

# STRAYED SHEEP RESTORED

## A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.” Psalm 23:3

WHEN the Lord begins a work of grace in the heart, such a one feels that he has a great deal of business to attend to pertaining to himself and his own eternal welfare. Hence it is he is called home thus to himself. So, we read of the prodigal, that when he came to himself, and found out what and where self was, he then longed to get away from what and where he was. And so, Saul of Tarsus; he, before he was called by grace, thought every one of his fellow-creatures to be a dreadful sinner, and he thought everyone was wretched and guilty to the last degree, especially that sect of the Nazarenes everywhere spoken against. But when the Lord took him in hand he changed all that; and so great was the change that now, instead of thinking every one of his fellow-creatures was worse, a great deal worse than he was, he began to think himself worse than anyone else, for he now said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” And so, David here in this psalm is very beautifully busy concerning himself and his own welfare. And Christians always do the better when each thus keeps with all diligence his own heart, keeps diligent watch over his own soul; because when this is the case, and Christians come together, then they have something to speak about in relation to their personal experiences and exercises that will do each other good. So, David mentions himself, as you see, twice in our text, “He restores *my* soul: he leads *me* in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.” And though David lived in Israel, as we live in the professed Christian world, yet notwithstanding that he felt his need of the Lord himself to interpose for him; and however others treated him, and however he was tried, as we all are, with our fallen nature, Satan, and the world, yet he knew there was a sufficiency in the God of his salvation, and so could say, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want;” and amidst other things he brings in the sweet testimony contained in our text, “He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”

Here are then three things presented to us. First, *the restoration*, “He restoreth my soul.” Secondly, *the divine guidance*, “He leads me in the paths of righteousness.” Thirdly, *the reason*, “For his name's sake.”

I notice, then, first, *the restoration*. I will take a fourfold view of this restoration: that he restores the souls of his people first, essentially; second, renewingly; third, circumstantially; and fourth, finally. First, that he restoreth their souls essentially. By the fall in Adam we have all gone astray like lost sheep, we have turned everyone to his own way, and there is none righteous, no, not one; and yet without a restoration from this condition we must be eternally lost. Look for a moment at the way presented there in which this restoration is brought about. The very next words, as you are aware, to those I have quoted in the 53rd of Isaiah are that “he has laid on him the iniquities of us all.” A knowledge of this, that Jesus Christ is the sin-bearer; a belief in this, an understanding of this, and an abiding by this, will (for the vision is for an appointed time) by-and-by bring those of you that are seeking into peace with God, and then that stated by the apostle Peter to those who were thus brought to God by the substitute, Christ Jesus, the sin-bearer, Christ Jesus, who has put sin away by the sacrifice of himself, will be true of you, “You were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” The word “bishop” is made up of two Greek words, and signifies “an overseer.” And we have another beautiful representation of this in the last chapter of Hosea; “O Israel, return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity.” That literally refers to the apostasy of the Israelites, but mystically and properly, as applied to the Gentile world, means our great apostasy from God in the first Adam. There is our fatal apostasy from God. Now, said the prophet, “Return unto the Lord your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity. Take with you, words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity.” That was the request which they were taught to make hundreds of years before the coming of Christ. And you will see how beautifully this request accords with the work of Christ; for whatever prayers do not accord with the work of Christ will never be heard, will never be answered, will never be substantiated. Hence it is, then, that there have been a people, and will be a people, that when they shall cry to God, he will laugh at their calamity, and will mock when their fear comes, because they do not cry to him by faith in his dear Son. Now, then, “take with you, words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity.” The delightful time did arrive when the dear Savior appeared, and he did take away all the iniquity of his sheep, all the iniquity of his people. The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s dear Son, cleanses from all sin. David understood this, though he lived 900 years before its mediatorial accomplishment; and he said, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: who forgives *all* your iniquities, and heals *all* your diseases.” You will thus see, then, that this restoration to God is by the great Sin-bearer; and in this restoration to God there must be a renunciation of all other confidences. Hence it is there the people are led to say what is the language of the Israelites returning from apostasy, but applied to spiritual things we must take it in the spiritual and proper sense: “Asshur shall not save us,” that is, no earthly power shall save us; that is, we will hope in no earthly power, because no human, no earthly power can save us; salvation is of the Lord, and the very faith by which we receive and believe in Jesus Christ is the gift of God. “We will not ride upon horses”, the same idea; that is, we will not put confidence for the salvation of our souls in anything but the Lord himself, “neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods;” for we are poor orphans; we are poor cast-out creatures; we are spiritually as the infant you read of in the 16th of Ezekiel, cast into the open field; and so we are thus represented as orphans; and the Savior said, “I will not leave you comfortless“ I will not leave you orphans.” I found you in an orphan state; I found you forlorn, but I will not leave you so. Therefore, it is here said, “For in you the fatherless finds mercy.” Here, then, being thus brought to God by the great Sin-bearer, and by solemn prayer to God, there is a renunciation of all confidence in the flesh. Hence the Lord said, “I will heal their backsliding;” better rendered, as the Latin gives it “I will heal their aversion.” They were averse to me, but now I will put a stop to that,

