

MIDNIGHT SERVICE AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE

A SERMON

By Mister JAMES WELLS

MONDAY NIGHT, December 31st, 1866

“There shall be no night there.” Revelation 22:5

[The meeting commenced at twenty minutes before eleven and ended at ten minutes past twelve. There were present from nine to ten hundred persons. Two members of the Surrey Tabernacle engaged in prayer. The meeting was deeply solemn, and all seemed much interested and not sorry that they were there. A Christian friend, at his own expense, engaged our reporter to give a report of the meeting. The following is Mr. Wells’s address on the occasion. We must say that the five minutes silence of near ten hundred people was profoundly solemn, and the behavior of the people all that could be desired.]

I HAVE felt that to occupy the few solemn moments we shall be together in a mere review of our history as a church, or a mere review of past circumstances, would not be the most profitable way in which to spend a short time in the presence of the Lord on this occasion. I shall therefore pass by all that, and simply take what is suggested by the language of our text.

First, *what is suggested by the word “night.”* Secondly, *that night which we are, if taught of the Lord, seeking to escape.* Then, lastly (though time perhaps will scarcely permit me to notice that) *the truth of what is here declared, that there is a region where there is no night, “There shall be no night there.”*

First, then, just *a word upon that which is suggested by the word “night.”* And of course, the very first thing it is right for us to attend to is that dark night into which the Savior himself went. Our sins are an awful night, they are a dark night; they are, for aught the creature can do, an everlasting night; they are a night that cannot be terminated in whole or in part by anything the creature can do. The dear Savior went into all the darkness of our sins. Hence in the Psalms, the Savior, speaking of this, says, “You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.” And when a sinner is brought to feel and see what an impenetrable cloud his sins are between him and God, he looks about, and he discovers by and by that there is only one way in which that scripture can be realized by any sinner under the heavens, where the Lord says, “I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions for my own sake and will not remember your sins.” And again, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins.” And I think that this night of which I am now speaking was typified by the fact that the judgment of the Lord was ministered to the Egyptians in the night; and that night in which the paschal lamb was slain, the blood sprinkled,

and the Israelites exempted from judgment, is paid in the 12th of Exodus to be a night “to be much observed “ by the children of Israel; and it is repeated also in the same 42nd verse of that chapter, “This is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.” Am I speaking then to one soul here that has never yet had light enough to see the darkness of its sins, and to see and look forward with fear and trembling to that region of ever-lasting darkness to which all must be brought who die unacquainted with the Paschal Lamb? Just look at it: it was the spotless lamb, it was the death of the lamb, it was the blood of the lamb, this was the way in which they were to escape. And just so now, the language is to everyone that thus sees what a dark night he is in by nature and by sin, “Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world.” What a solemn night was that, when there was not an Egyptian house in which there was not one dead! and there was a very great cry. But what was that cry in comparison of the howling of the lost at the last great day! May the Lord, therefore, if there be any here that do not feel concerned, make you concerned, and give you to see that by believing in Jesus Christ, by looking to his precious blood, by looking unto God by him, there is a way of escape from it all, and something infinitely better even than this, there is a region where there is no night. This, then, is that night much to be observed. And will not the saints of God to all eternity observe that dark night into which the Savior went, and put an end to it? so that there is no night where he is; he is the end thereof shall we ever forget it? Shall we not remember that scene to all eternity? One of our brethren tonight in prayer very properly quoted the words, and they are expressive of that remembrance we shall have to all eternity of that solemn night in which the Savior thus went into all the darkness of our sins, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father.”

