

THE CHRISTMAN MORNING SERMON

A SERMON

Preached on Tuesday Morning, Christmas Day, 1866

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the New Surrey Tabernacle, Wansey Street

Volume 8 Number 423

“The coming of the Just One.” Acts 7:52

THERE is no relation that I am aware of in which the Savior appears in the New Testament that he was not pointed out in the Old Testament. And we must not suppose that the Old Testament saints were unacquainted with the person and with the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, or that they were unacquainted with the covenant to which he belonged. The Old Testament saints were led definitely into God's plan of salvation. If we had no other proof of this, we see it in the 11th of the Hebrews. Does the apostle Paul make any difference? He shows that it is all of faith, that it might be by grace, from first to last. It is true, the apostle does in that 11th of the Hebrews make one difference between Old Testament saints and New Testament saints, but he makes only one difference, and that difference is in reality no difference at all; for the difference he makes is this he says, “God having provided some better thing for us, that, they without us should not be made perfect.” Some have taken this to mean numerical perfection; but that is not the meaning there, because if that were the meaning, it would be as true that we could not be perfect without them, any more than they be perfect without us, if he there alluded to numerical perfection. But the apostle alludes there to that perfection that is found nowhere but in the completeness of the Savior's work. Now, then, the same Jesus Christ in whom, we believe they also believed in, only with this difference, they had only the promise, that was all they had; they had God with them in that, promise; but we have the actual performance. And so, the apostles came in their testimony, and carried with them the perfection of the work of Christ. The Old Testament saints could not be perfect without that perfect righteousness that we see is wrought out and brought in; the Old Testament saints could not be perfect without that one offering which we see was made, achieved, and brought in. That is the sense in which I understand the apostle there. Now if this be right, do you not see from this one thing what a sweet unity must prevail ultimately in the whole universal church of the blessed God? that everyone derives his perfection from the work of Christ, that every one's acceptance with God is by the coming and doing of this Just One. But then perhaps, you might say, What does the apostle mean then when he says, “God having provided some better thing for us.”? Why, for this reason, that the work of Christ is better accomplished than not accomplished. You recollect what the wise man said upon this subject: “Better is the end of a thing” that is, if it be a good thing; it depends upon what it is, “than the beginning.” Because we cannot say that better is the end of the life of an ungodly man than the beginning; the beginning of

his life is bad, and his life is bad altogether, but the end is worse still. Now, then, better is the ending than the beginning. So Jesus Christ; he had his sorrows, or our sorrows rather, before him; now they are behind him, he had our sins upon him, now they are gone, he had the curse to meet; he has met it, and it is gone, he had the mighty race to run to obtain the prize; he has run the race, the work is ended, he had the mighty victory to achieve, he has achieved the victory, it is done. This is the reason the Savior said that the least apostle is greater than John the Baptist. The Old Testament prophets could say it should be done; John could speak in the current tense, and say, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world;" but the apostles could speak on higher ground than this, they could speak in the past tense, taking up the echo of the Savior's words, "It is finished;" it is done. So, the least apostle was greater than John the Baptist, because they could all say what John the Baptist could not say, that Christ has died, that Christ has risen from the dead.