and they shall be of one mind with me, Reconciled to God by the death of his dear Son. "I will love them freely." These, are the persons that he does love with an everlasting love. The words belong unto such, "I have loved you with an everlasting love;" "He restoreth my soul." Now, then, it is said that "Jesus Christ died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to", whom? Look at the greatness of that scripture, "to bring us to God," and God is to be our all and in all. Oh, ask the Christian. Above all objects to which you would go, which has the preference? Above all dignity to which you aspire, which stands first with you? Above all favor and above all advantages, which is that that you would most desire? I know what the Christian's answer would be, and the answer would be honest, the answer would be sincere. His answer would be with David, When the Lord shall send out his light and his truth into my soul, "then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy." While many are saying, "Who will show us any good? Lord, lift you up the light or your countenance upon us," and that shall put gladness into our hearts more than in the time when their corn and their wine shall increase. Oh, to be thus brought to the Lord, it cost the Redeemer his precious life; it was at the expense of infinite mercy, of almighty power, of the condescension of the eternal Spirit thus to quicken us, and of the infinite condescension of God our Father to look upon such poor creatures as we are, to remember us in our low state, and to reveal to us that mercy that we shall need for ever, and to our comfort that same mercy endures forever. Nothing short of this is real religion. If we are thus taught and thus led to receive Jesus Christ as a Savior, as a Mediator, as a Surety, as our life, as our sanctification, in a word, as our all and in all, if we are thus brought to God, and understand this matter, then we are united to him to be severed from him no more. This, then, is one thing, I think, fairly meant, being thus restored from our apostasy and fall in the first Adam.

Second, the restoration also means renewing. I do not know anything that the Christian feels his need of more than the renewing of the Holy Ghost. When you are swallowed up in the world, and your worldly cares seem to set on your mind as though there was nothing else worth caring about; though worldly cares, at the worst, cannot last very long: or, on the other hand, when Satan will try and tempt you with the anticipation of a worldly paradise, that you shall someday retire amidst riches and ease and pleasure, all this is of Satan. Now when the Lord is pleased to make the soul feel a bitterness under such a state, to make it feel that it is in captivity to that from which it would gladly be free, in come the words, "Be not conformed to this world," for the friendship of the world is enmity against the welfare of your soul: "but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Ah, dear covenant God! one of your children feels his bondage, and you hear him crying out unto you, "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise your name;" and you hear another groaning, and saying, "I am shut up, and cannot come forth into the house of the Lord;" and hear another complaining and saying, "Oh that it were with me as in days past!" Dear covenant God, you have nothing towards such but good-will, only goodwill. "That you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." If Satan could persuade us that the Lord, in some of his dealings with us, trying, of course, as many of them are, and he means them to be so, has an ill-will towards us, or else he would not so deal with us, then down goes our faith, up comes our unbelief; we begin to envy the ungodly, and wish now we had made no profession at all, and are ready to say, with Jeremiah, "I will not make mention of the Lord anymore." But when the Lord reappears, and gives us that measure of grace according to our need, the grace that Job had when he believed that the Lord had no ill-will towards him when he suffered Satan to make the havoc he did make upon him, and therefore Job blessed the Lord, because he knew that the Lord had blessed him, and that he