But again; he went not only into the night of our sins, but also into the darkness of God’s wrath. Oh! what an impenetrable cloud, what a tempestuous cloud, what a fiery cloud, what an electric cloud, what a wrathful cloud, what a dreadful cloud, is the law of Sinai! and what a hopeless thing it is for any poor sinner to attempt to meet Sinai! They could not so much as endure what was commanded. Ah! then, the wrath to come is a dark cloud, the wrath to come is a fiery cloud, the wrath to come is a vengeful cloud, the wrath to come is a retributive cloud, in which God will minister almighty and everlasting wrath, to vindicate the rights of justice, the honors of his law, the sanctions of his holiness, and also to reward retributively all that live and die enemies to his people. It was a dark night. Yet into this night the dear Savior went. And to change the simile for a moment, where he says, “Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterspouts; all your waves and your billows are gone over me.” Ah! poor sinner, do you see this wrath? have you ever heard its threatening rolling in God’s threatening’s over your head, and have you ever trembled lest this wrath should take hold of you and drag you away, and then a great ransom cannot deliver you? But Jesus again comes in; he was made sin; he was made a curse, he himself has put an end to this wrath, and has wrought salvation from the wrath to come; so that “he that believes on the Son of God has everlasting life;” while, on the other hand, “he that believes not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” So, then, “no night there”, means that there is no sin there, and “no night there” means that there is no wrath there. Hence you will observe that by Jesus Christ you have these beautiful words in the 54th of Isaiah, descriptive of his putting an end to the night of God’s wrath for all those that are led to seek his face, to receive his truth, and to stand out for him. And hence the words stand thus: “For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn

that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.” He that is brought to feel his need, to tremble at God’s word, and to seek God’s mercy by Jesus Christ, he will not be angry with such; for on behalf of such he has taken away all his wrath, turned away his anger. “I will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. For the mountains shall depart” the kingdoms of this world must and will depart, “and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you.”

Then, again, night also suggests death. Jesus Christ went into the darkness of death. There never was a death surrounded with such darkness as was the substitutional death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Never were the powers of darkness arrayed in such a concentrated form as they were against the dear Savior. When he came to the gloomy regions of death, and looked at those powers, invisible to us, but not invisible to him, he said, “Now is your hour, and the power of darkness.” Eternal thanks to the great God that it was but an hour. He soon conquered them; he soon crushed them; he soon scattered them; he soon spoiled principalities and powers, said, “It is finished.” The sting was gone, the bitterness gone, darkness gone, life and immortality brought to light. Angels rejoiced, saints rejoiced, the Father rejoiced, Christ rejoiced, and millions of men shall to eternity rejoice in the achievement of the wondrous death of an incarnate God. So, then, in the happy region to which our text refers, there is no sin, there is no wrath, there is no death. And I need not say that he went into all the darkness of tribulation. His life was a life of tribulation. And it is needful that we should be baptized, in a measure, with the same thing; it is needful that we should drink of the same cup of bitters, and hereby be weaned more and more from the things that are seen. And while we have tribulations, and many of our earthly consolations are dried up and pass away, it is then that we may draw consolation from his tribulation:

“His way was much darker and rougher than mine;
Did Christ my Lord suffer, and shall I repine?”

Here, then, is the end of that night which the paschal lamb shadowed forth. “This is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.”

What shall I say of the mercy of the Lord in this department? I will say this, without fear of contradiction, that if the Lord himself had not kept up in the people a scriptural remembrance of what Christ has done, it had been ere this forgotten, and human tradition, one tradition after another, one human invention after another, one human device after another, would by this time have excluded everything from what is called the gospel except the mere name. The Pharisees of old retained in the Savior's day nothing but God’s name. They had nothing of his Spirit, they had nothing of his Son, they had nothing of his grace, they had nothing of his salvation. Hence, when the Messiah came, he was in perpetual collision with them, “He came unto his own, but his own received him not.” But “I,” says the Father to Christ, “will make your name to be remembered in all generations.” No, worse than this, worse than this, the true Christian himself, if it were not for the thorns in the flesh that he has, if it were not for trial after trial, trouble after trouble, even the Christian himself would get very Pharisaic, would get very self-gratulatory, and would pique himself upon his own little hill of holiness and goodness, and by slow degrees adopt another gospel, get into another spirit, and thereby be milled. But bless the Lord! while, if it were possible,

the feasible gospels of the world should deceive the very elect, he will so lead and teach them as that they shall not be deceived.

These, then, are some of the things suggested by the night; that night much to be remembered; that night that brought to the Israelites exemption, that brought to the Israelites deliverance, for they went out of Egypt; that night, that brought to the Israelites safety, that brought to the Israelites the great God in the mystic cloud, that brought the Israelites near to God. And so, by what Christ has done he has put an end to the darkness, and has brought us light, brought us freedom, brought us salvation, brought us to himself. "I bare you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself." Once you were in darkness, but now you are in the light; "walk," which you desire to do more and more, "as children of light," and glory in the light which he has revealed to you, rejoicing that it is a light never, never to be withdrawn.