Many persons have supposed that in ancient times everybody desired the coming of this Messiah. That sentiment is taken up, and echoed from place to place; but I never yet could see the truth of it. Well, but is he not said to be "the desire of all nations"? Well, I will clear that up before I enter upon the subject. Hence it is that some have supposed that the Hebrew women being anxious to be mothers was in order that they might prove to be the mother of the Messiah. But that is a false notion. Every one that understands the constitution of ancient society well knows that a woman never acquired a dignified standing in society until she became a mother. And thus, it was the character of a mother being so exalted, that the sons were so attached to their mother, and took very great care of her, and had a very great affection for her; and it would be as well, and better too, if the same feeling prevailed more generally now. Hence David took the circumstance to illustrate his mourning after the Lord, "I bowed down heavily, as one that mourns for his mother." And hence it is that a great king like Solomon commanded a seat for his mother to sit down in the royal presence, which was considered a very great favor. It was for this reason, therefore, that the Hebrew women desired to be mothers; while unhappily they were not so spiritually minded as to desire this, and that, and the other, for the sake of the Messiah. Now when he is said to be "the desire of all nations," people quote that, but leave out the preceding clause, in which the Lord says, "I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come." The dry bones will never desire spiritual life till God shakes them. When God convinces a sinner of his state, that man begins to tremble at his own sins, at his own state, and at the wrath which he sees is treasured up for him; that he has been treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Now you are shaken out of your false confidences; now you begin to tremble; now the dear Savior becomes the object of your desire. Just in proportion, then, as men in different nations are thus convinced, thus made to tremble at God's word, and shaken out of their false confidences, just in proportion as they are thus dealt with, they desire the Messiah. In that sense, then, he is the desire of all nations; but it has never been proved that he has been in any other sense the desire of all nations. You all know that when the dear Savior came, so far from the people receiving him, they rather seemed to say, Who wanted you? who desired you? who asked for you? who sought for you? So far from his being the object of desire, he was despised and rejected of men; and so, he is to this day by the carnal mind. If, therefore, we are made to desire him, let us acknowledge that we are indebted to the grace of God for the existence of that desire; and if that desire be real, we shall never stop, we shall never rest, until the desire be granted. And when this desire comes, it will indeed be a tree of divine, of peaceful, of plentiful, of heavenly, of paradisiacal, of holy life, of happy and of everlasting life.

Our text, I think, fairly sets three things before us. First, *the relations in which the Savior came*. Secondly, *the note of distinction given in our text*, “the Just One.” Thirdly, *the ultimate end to be answered*, as indicated in this note of distinction.

I notice, then, first, *the relations in which the Savior came*. “He went about doing good.” And those of you that know the Lord, you can realize the blessedness of the gospel, that the Lord God sent Jesus Christ to meet us in all our guilt, and sin, and maladies, let them be whatever they may; and all he wants is (and that is his own gift) faith to believe, a sight and sense of our need of it. He never did turn one such away, and he never will. Here you will learn the greatness of the love of God in sending a remedy for every woe. What a wondrous remedy is the dear Savior, not only to the soul, but also to the body! Must your body die? Must it return to its native dust? Must it slumber in the ground? Will Jesus be ultimately a remedy for this? Yes; he by his incorruption, by his immortality, by his power, shall overcome it all; and our now poor dying bodies shall rise incorruptible, immortal, mighty as his is mighty, heavenly as his is heavenly, to die no more. And just as he will deal with the body, so he does previously deal with the soul; for the one is made a kind of figure of the other. Now, I say, the more we, thus see Jesus Christ in his remedial character, the more we shall see the love of God; and the more we see of the love of God, the more we shall desire to retire from the noise of controversy, I mean useless controversy, the more we shall desire to retire from the empty gossiping’s and talking’s of thousands of professors, and the more we shall wish to live under the constraining power of the love of God, of the preciousness of Christ, of the liberality of the gospel, and the sweet teachings of the Holy Spirit. And while it is good for Christians to assemble and to speak of these things, it is also good for you when you are favored to meditate upon these things in relation to yourself, and say to yourself, There was a time when I did not see the infinite importance of this acquaintance with Jesus Christ; when I did not see the love of God as I see it now; when I did not see the plentifulness of God’s mercy, and the liberality of the gospel, as I do now. Now I see that pardon must be by the blood of Christ, and that alone; now I see that acceptance with God must be by his righteousness, and that alone; now I see that whatever compassion the Lord has on me, whatever mercy he show’s me, it must be entirely by his dear Son. Henceforth I will go in the strength of the Lord, and will make mention of his righteousness, even of his only. And when you read in the Bible of bad characters, the worst characters that the Bible describes, and at the same time declares that such shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven, and that such shall be damned, Ah, you think to yourself, I am all this, all this by nature. I am under this threatening, and as a sinner considered I cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven, I shall never go to heaven. But turn away from what I am in myself, which brings me under this threatening, and look at what I am in Christ; there I am just the reverse; there, there is no condemnation, there, there is no spot, there, there is no wrinkle, there, there is no fault. Ah, how often does the Christian, knowing the bubbling’s up, knowing the besetments, knowing his ten thousand infidelities, how often does the Christian say to himself, Well, I am just that wretch, and therefore there is no hope for me! No, there would not if your hope were in your own doings; there would not if your hope were in your own righteousness, or in your own worth. But when you look at the atonement of Jesus, it is more than you dare to do to despair; it is more than you dare to say that it cannot save you. When you look at his righteousness, it is more than you dare to say that it cannot exempt and justify you; and when you look at that reconciliation you will say, Well, with all I am, I do see my need of Christ, and I am reconciled to God by Jesus Christ; I do feel a love to God as he appears in and by Jesus Christ where there is nothing against us. For you cannot love that that is against you. You may fear and dread the Almighty, but you cannot love him all

