

THE PLANT OF RENOWN

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Evening May 13th, 1866

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the Surrey Tabernacle, Wansey Street

Volume 8 Number 391

“And I will raise up for them a plant of renown.” Ezekiel 34:29

IT is of essential importance for us ever to notice the character to which the promises of the gospel belong. There ever has been, and there is now, a great tendency so to generalize the promises as though they were thrown into the Bible for anyone to come and take as they please. But it is not so. The apostle Peter speaks of the promises in this way: “He has given unto us” implying not unto all, but “unto us” “exceeding great and precious promises.” And so, the persons to whom our text belongs are clearly described in connection with our text. They are first set forth as brought into reconciliation to God. “I will make with them a covenant of peace.” Here this covenant, although covenant here is represented differently from what it is in some other parts of the word; but while it is represented differently here, it is not in a way that does not accord with the other parts, but in a way that accords entirely with all the other parts and varieties of aspect of the covenant, here it appears, then, as a covenant of peace or reconciliation; and the Lord making a covenant with them means an agreement with them; and they are brought to make an agreement with him, according to that scripture in the Psalms, “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant” made an agreement, that have made peace, “with me by sacrifice.” “Let him take hold of my strength, and he shall make peace with me.” So the Lord reconciles the world that he loves, the world that Christ died for, the world that the Holy Spirit will convince of sin; the Lord reconciles them unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and so they come by virtue of the blood of Christ, by his atonement, into reconciliation with God, into peace with God. And this reconciliation is spoken of here as God making a covenant with us, and we, as it were, making a covenant with him; “those that have made a covenant with me;” in the way not that Cain attempted it, but in the way that Abel did, gather such together. Here, then, is reconciliation to God. This is where Cain stumbled. Cain should have asked first, What is the way in which I can be reconciled to God? What is God’s way? But no; he left the great essential out. But Abel was better taught; Abel, therefore, came with a more excellent sacrifice; and Abel, being thus a believer in the only way in which we can be reconciled to God, Abel was therefore, as a believer, thus accepted, and so his sacrifice was accepted. So, with us, if we are brought into this gospel reconciliation with God, then we may rejoice with the apostle, and say, “Approved and accepted in Christ.” And then the several items of this covenant, of which our text indeed is ones are

beautifully enumerated. "I will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land." the wild beast. The idea here intended is this; they shall be brought into a land where there is no adversary, where there is no evil, and that land is the liberty of the gospel. "And they shall dwell safely in the wilderness," is another item of the covenant. And yet how many dangers there were in the wilderness! There was danger from famine, for there was no food till the Lord brought them manna; and there was danger from thirst, for there was no water till the Lord brought the same from the rock; and there was danger from scorpions and fiery serpents; and there was danger from the Amalekites; there was danger in a great variety of ways. Yet here is a promise to this new covenant people, that they shall dwell safely in the wilderness; that there is nothing that shall be connected with them in this wilderness pilgrimage that shall finally hurt them as they stand in Christ. "Nothing shall by any means hurt you." "And they shall sleep in the woods," It is a great thing to be able to do so. I have been in the woods in the sense there intended many times, and have not known in what way I could get out of the wood. You know the meaning of this. And yet, if the Lord is pleased to be with you in those perplexities, there intended figuratively by the woods, you will say, Well, I shall get out some day; and I am better here with the Lord with me, than I should be without these troubles and the Lord not with me. And, therefore, the great question is not so much, How shall I get out of this, and out of that, and out of the other? but it is, Is the Lord with me? And if the Lord be with us, then, whatever woods we may be in, however adverse surrounding circumstances may be, we shall lay our heads down and sleep as quietly and as comfortably as though there was nothing the matter. I would venture to say that if the apostle Paul were here this, evening in this pulpit, he would tell you that when he was in the Mamertine prison in Rome, though he knew not either when or how he should get out, he slept as soundly, and more so than some of you do upon your downy beds. I venture to say he did, because the Lord was there to make him happy. Godliness is a wonderful mystery and a wonderful secret, the Lord being thus our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. And then these people who are thus reconciled to God, and thus preserved, shall be blessed, and the Lord will make them a blessing to others. "I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing." Now it is no small honor to stand connected with a church that is useful to others; it is no small honor to be a minister of those things that are such a blessing to the souls of others. Such may well be willing to suffer reproach all the time they are conscious that God is blessing them, and doing good to others. And what shall I say of private Christians? What blessings they are to others in a great variety of ways, that I must not now stop even to notice! but there is the Lord's declaration, and so it is.