But, secondly, the word "night" brings before us not only the wondrous work of the dear Savior, by which we escape everlasting darkness, but it suggests the Lord's interposition providentially for his people in the most solemn manner. We have a great many instances (and therefore we are in meeting this evening in perfect order with the Scriptures) we have a great many instances in the Bible of great mercies being ministered in the night. I will give you some of those instances, just to show that our God neither slumbers nor sleeps; that our God watches over those that are his, and that perpetually. Take Ahasuerus. Here is a decree gone out for the massacre of the poor Jews. God saw this. He was at work, and that same night Ahasuerus could not sleep, so he commanded the chronicles to be brought. He wanted to hear a little of past affairs. How has the old year gone off? How are things? Bring the chronicles. The chronicles were brought. God took care the king should not get drowsy; he took care to keep his eyes open, and his ears open, and his mind open. "And it was found written that Mordecai", Mordecai? Mordecai? why, that is five years ago, Mordecai saved my life. What has been done to Mordecai? Nothing at all. And you all know the result. So, then, there was in that one circumstance of the Lord appearing in the night, and keeping the king awake, there was in that one circumstance the destruction of the Jews' enemy, the deliverance of the Jews, the exaltation of Mordecai, and the glory of God. Ought we then to be too proud or lazy to give our God now and then an hour in the middle of the night, when he gives us his care all the hours of the night? Who keeps us in our slumbers? Who preserves us while we are sleeping and slumbering on our beds? Let the Lord himself have the honor of so doing. For it is an old-fashioned custom in the Bible to give him the honor. "I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me." "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for you, Lord, only make me dwell in safety." There is no safety without him.

Then, again, the enemy gets a good man into a bad place, though God turned it into a good place, into the lions' den. Then they walked off to have their reveling, I suppose, and thought, We shall have nothing to do but go in the morning and find that Daniel is gone, the lions will have eaten him up. But that night Darius could not sleep, and he would not eat anything; he was so angry with himself, so vexed with himself. What a fool I was to give my signature against the best man in the empire! They themselves confessed they could find no fault in him except the law of his God. He was too bigoted, too high in doctrine, too narrow-minded. There, said they, we shall be able to find fault with him. But the king could not sleep. "He arose very early in the morning and went in haste

unto the den of lions. And when he came, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel; and the king spoke and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver you from the lions?" Yes, "my God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocence was found in me; and also, before you, O king, have I done no hurt." So, Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God." Thus, God works in the night-time as well as in the daytime.

Then, again, is Peter put into prison? Yes. We must be careful of him. These high doctrine people are very slippery, very difficult to hold when you get them. And what did they do? They chained his hands and left sixteen soldiers to take care of one poor solitary man. Ah, they said, we have got him fast enough now. It is midnight, and here he is, and here we are the prison is shut; we have got him at last. But the Lord does not sleep. The Lord does not mind going into a prison in the night. Now you are come into a nice chapel tonight; but the Lord did not mind going into a prison at midnight. So, the angel went in, and he stepped so carefully he did not wake the soldiers, and just smote Peter hard enough to do two things, to smite the chains off and to wake Peter. And so, Peter got up, left the chains, and left the soldiers. Now he says, How shall I get out? The gate opened of its own accord; then there was a tremendous iron gate at the outside, enormous that was, and that respectfully opened also. So, in the middle of the night out went Peter. And those that didn't like midnight meetings would say the next morning, What has become of Peter? Ah, you should have been at the midnight meeting, then you would have seen. But you went crawling home, had your supper, and off you went to sleep, and knew nothing about it. What is become of him? There was a midnight meeting; Peter and the angel met, and Peter got out; and the people had been praying for him; but when he was out, they themselves could hardly believe that Peter was got out. So much for midnight, then. The Lord will appear for his people in the night.