the time you view him where he has something against you. But if you can view him by Christ Jesus where he puts everything away that is against you, and puts things into such order as to make everything to be on your side, there it is you can love Him.

The Savior, then, came full of grace, mark that; and because of his mediatorial work putting away sin and meeting all the demands of justice, God being thereby just as well as merciful, because of this he is said to be full of mercy, of grace, and of truth. That is the way the Savior came. And yet we live in a day when those that preach out these truths the most clearly, the most liberally, the most scripturally, and the most spiritually, are ridiculed and despised, called extravagant, dangerous characters, by those very persons that need the things they despise as much as any persons can do. I have no doubt if what the apostle says of Christ in one place had been said by an uninspired man now, if I had said it, for instance, oh dear, dear! it would have been ten thousand times worse than it is now. Talk of what I said of Rahab! Why, that would be mild in comparison of what the apostle said of Christ. If I had said it, what constructions would have been put upon it! though my meaning might have been as pure and as consistent as that of the apostle. If I had used such a phrase, if I had said what he has said, why, I should be deemed the greatest blasphemer under the sun, and they would have construed my words to mean just the reverse of what I meant. And what is it the apostle said, then? Why, he said that Jesus Christ "was made sin." Ah, they would have said, there's a pretty fellow for you. What do you think that minister said? Now do not you think Jesus Christ was holy? Yes. Do not you believe he was free from sin? Yes. Do not you believe he was incapable of sin? Yes. Well, if I didn't hear that high doctrine man say that Jesus Christ was made sin! This minister meant that Jesus Christ was sinful. Are you *sure* he meant that? Not a doubt about it. Did you ever hear such a blasphemer in all your life? What an awful character! What a fearful character! I really think if you will fetch the fire, I will get the fagots, and if somebody else will find a rope we will tie him to the stake, for the sooner we burn such a fellow the better. That is the construction they would put upon it. But the words being in the Bible, and the words being recorded by an inspired apostle, they dare not so deal with them, and so they are obliged to take the apostle's words in the sense in which he meant them. They are obliged to say, Ah, the apostle did not mean that Jesus Christ partook of the properties of sin, or that there was anything sinful in his nature; but the apostle meant that Jesus Christ was clothed with all the sorrows of sin, and being clothed with all the sorrows of sin, and with all the responsibilities of the sinner, he stood there before justice and before God the representative of sin, and condemnation came down upon sin in Christ, and there sin was condemned to death. Sin is condemned everywhere, but it is not condemned to death anywhere but in Christ; for none other but Christ could bear a sentence strong enough to put sin to death without he himself being put to death. Well, say you, was not Jesus Christ put to death? Which died first, sin or Jesus Christ? You may depend upon this, if he had died first, sin had never died at all. He conquered sin; sin was dead, and as soon as ever sin dropped dead the Savior then said, "It is finished." He would not die until he saw sin dead; for no man, not the man of sin, nor anything else, could take his life from him; he laid down his life sovereignly. When sin was dead, he yielded up the ghost, his spirit, into the hands of the Father, but not before. So, then, never mind if it be dangerous to preach the liberalities of the gospel; God being with us we will still go on in the same good old track, for "the liberal devises liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand." Thus, then, the mission of the Savior was a mission of boundless love, of everlasting life, and of illumination. We know how to understand the words, also, that "he was made a curse for us." Are we going to say that God cursed Christ, that God hated Christ? No; no danger of our falling into any such delusion and blasphemy. We

