the change! Now, as we stand in Christ, there we are not liars, but children that will not lie; there we are not murderers, but lovers of God and of the brethren; there we are not gods of this world or of any other world, but dependent creatures, glorying in that dependence; there we are not roaring lions, but made to lie down as the lamb, in sweet repose and tranquility. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain." Here, then, again, we are not serpents, but delivered from that serpentine policy and poison, and brought into open reconciliation to the blessed God, rejoicing in that eternal purity we have in Christ. Jesus the Lord.

But, secondly, I have said *we are fitted for destruction legally*. Upon that I must say next to nothing, having dwelt, as I thought I should indeed, rather long upon the first part. The third chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians will explain this part, as well, as the fifth of the Romans. In the fifth of the Romans you get what we are by the law of God on the one hand, and what we are by the Christ of God on the other. In the third chapter of Second Corinthians you get what we are in our experience by the ministration of the law, cutting us up, on the one hand; and what we are by the gospel of God, delivering us and bringing us up to behold with open face "the glory of the Lord, changed into the same image from glory, to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

I now notice, thirdly, *the nature of this destruction, and its near approach*. This destruction is not a destruction of being, but only a destruction of all hope, of all comfort, of all help. The word of God clearly shows, and circumstances substantiate it before our eyes, that "it is appointed unto men once to die." And we read of Satan being cast into hell, and that the smoke of his torment ascends up forever and ever. We read of men being cast into hell, and that the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched. Now if I could find two things in the word of God which I do not, I might perhaps be inclined towards the doctrine of annihilation, or that of restoration. And the two things are these. First, if where the wicked are spoken of as being consumed as chaff and as stubble, that the fire shall burn them up, and leave them neither root nor branch; if there were no possible way of understanding such scriptures but by admitting annihilation, then we must admit it. But when we remember that there is a way of understanding those scriptures without adopting that doctrine, when the man is cut off from earth, the judgment of God, without any literal fire, burns that man up as chaff, he is gone away, he is become a thing of nothing, a thing not regarded by the most high God, and there is an end of him, there is an end to his being as regards this life, he can return to it no more: we must therefore understand it as a destruction from the earth, but not a destruction from being. No; as a poet somewhere said,

"Life's in earnest,

And the grave is not the goal;  
Dust you are, to dust return,  
Was never spoken to the soul.”

The soul goes on to eternity; there is no annihilation. If those scriptures, therefore, could be understood in no other way, then we must admit annihilation. But they can be understood in another way. Did David mean annihilation when he said, “I am consumed by the blow of your hand”? And does the church mean annihilation in the sixty-fourth of Isaiah, “You have consumed us because of our iniquities”? Thus, then, this destruction is not a destruction of being, but a destruction from earth, and hope, and help, as we see in the case of the rich man. Second, while I cannot find that these scriptures bear at all upon annihilation, there is, I think fatal to that doctrine, the absence of something else. When Satan is cast into hell, is there any information in the Bible as to when, in what stage of futurity, he ceases to be? When men are cast into hell, is there any scripture that shows in what stage of futurity they will cease to be, or that they will ever cease to be? Not a single hint of the kind. I cannot, as a matter of reason, bring my mind to believe that so many millions will be lost, that the period will come when they shall die, and no information given of it, no intimation given of it in the Bible. We read that “the worm dies not; the fire is not quenched.” I need not say that this destruction is nigh at hand, very nigh at hand. How short is life! how fast do days, and weeks, and months, and years, roll away! The apostle might well say, “Brethren, this I say, the time is short;” and I need not say to you, but I do nevertheless say it, that what is done must be done on this side of the grave; for it is a true saying, “As death leaves us judgment will find us.” Now what shall I say to you, most of you? Oh, what has the Lord done for you! You that have undergone this change, you that are thus brought to know the Lord, of each of you it may truly be said, At famine and destruction you can afford to laugh; there is no famine for you; no plague shall come nigh your dwelling, no fatal evil shall befall you. Safe while you live, safe when you die, safe when your body is sleeping in the dust, safe at the judgment seat, and safe to all eternity. For we needed an order of things that should not only deliver us, but keep us in the same state after it had delivered us. Hence there is in Christ’s atonement not only delivering power, but power to continue to eternity. There is in his righteousness not only exempting power, to exempt us from the curse, but to continue us righteous to all eternity, “Your people shall be all righteous” yes, there is in him all that shall keep us what he is for ever and ever. “He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever;” and if they did not live forever, he could not reign over them forever; but because he lives forever, they shall live forever. May the Lord lead us more and more into these things, for his name’s sake.