Again, we have got that Paul and Silas into the inner prison. We think they are too much cut up, and their spirits are too much gone, and they are too downhearted not to be quiet. Depend upon it they will be glad to go to sleep and forget their troubles. Do you think so? Are you sure? I should think so. The jailer thought so, and he went off to sleep, thinking all was safe, everything made fast. But he did not sleep very long that night. By and by Paul and Silas began to pray, and the Lord stopped their praying by turning their prayers into praises. Presently the foundations of the prison began to shake. Why, dear me! there is an earthquake! everyone's chains fell off; they were all free! I dare say they were glad that Paul and Silas were there; and all the doors were opened. Why, says the jailer, what is all this about? I thought you would have been quiet in the middle of the night. What disturbances these midnight meetings are! Ah! this is the hand of God; this is the finger of the Great Judge; this is the presence of the God of all. Why, the jailer thought, I shall be put to death in a very torturous way for this, so I will put myself to death, and there will be an end of it all. No, said Paul, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here." It is slaves that run away, we are not slaves, we are freemen. We are all here. Do you think we would run away from such a poor moth as you are? Do you think we are going to run away from such a poor thing as you are? We are all here. Well, I wonder at that too; you must be honest men. Oh then, sirs, what must I do to be saved? No occasion to make a noise about it; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house," Bring a basin, bring some cold water, let us wash their stripes, give

them something to eat and drink. Bless the Lord! we have found salvation. And they were baptized there and then.

Again: is Paul on a voyage, and must the ship come to where two seas meet, and must the stern of the ship be broken to pieces, and must every one seek a way of escape? Who is to foresee this? The Lord and Paul had a midnight meeting; and so, Paul in the morning said they ought not to have been loosed from Crete. You have done wrong, but still it shall be righted. That though they had done wrong, things were made right. They loosed from Crete because the haven was not commodious to winter in. So, it is with us sometimes, we loose from our haven, and away we go we do not know where. He said, There is hope; for the angel of the Lord, whose I am, and whom I serve, stood by me this night, we had a midnight meeting, and he told me that the ship shall certainly be destroyed, but not a hair of your heads shall perish. He has given me all that sail with me. And now then, he said, take some food for your health. And he there stood, man of God like, and thanked the Lord for the food, consecrating it, as it were, by solemn prayer to God. Everything turned out just as he said it would. Then again: Ah, said one, there is one midnight meeting I know of in the Bible that turned out very unfavorably. We shall not have such an accident as that tonight, because we have closed the galleries, lest any of you should go to sleep and fall out of them. Well, Eutychus went up into the gallery, went to sleep, "fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." Ah, that is the result of meeting at midnight; I wish he had gone somewhere else preaching. For the apostle Paul preached till midnight, and after that he talked till daylight, and that seemed to make it worse still. Paul went down, the Holy Spirit went with him, he said, "Trouble not yourselves, for his life is in him." By the power of the Holy Spirit the young man was lifted up, and his bones were not broken, he was not hurt; whatever hurt there was, all vanished. And the apostle said, Here is the young man, look at him; he fell down, but the Lord picked him up, and here he is. This is a declaration of the presence and the power of the blessed God.

Thus, then the word "night" clearly suggests these two things: first, the sufferings of Jesus Christ, by which we have life, everlasting life; and secondly, that the Lord is with his people, not only in literal midnight, but also in midnight troubles, taking the word of course figuratively. And have not some of us so found it? When our troubles have been overwhelming, and we have been despairing, a ray of light has come, deliverance has come in a way we never thought. So, then all shows that the Lord, as we have said, neither slumbers nor sleeps.

But secondly, I notice *that night which we are, if taught of the Lord, seeking to escape*. There is the night of hell; for while there is no night in heaven, there is no day in hell. We are to escape this night, then, as I have already anticipated, by Jesus Christ. I have often thought upon this subject of seeking the Lord of that beautiful scripture in Amos: "Seek him that makes the seven stars and Orion, and turns the shadow of death into the morning, and makes the day dark with the night; that calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the face of the earth." These two constellations are spoken of in the Bible evidently as having a spiritual meaning; and I think the seven stars, or the Pleiades, as they are called in Job, stand as a figure of that completeness of the gospel ministry that should be, especially by the prophets and apostles; and that Orion stands as a figure of their testimony against them that believed not. "Can you bind the sweet influences of Pleiades?" No; the sweet influences of the gospel, the completeness of the gospel ministry, shall