know how to understand it; we know that he stood the representative of sinners in his sorrows; now he stands the representative of his people in what he has made them. He first stood as their representative in what sin had made them; he now stands as their representative in what he himself has made them. He represents them now as holy as his holiness can make them, as righteous as his righteousness can make them; he represents them now as lovely as he himself is lovely, as pleasing to God as he himself is. This, then, is the gospel that finds out poor sinners, shows them what they are, and shows the remedy for all their woe, found in Christ Jesus.

But I notice, secondly, his coming as the Lord's anointed Priest. Now in Daniel we have a beautiful representation of this. Daniel was praying, and he says, "While I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God. I like Daniel's order of things. He confessed his own sin first. I meet with plenty of professors wonderfully busied about other peoples supposed or real sins, but their own are not much trouble to them, for if they were, they would not be so busy about other people's. They would get themselves right first, and then they would be in a position to help others. "While I was confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication," then the Lord appeared to me. And he says it was "about the time of the evening oblation," to show that that which the Lord was about to reveal to him was the subject contained in our text, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. "And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give you skill and understanding." Now that scripture a great many years ago struck my mind with great power, and it would take me a long time to tell you what use it has been to me. "I am come to give you skill and understanding." I thought, Now wherein is the skillfulness? What is the subject to be understood? If I can understand this subject, that will make me skillful in the word of God. "Understand the matter, and consider the vision." Presently out it comes that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was to come and to "finish the transgression." Ah, I said, if I clearly understand that he has done that, I shall not try to finish it myself; I shall give it up, and receive him that has finished it. "And to make an end of sin." Very well, then, I shall give it up, will not trouble myself any more about it; my business is to receive Jesus Christ as the end of sin, and he cannot be defiled, nor I either as I stand in him.

We have now received this finishing of transgression, this end of sin, this reconciliation. "And to bring in" now mark, "everlasting righteousness," that is, to make things everlastingly right between God and us. "Understand the matter, and consider the vision." "And to seal up the vision and prophecy," to confirm the prophecy, and so the Savior did; "and to anoint the most Holy." Jesus Christ is to be anointed with the oil of that joy into which he has entered. Here, then, was the coming of the Savior as that great Melchizedek. He has honored the law, met the precepts, confirmed the promises, swallowed up death in victory, cast out Satan, delights our souls, gathers us with his arm, carries us in his bosom, keeps us, and presents us constantly before God all that he has made us. You cannot repeat this truth of Jesus Christ coming to do this great work too often. What can sympathize, what can soothe, what can cheer us, what can comfort, what can strengthen, and what can give us such confidence as the gospel? But it could not give us these soothing's, and these healings, and these strengthening's, were it not what it is. But the dear Savior having gone to the end of the law, the end of sin, he has rolled in blessing after blessing, promise after promise; yes, like the waves of the sea they will follow us up to all eternity in full tide, never, never to end.