did and would bless him, when the Lord thus reappears our faith revives. How solemnly important, then, are these renewings! Mysterious, I am aware, are the ways in which the Lord does renew. You recollect how Habakkuk speaks of the Israelites going into captivity. He saw they should be expatriated, and should spend a long time in a foreign land, and he prayed that the Lord would revive his work in the midst of these years of captivity, that he would make known and that he would remember mercy in the midst of these days of wrath. And so, he did. Presently out comes a decree that Daniel and his fellow, shall I say collegians? for they were at the Babylonish college, not to learn religion, but to be instructed for political purposes, should be slain. That is the way the Lord revived them, and that was enough to wake them up, I think; that was enough to alarm them. So, it did alarm them, and Daniel and his companions were revived. This is very solemn. Why, this Nebuchadnezzar hardly ever alters his decree. If he only moves his finger in a certain way, it means "Take that man's head off," and if you look round you will see that the head is off. For you must understand that the executioner in those countries was almost equal in dignity with the prime minister, and was with the king to cut off any woman's or any man's head in one moment. And therefore, Daniel felt he stood on very dangerous ground. But he also knew that the Lord God of Israel had promised to be a little sanctuary to them in Babylon. They had a prayer meeting, as you know, and the 2nd chapter of Daniel shows the answer to the prayer of Habakkuk that the Lord did make known. What a revelation he granted to Daniel and his fellows! How must Nebuchadnezzar have stood astounded when Daniel went on in detail from part to part, and presented to him the successive empires, and in contrast to these temporary empires set forth the eternal empire of the Son of man, the stone that should be a substitute for everything! No wonder the king should be overwhelmed; this was the way the Lord revived his work. So now, perhaps, some evil tidings, some loss, some affliction alarms, stirs you up; you run to God, you fly to God, and you pray out of this affliction as Jonah did out of the whale's belly, and so the work is revived; you cry as Daniel and his fellows did, and become strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. The fiery furnace also. I know some of you old Christians are half afraid here. You have had so many fiery furnaces, and have been in Jonah's hell, not literally, but figuratively, so many times that you say to yourselves, If the Lord revive the work it will be by some painful means. Well, it will be, perhaps; but when you get to the end of it, and you are enabled to put the pain into one scale and the profit into the other, you will say, I would not have been without this affliction or that trouble for all the world. I will venture to say if we could have seen Job after his captivity was turned he would have so spoken, and he would have said, Painful as it was, the profit infinitely outweighs the pain, for it shall yield fruits of righteousness at the last to them that are exercised thereby. Daniel had no desire to go into the lion's den, yet that revived the work. Daniel had become a great man in Babylon, and it is hardly safe for a Christian to be a great man; it is always best to be a little one, always dangerous to be a great man. And therefore, the Lord was determined that Daniel's Babylonish greatness should be so dealt with that while it should not in one sense be lessened, he should nevertheless be reminded of the uncertainty of it. Here he is to-day a prince in Babylon, the greatest man, except the king, in all the Babylonian empire. Here he is in the evening in the lions' den. an outcast. And of course, the superstitious people would say, Heaven and earth are against that man; he is doubly and trebly cursed, or else he would not be in the lions' den. Yet that was the way the Lord revived his work. The Lord watched over him, and would not let the king sleep that night, and would not let the lions hurt Daniel, and so he brought Daniel out of the den. Here was the display of his power! So, then, Daniel and all the people of God may well say, "He restores my soul." Bless his dear and holy name! there is no danger, there is no difficulty into

which his people can get, out of which they shall not be brought; for “the Lord hears the cry of the humble, and delivers them out of all their troubles.”

Third, he restoreth circumstantially. This is the most difficult of the four parts of this division of my subject. I rather tried to get away from the words of our text, and have another; but the words would stop with me, and as they would stop with me, I could not send them away, and they would not send me away. Therefore, I will here make a few remarks upon circumstantial restoration; a doctrine and practice I am inclined to think rather neglected in the day in which we live. In the 34th of Ezekiel the shepherds are found fault with for not healing that which was sick, for not strengthening that which was diseased, for not binding up that which was broken, and for not bringing again that which was driven away. I refer now to cases of discipline. Let us look at the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures upon this. Let us see if there is any scriptural authority, sanction, or rule, according to which we are to show the least mercy to persons who have been dealt with by the discipline of the church. Let us look at the word of the Lord upon this subject. I shall not say much about the practical part, but just a word upon the doctrine of it. Now it does appear to me that if there be a cessation of that for which a member is suspended or severed, and if that member be brought into a right spirit, under such circumstances it is my opinion that a day ought not to be lost in restoring such a one to what he was before. That is my opinion upon that subject. Now I come to Noah. He was overtaken with wine. And the Lord forbid I should say a word to sanction the wretched, degrading, and, destructive vice of drunkenness or any other sin; but we are all poor creatures. Now Noah was overtaken with wine. One of his sons was ungodly, was glad to see it, made sport of it: the other two were godly; they were for covering his shame, they were for hiding his fault. Now how did the Lord deal with Noah? No sooner did he wake up with a sobriety of mind than the eternal Spirit set in upon Noah’s mind, he pronounced a curse upon Ham’s posterity; under that curse they are to this day; he pronounced a blessing upon Shem, the representative of the Jews, and upon Japheth, the representative especially of the Saxon race, and upon that race the blessing remains unto this day. “God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem.” The tents of Shem, I think, there mean the Jewish dispensation; the kingdom of heaven is taken from them and given to the Gentiles. There is circumstantial restoration, I will pass by David, that speaks for itself, and come to other scriptures. Let us hear the word of the Lord; and the best of you, if you are in your right minds, will be thankful that there are such scriptures as the following in the Bible. “Hatred stirs up strife” no question about that: “but love”, so you see how differently people will act where they hate and where they love, “but love covers all sins.” In the 54th of Isaiah the Lord speaks thus upon this subject: “For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies”, as there are great sins you need great mercies, “with great mercies will I gather you.” Peter speaks of it thus: “The end of all things is at hand,” which is true in all ages; the end of all things was at hand with them, and the end of all things is at hand with us; a little while longer, and we ourselves must do as our brethren and sisters, several of them, have recently done, crossed the Jordan. So “the end of all things is at hand: be you therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things”, above all, do not forget that, “have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” And James, my namesake, and I am thankful I am honored with an apostolic name, James said, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that the one which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” Such is the doctrine of circumstantial restoration; and yet we read of one who professed to have been forgiven *ten thousand talents*, and could not forgive his poor brother *a hundred pence*. And I think we live in a day when the world is studied