Therefore, it is that no one can trifle with such love, such mercy, such a gospel, that understands it. Now I will come to our text. "I will raise up for them a plant of renown." I shall have now very carefully to describe the plantation of this plant, and how it became a plant of renown. Go to the 17th chapter of this same book, and there will be presented to us the threefold plantation of Christ. I will quote the words, and then show how they explain our text. "Thus says the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit," and now comes the renown, "and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field" meaning the people, "shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it." There

is the explanation, then, of our text. Let us run through it, for it is worthy of attention more than we can give. The first thing in what I have quoted that strikes my mind with great force is the care the Lord took of the genealogy from which the Savior should descend. "I will take of the highest branch of the high cedar;" the high cedar is the tribe of Judah, God suffered all the other tribes to be cut down; all the other cedars were cut down; the tribe of Benjamin may seem an exception, but not strictly so. We may therefore here, carrying out the figure, view the twelve tribes of Israel as twelve cedars, and eleven of those were to be cut down, there was only one that continued to stand uncut down until Christ came. Now see the care, therefore, which the Lord took of the lineal descendants of the highest branch; the high cedar, the tribe of Judah, and the highest branch, the royal house. We read in the 1st of Matthew how the Lord kept the genealogy unbroken. It is astonishing to see what care he took. Is it possible that the blessed God so dwells with men that he has planned a concatenation of things, and he will not allow one link to be missing, he will not allow one particle to be absent, he will not allow one thing to get out of order?

"Our lives through various scenes are drawn,
And vexed with trifling cares;
But your eternal thought moves on,
Your undisturbed affairs."

How Satan tried to cut this cedar down! If we can but harm those three Judahites (for they were of the tribe of Judah, and they were of the royal house too); if we can but get this Daniel torn to pieces by the lions. And when, they returned to their land, see how Sanballat and all the enemies were stirred up. If we can but annihilate this people, if we can but cut down this cedar, then where will the tender branch be? where will this coming one be? where will this plant of renown be? If we cut the cedar down, then we destroy the offshoot of that cedar. I do not know what effect this may have upon your minds, but I will tell you the effect it has upon mine; it wonderfully encourages me to cast my care upon the blessed God; because if he took such care of that tribe through all their captivities, and took care to turn their captivity, and bring them back again to the land of Canaan, will he not take care of, his people still? There is Bethlehem, a little city, and yet the Lord had so ordered it that this tender one should be cropped from the young twigs, that is, the immediate predecessors at Bethlehem, that there he should be born, wonder, O heavens! Augustus Caesar grows jealous of Herod, sends out the command that every Jew should go to his own city, and enroll his name as a loyal subject of Caesar's empire, and they were obliged to do so. This arose from the jealousy Caesar had towards Herod, lest Herod should unite some surrounding nations, and perhaps overturn the Roman empire. So, you see when men are stirred up with jealousy we must wait and see what the Lord is going to do with them; you may depend upon it He will bring something about by it that shall be to the good of His people and to the glory of His name. And here were Joseph and Mary from sixty (and that was a long way in those days, friends), from sixty to seventy miles from the place where the prophecy was to be fulfilled. They, as loyal subjects; for Christians are loyal subjects, Christians are taught to honor the king, Christians, are taught to submit to the ordinances of man; not ordinances that they say are ordinances of God; no, no, but to all the ordinances and laws of man that are not contrary to God's word. And therefore, Joseph and Mary, as loyal subjects, recognized the providence of God in placing them where they were; they went to Bethlehem. And see the care the Lord took. There was the dear Savior born just at the time and just at the place; and while he is thus born, he is, speaking after the manner of men, exposed to every danger. Herod employs all his regal power to reach this tender plant, and cut it