But I notice, in the last place upon this part, that the Savior came also as a King. And it is under this character that we have, as far as I can learn, the only note of time. The Old Testament prophets were anxious to know what time the Savior was to come; but none of them could by possibility tell within a few years. The seventy weeks in Daniel are no guide whatever. The learned, I am aware, take those seven weeks to mean, taking a day for a year, 490 years. But those seventy weeks date from the proclamation of Cyrus, and the proclamation of Cyrus was 536 years before the birth of Christ; and that description of the seventy weeks in the 9th of Daniel goes down to the destruction of Jerusalem, 70 years after the birth of Christ, so that you get there upwards of 600 years; whereas, from the time of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem to its destruction, if you take the seventy weeks to mean a day for a year, that is 490 years, you get upwards of 600 years. So, you see it does not agree. What then must you do? Why, take the seventy weeks mystically. When the literal Israelites were to be in literal Babylon for 70 years, you must take the years literally, because it is a literal circumstance. But here is a mystic time. After sixty and two weeks, before the seventy weeks expire, the Messiah should be cut off. It is a mystic time. Jesus Christ himself as man did not know the exact day when that seventy weeks should terminate. And yet men take it upon themselves to understand the times and the seasons that God has put in his own power. The Savior, when speaking in the 13th of Mark of the destruction of Jerusalem, said, "Of that day and that hour knows no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." So, it was not yet revealed to Jesus Christ the precise day of Jerusalem's destruction. So then that seventy weeks merely said this, that there is a limited time, there is a given time, the meaning of which as to its actual length he reserved to himself. All the seventy weeks mean then is, there is a limited time, and the event will show how long that time is. Just the Same with all the dates in Revelation, they must be understood in exactly the same way. Once adopt this view, and away go all your prophecies directly. Oh, what infinite, I was going to say fooleries, have I seen in my day! However, they sell their books, and the people buy them, so it is. Poor Irving, he knew all the times and seasons that the Father has put in his own power. He was constantly saying, He is coming, He is coming; and at last he pointed out the day. He said, He will come on such a day, and to such a place, and five or six hundred of his followers actually went out and watched in a field that night. The Savior was to come at nine o'clock at night, and they waited till nine, he did not come; ten, eleven, twelve o'clock, and he did not come. At last they thought there must be a mistake in the date, and went home again. So, you see how absurd this is. We must take these dates in the mystical sense. That there are to be 1,260 days means a limited time in which the adversary is to reign. How long that time is God alone knows; he has never revealed it. So, the forty and two months in which ministers are to preach in sackcloth, and they always preach in sackcloth more or less, "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." It means a period known only to God. Just so the thousand years; there is to be a succession of saints, a generation that shall reign with Christ, not without Him. Ah, but, say they, don't you see He must be on earth, because they are to reign with Him? Well, do not we reign with Him now? We cannot reign without Him. I know that very well; but if I have that faith that unites me to Him, I reign with Him now. And that thousand years may be a hundred thousand years for aught I know; I do not understand how long it is; the Lord has not revealed it. But if we take it mystically, then we can understand it. As to men pretending to know when the Lord will come, it is sheer delusion. It is enough for us to know two or three things; first, to know the Lord himself; second, to know that while death is at hand, if we are Christians, absent from the body, present with the Lord; and third, to know that there is a day fixed in which God will judge the world by that man whom he has

ordained; and that day will be a day of completion of the victory of the saints, when the saying shall be brought to pass, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" That day will be the day of our enthronement, the day of our coronation, our wedding day, our glorious day. That day will commence with a morning without clouds, and will continue to be a morning without clouds. "The Lord shall be unto you your everlasting light, and your God your glory." Therefore, don't you be so foolish, any of you, as to buy any more of their nonsensical books. If you have a few shillings you don't know what to do with, give, them to the poor, especially the poor of the Lord's people. It will do you better, and them too, than reading trumpety books about prophecy.