rather too much. So, then, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." "He that has showed no mercy shall have judgment without mercy; and mercy rejoices against judgment." If David wrote this psalm after his fall, he could indeed lay great emphasis upon this part, "He restores my soul." I have thus just thrown out the doctrine, and, as I have said before, there is so much of a worldly spirit in our day in the church. There is so much of, What will Mr. A. say, or Mr. B., or Mr. C.? It is true they do not make a profession, but what will they say? We have nothing at all to do with what they say; we have to do with what the word of the Lord says, and if we believe that the people we are dealing with are children of God, that ought to bring them with us as much under that scripture as any others of the children of God, that "he that touches them," unkindly or improperly, "touches the apple of Jehovah's eye."

Then, lastly, upon this part, he also restores us finally. Bless the Lord! there is a final restoration. "I will hide my face from them no more." "You shall be like a watered garden." "You shall not sorrow any more at all." "The Lord shall be unto you your everlasting light, your God your glory, and the days of your mourning shall be ended." The last enemy is in sight, he is within the range of vision, and we see that he is now like Samson's lion, has lost his roaring power. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. God will not leave a single tear to trickle down the cheek of any one of his dear children, for they are dear to him, though they only see his love partially yet. Children may think their parents have not much love to them because they deal with them rather sharply in certain things; but afterwards, when they grow up to maturity, they will see it was done not in wrath, but in love. And so the people of God, when they get home to glory, and see the end the Lord had in view in all his dealings with them, if such a thing could be that they could take their hymn-books to heaven, they would sing,

"I know"

now I know; I did not always know or think it on earth,

"I know in all that me befell,  
My Jesus has done all things well."

"He restores my soul." So, then, if we have not a Christian friend on earth to sympathize with us, if our mother's children are angry with us, and look upon us where we are black, without looking upon us where we are fair, nevertheless, there is God left, Christ left, the Holy Spirit left, the kingdom of heaven left, the promises of God left. The Lord has said, "I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." What a religion is ours! It conquers everything, going on from strength to strength, mercy to mercy, blessing to blessing. The word of the Lord is not bound; it must go on, bear down everything before it, for the Scriptures cannot be broken.

Secondly, *the divine guidance*, "He leadeth me in paths of righteousness." Here is still the pastoral idea kept up. When he leads forth his own sheep he goes before them, and the sheep know his voice, and they follow him. And if the sheep be not led into green pastures, if the sheep be not led beside still waters, if the sheep be not led into the right premises, and the sheep could speak, it would say, This is not the path of righteousness; this is not the right way; here is no pasture, here are no still waters; these are not the premises of my Father. Why, here is a mysterious shepherd; he has got hold of me, and is taking me down to Egypt; he is taking me to the barren mountains of