down as soon as it is planted. He cut a great many tender plants down; hoping to include among them this tender plant. But no; this tender plant was gone to Egypt; this tender plant was safe; Herod could not find it; there it was. So, with you, Christian. All hell and all earth combined may unite to cut you down; but if God is determined to hold you up, they will not reach you. They may cut at you, and you may be frightened, and think you are cut down; but no, no; he will take care of you, and the enemy shall be disappointed. But when the Lord comes to cut them down that would cut you down, he will not do as your adversaries have; they have missed their mark, but God will not miss his mark. A hundred and fourscore thousand men came to cut Jerusalem down, but they missed their mark. But when God would cut them down, he did not miss his mark; they looked over the wall, and all were dead men. See, then, the care the Lord took of the high cedar, the tribe of Judah, and the highest branch, the royal house, but after that cedar had yielded this tender plant it was cut down. Where is the tribe of Judah now? Where is the royal house now? Where is the genealogy now? Where is that tall cedar now? Why, according to the words I just now quoted, cut down, dried up, and is no more. We see here, then, the doctrine of the Lord's care. And this is a doctrine that concerns the Christian every day. Where would you be in your health, where would you be in your circumstances, and above and beyond all, oh! where would you be in your soul and in your eternal destiny, without the care of the great God? No care for God? Do you not fear God? despise God, laugh, at religion, the only thing that can befriend us, the only idling that can really abide by us, the only thing that is profitable for the life that now is, and for that which is to come? What an infinite mercy that the Lord did not say in our case, when we were despisers, "Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish: I will work a work in your day which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you"! He might have so dealt with us. But though we despised him, he would not despise us; and though we hated him, he loved us; and though we had no heart to pray to him, he had a heart, and an arm too, to save us; and though we cared not for him, he cared infinitely for us. Never, never, never, not to eternity shall I forget the interposing of the Lord's hand when he took me out of where I was, and made me concerned for eternal things.

Now this tender plant is there represented in a threefold plantation. He is planted first upon a high mountain. Very frequently in the Bible, holiness, because of its elevating character, is called a mountain. Hence the holy mountain, or mountain of holiness. "The Lord bless you, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness." Jesus Christ, therefore, being planted on a high mountain evidently means that he stood upon the mountain of his own infallible holiness, and from that he never came down. What a delightful truth is this, that he never came down from his personal holiness! It was by his personal holiness he met the law for us; it was by his personal holiness, as a Lamb without spot, that he atoned for sin. Here, then, is the mountain; and Jesus Christ ever had, though our sins and the penalty of them were laid upon him, yet he ever had sin and Satan in every respect under his feet. Now do not let us be abstract here; let us be careful, because all the people of God are to be planted together with Christ, as he thus stood upon this high mountain of holiness, and sin never had, never could have, the least dominion over him. So, his people as they stand in him are so planted that it is utterly impossible for them to sin there. They cannot sin there. Their life is hid with Christ in God, and that life their sin cannot defile. They are justified in his righteousness, and that righteousness their unrighteousness cannot defile. He was innocent and pure; and as they stand there, holy, innocent, and pure, their sins defile them in themselves, and grieve them in themselves, and wound them in themselves, and deform them in themselves; but wonder, O heavens; be confounded, O hell; worship, all you hosts of heaven; when a poor stumbling believer leaves the body the soul rushes into heaven as pure as the Savior's blood can