Nevertheless, while I thus speak, there was one note of time as to the coming of the Messiah which the people of God of that age could understand. They could not tell to a month, or a year, or to fifty years; but still within a few score of years. That note of time is distinctly given, and how beautifully it answers! How many times have I listened to that note of time! and I have looked up and said, Blessed God, how truthful you are to your blessed word! If you do pronounce sentence, eternally it stands; it cannot be overturned. And where is that note of time? In the second of Daniel. The Lord explained the four empires to Daniel, the Babylonian, then the Persian, then the Grecian, then the last, the Roman empire. That empire was to rise, mightier than any of the preceding, and so it was. Now, then, during the reign of the Roman power, whether under emperor or senate, whatever the shape of government was, the beast is the beast, let it be in what shape or form it may, at that time there is a stone cut out of the mountain, That mountain, of course, is the Jewish nation; Christ is the stone taken from that nation. The Jewish nation had cohesive power in it all the time Christ was in it; but after Christ was born, and after he died and left that nation, it lost its cohesive power, fell to pieces before the Roman armies, and there it is scattered to the four winds to this day, and will never again be reunited. There is no hope now for Jew or Gentile but in Jesus Christ. That was the mountain that could not fall to pieces while Christ was in it. It was rolled off to Babylon, but still cohered; it was rolled back again from Babylon, still cohered, could not dissolve it; the scepter would not depart, Now there is another nation namely, the chosen nation, the new covenant people, the true Mount Zion, that has in it a power of coherence. The enemy will never be able to sever the true Mount Zion, never dissolve that. Let us hear what is said: "Forasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands." Why without hands? The first chapter of Matthew will show you: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise," it smote the image upon its feet, that is, in the Roman time. When did the apostles preach? In Roman time. Was the gospel attended with power? It was. Did thousands of souls rise by the power of God into the knowledge of that gospel? They did; and the kingdoms of this world became to Christians of that age as they should be to us, as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor compared with the promises of God, the kingdom and glory of God. And this stone "became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." Now do not misunderstand that. That does not mean the conversion of all the population of the globe. It is a substitutional idea. In that day most men thought, though some philosophers, Pythagoras for one, had an idea that the earth was spherical, or a globe, the general notion was that *the earth was one extended plane*. And so, you must look at this earth as though it was *an extended plane*, and this stone covering everything, good and bad, so that nothing at last was to be seen of the earth whatever, only this stone. Do not you see how this represents the substitutional work of Christ? Your health must go by-and-bye, but you will have Jesus Christ in the place of it, and you will have a better kind of health. All your earthly possessions must go by-and-bye, but you will have better possessions in the place of them. All your earthly friends must go by-and-bye, but you will have a heavenly Friend in the place of them.

So that Christ takes the place of everything that is good and everything that is bad: it means complete substitution. Now then mark, "In the days of those kings", Roman kings, "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom," the God of heaven. Was there anything of human contrivance in the work of Christ? Was it not a heavenly work? And did the Savior say to his apostles, Now, then, I want to found a kingdom, and I want to people that kingdom out of all nations, kindreds, and tongues, and now you had better consult with kings and wise men, and devise some plan by which my kingdom may be founded? No, no, no. "Tarry in Jerusalem until you be endued with power from on high." And so, they did; they preached the truth; the kingdom was founded, and this kingdom shall never be destroyed, neither shall it be left to other people, but it shall stand for ever. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that shall not pass away. That, then, was the note of time, so that those who lived near the time felt sure it would not be long; they felt sure he would soon come.

But I notice, secondly, *the note of distinction*. Why is he called the Just One? Not merely because he was just; there is a deeper meaning than that. I will tell you in almost one sentence why he is called the Just One. It is this: sin had made everything wrong between us and God; Christ comes and makes everything right between us and God. Therefore, he is the Just One not in the mere abstract sense, but in the substitutional sense. I have said that sin has made everything wrong between us and God, which it has. It has brought us into antagonism with every one of his perfections; we have dishonored his name, sinned against his holiness, his justice, his omniscience, his omnipresence, his eternity, his authority, his sovereignty, in every way we have sinned against him. But Jesus Christ comes and does away with that wrong, fords the gulf, makes up the breach, and makes everything right, and now by him there is not a single thing wrong. What a wonderful thing to say, not a single thing wrong! Well, but suppose Job loses all his property and his family, and his wife and his friends turn against him. It is all right. Well, suppose Elijah is subjected to such privation that he is obliged to be fed by ravens. It is all right. Suppose he is obliged to lodge there by the sea-side, and have a little every day out of the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil. It is all right, perfectly right. Jesus Christ has made everything right. Therefore, taking the word "just" in the relative sense, this I understand to be the meaning.

But, lastly, I notice *the ultimate end to be answered*. The ultimate end is that which I have partly anticipated, that he may present us at the last day as just as he is just, as righteous as he is righteous.