Sinai; he is taking me not into the place where heavenly pasture grows, but where there is nothing but wrath and fiery indignation. The right path is the path that, leads to the high mountains of Israel, where the pasture, shall be found. Now if there be in existence paths of righteousness such as poor fallen man could walk in, then God himself must have made some new paths somewhere; for by the fall of man every path of righteousness with God was closed. "By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified." Where, then, are these new paths? God has made some new paths somewhere; we know where to find them. If we get the main path, that will lead us into all the other paths. The main path is Christ Jesus. He says, "I am the way;" and "as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him." He leads you to himself. He gathers the lambs in his arms, and then by him you walk in the path of God's love, that is right; you walk in the path of electing grace, that is right; you walk in the path of mediatorial righteousness, that is right; you walk in the path of sacrificial perfection, that is right; you walk in the path of yea and amen promises, that is right; and in the way of his precepts, that is right. Your walk is by faith. These, then, are the paths of righteousness. God never leads into the paths of unrighteousness. The people of God willingly attribute all their sins to themselves; they know where the blame lies, and the Lord brings them to know where the mercy and salvation lie. These paths of righteousness, then, are gospel paths; we walk in them by faith; and they are right, because they not only accord with all the perfections of his nature, but illustrate the same, carry out his everlasting love, 31st of Jeremiah: "I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way" and that is by Jesus Christ, who has made everything straight, "wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." He leads me into these paths of righteousness. And I must not stop here to notice, the advantages they give us. God's Christ, and his truth, and his precepts, and his ordinances, and his wise appointments, these are lofty privileges. No one has ever walked in these ways that has not been able to set to his seal to God's word, that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is every one that retains her."

But lastly, *the reason*, "for his name's sake." Now I think there are four things meant here in this last clause. First, that he might make good his name. He has a certain name, and that name has two sides to it, a gospel side and a law side. Our text refers to the gospel side of that name. And as he has appeared in a certain name, and proclaimed that name, he does thus lead his people in order to substantiate his faithfulness. What is his name? 34th of Exodus: "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful", are you prepared to say he is not merciful? "and gracious" can you say that he is otherwise than gracious? "long suffering", are there no proofs of this? "and abundant in goodness and truth" can you not bear testimony of this? "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." That is his name, and therefore, for the sake of making that name good, he thus deals with us, because he there publicly declares his name, But it says also, "And that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Now the last verse of the 3rd chapter of John, and the 16th verse of the last chapter of Mark, explain what is meant by those two sides of his name. 3rd of John: "He that believes on the Son", that is it, you see, "has everlasting life." To that man God is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. "And he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him." He does not receive the remedy by which forgiveness comes. He lives in himself, and dies in himself, and can never be cleared if he dies in that state. Then the 16th verse of the last chapter of Mark: "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Unto such, then, the Lord is merciful, gracious,

longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving their iniquity, their transgression, and sin. “But he that believes not shall be judged;” our version says, “shall be damned;” I think the word “judged” would have been rather more expressive of the original than the word “damned.” I think the word “damned” there, though it conveys an awful truth, yet does not convey it in that form that is so instructive as if we had the word “judged.” Now you try to catch the idea, because if you get a thing into your memory, and yet do not understand it, it cannot profit you. The idea is this, that he that believes is saved, and shall be judged by what he is in his faith in Christ, by what he is in Christ; and that will be the judgment of justification. He that believes not shall be judged by what he is in himself, that is, a sinner; he shall be judged by what he has been in his works, that is, a sinner. And therefore, the judgment which cannot go against the one must go against the other. Thus, then, the two sides of the name signify the two characters, he that believes, and he that believes not. Thus, no means can clear him that believes not, and no means can condemn him who does believe. Secondly, “for his name’s sake” means also to show that he is just; because God’s name is in Jesus Christ, and by him God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. Thus, he keeps up the mercifulness and justice, or righteousness, of his name. Third, it means in contrast to all human worth, or merit, or desert. There is Saul of Tarsus. If I have mercy upon that man, on what ground can it be? Can it be on the ground of anything in him? Why, his religion is the worst part of his sin; I say Saul’s religion was the worst part of his sin, because his religion led him to persecute the Savior, and to injure all he could the cause of the living God. Now, then, here is the Lord’s own name. My name is merciful, and by that sinner I will carry it out. My name is just as well, and so by Jesus Christ justice is vindicated, the law is magnified.

“God is merciful, ’tis true,  
And he is just and holy too.”

Lastly, “for his name’s sake” means that he holds his good name in esteem. There is nothing would grieve the Lord so much as for his name to go down among his people. He likes to have a good name among his people. See the 63rd of Isaiah: “He led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name.” That points ultimately to Christ, that Christ has wrought eternal salvation, by which the goodness of his name shall forever be kept up. Then, again, “That led them through the deep, as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble. As a beast goes down into the valley: The Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest; so, did you lead your people, to make yourself a glorious name.” First, an everlasting name, and then a glorious name. I must have my name kept up among my people. If my name goes down, they will go down. So, if we hear anyone say anything, bring in any doctrine that would be derogatory to the name of our covenant God, we hate and despise that doctrine. The Lord must always have a good name among his people. And yet, wonder, O heavens, and be astonished, O earth! see how the dear Redeemer submitted himself to reproach!