minister life, and light, and liberty to the souls of men. They are indeed sweet influences; and many of you know some-thing of the sweetness of the gospel. "Can you lose the bands of Orion?" See the testimony of the apostles: "He that believes not shall be damned." Ah, it is an awful thing to be tied by those bands. To be loosed, then, from this unbelief, from this ignorance, from this darkness, and to be brought into the liberty of God's salvation, is indeed a mercy of mercies. Now "seek him that makes the seven stars;" God made the stars, and God made the apostles what they were, and he alone can make Christians, and he alone can make ministers. Men do make ministers, it is true; but they are no use when they are made to the Lord's people; they shall not profit his people. They are received in the world; if anyone come in his own name he will be received; but they are no use to the Lord's people. Now it is said that the Lord "turns the shadow of death into the morning;" that is, by Jesus Christ. Just as he shines upon you in what he has done, the shadow of death passes away. He is the morning light, a morning without clouds. And not only does he turn the shadow of death into the morning, but he "makes the day dark with night." Those of you that know not the Lord, see what a dark night your nature's day will turn into; see what a dark night your mortal life will turn into; see what a dark night your dreadful destiny will turn into. Ah! a little more sleep, a little more slumber as regards your soul, a little more folding of the hands, and saying. I care nothing for religion, and your poverty shall come as one that travels, your want as an armed man, and you will lift up your eyes in hell, like one of whom you read. Oh, may this not be the unhappy lot of any one of you! May God give you a spirit of grace and of supplication, and may you be convinced that all the light, and pleasure, and comfort you now have must be turned into darkness; but if brought to receive Jesus Christ, then you have something to put in the place thereof.

Now I had intended, but time does not permit, to say a word or two upon the old and the new year. But if I had, I should have fallen into my usual way of handling things. I should have spoken of the old year as a kind of figure of the old covenant of God, and of the new year as a kind of figure of the covenant to come. And when we come to new things, see what a wide range we have there.

The Christian is a new man, he is brought into a new and living way, he inhabits a new heaven and a new earth, he sings a new song; old things have passed away, all things have become new.

Lastly, then, I notice that *there is a region where there is no night*, "There shall be no night there;" that is, in heaven. What a number of things are implied in this! There is implied in this the wonderful strength that the saints will have in the future state, to need no sleep, and never to be weary, and never to cease their lofty songs, their hallowed joys. Ah! what a scene! We cannot in our present state understand this. We all know in our present weak and mortal state that the vicissitudes of day and night are exactly suited to us. And yet there, when our bodies shall be raised like unto his glorious body, then will our strength in body, strength in soul, and in every sense, accord with the dignity and glory of that scene of things. So that they shall sigh no more, die no more, cry no more, but shall reign forever and forever.

What, then, is religion, after all, but being brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of the everlasting gospel of God? according to the language of Peter when he says, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the

praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” May the Lord increase our interest in these dear eternal things, for his name’s sake.

I will not speak too long. It wants now (I think our clock is about right) scarcely five minutes to twelve, so that I will now stay; and our friends perhaps will be silent until the clock has struck. We may reckon the clock when it does strike as the knell of the departing year, and as the signal of the birth of a new year, which may the Lord make a blessing to us and to others as well. Amen.

(Shortly after the Clock had struck Twelve.)

The old year is past, and we have now entered upon the new. We will just quote a few words from the Holy Scriptures, and then sing a verse or two. And is it not natural in entering upon a new year, can we not repeat the language of the 67th Psalm? “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us,” that in this new year his way may be known upon the earth, and his saving health more extended among the nations, and that the people may thus praise him, yea, that all the people may be brought to praise him; and that he will still judge his people by his righteousness, and still govern them, and that he, even our own God, shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him. Is not this our prayer, that we may thus go on by his mercy, and so the gospel be extended? I have often said that the very first principle of our religion is good-will to man. May the Lord this new year bless thousands and thousands of souls with a knowledge, a saving knowledge, of his dear name, and be with all his ministers and all his people everywhere in every means scripturally to extend the knowledge of his truth and pluck immortal souls as brands from the everlasting burnings.

We will, with your kind permission, sing two verses of the following hymn: it will take us only three or four minutes, the 225th Hymn

“Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come;
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.”

“Under the shadow of your throne
Your saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is your arm alone,
And our defense is sure.”