make it, as righteous as the righteousness of Christ can make it, and as truthful as the truths of the new covenant written in the soul can make it. And when the soul, the spirit of the just man made perfect, gets to heaven, it will look about and say, What a scene is this! what a life is this! Well might your servant say, "To die is gain." I have not brought one infirmity with me, nor one sin, not one doubt, nor one fear, nor one sorrow, nor one grief, nor one wound; all is pure, all is free, all is holy, the glorious liberty of the children of God. You, some of you, why, if you knew what a God you have, what a Christ you have, what a religion you have, what a plantation with him you have, why, you would smile at death, you would not be afraid of it; no, you would enter then into the spirit of the words you sometimes sing, "Come, welcome death, I'll gladly go with you."

But now that we are planted together in the likeness of Christ, the Lord will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel. Where are your degrees in heaven, then? where are your degrees of glory, and a great many other foolish doctrines that are the inventions of men? See, then, the Lord's care of Old Testament prophecy, the plantation of Christ upon the mountain of holiness. Adam was planted upon the mountain of holiness, but he came down, and he being the natural and federal head of the whole human race, all fell in him from that noble standing to rise no more except by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, secondly, he is planted on an eminent mountain; not only high, but eminent. Now this means the superiority of the order to which he belonged. Was there ever such a Son of God before? Adam was a son of God; but he was a fallible son of God. But Christ shall not fail nor be discouraged. "Unto the Son he said, Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever." He is infallible, and all his people as they stand in him are infallible too. Well, I was going to say that, and I might as well say that, and I have said that, and I do say that, and I will say that. What said the apostle? Why, "We are more than conquerors" more than conquerors, "through him that loved us." I cease to be a child of God? I shall when Christ ceases to be the Son of God, not before. I cease to be related to him? "Born of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever." Here, then, is a plant of renown, eminent, God as well as man in one person. Was there ever such a priest before? Never; and such another is not needed. When he came, he found nothing done, and when he departed, he left nothing to be done. He did all that was needful to be done; perfected forever by his one offering them that are sanctified. His people are priests; they are one with him as priests. And can they fail in this? No. Shall they cease to serve God? Never, never. I have served the Lord so long that it has in some respects become to me a very easy matter. The Savior says, "My yoke is easy" so it is, Lord, "and my burden is light;" so it is, Lord. Well, say you, how is that? Why, because he carries me and supports me, and if he wants anything of me, he always gives it to me first, yes, always. If I have anything extra to do, he always gives me extra strength to do it. If I could always believe comfortably I should do very well; only I happen to be so constituted, I do not seem able to conform to that scripture where it says, "It shall be given unto you in the same hour." Now all that I am to have I want at once, that I might make my arrangements, and pretty arrangements they would be, too. No, the Lord says, "It shall be given unto you in the same hour." My old nature says, Give it me now, Lord, that I may make my arrangements. No, "it shall be given unto you in the same hour." Well, Lord, do give us a week's manna at once. No, I won't do that; it will do you more harm than good if I do. I will give you the manna every day direct from my hand, but if I give you a week's manna at once, you will go off as far as a week can carry you, making your arrangements, that is what you will do; so I will not do so; I will just supply you. And so, it is here. We shall never cease to serve him. And Moses said, "We know not with what we shall serve the Lord." But it will be given to us, it will be given to us. When we get into the wilderness, we shall know with what to serve the Lord.

And they found they could serve the Lord with silver, and gold, and jewels, and wood; and they managed to build a tabernacle, and so they served the Lord, and the Lord filled the tabernacle with his glory, and they rejoiced that they were thus favored to serve the Lord. An eminent priest, then, was Christ, and his service was the most eminent service that was ever rendered, and his people serve God in a way no other people can. Was there ever such a king? Never, never such a king as he is. I might mention many of the features of this King, and I will mention only one, and that is this, that as all his subjects are his brethren, his heart never was and never will be lifted up above his brethren. He lives in the humblest heart; yes, as the old divines used to say, the humblest heart is his highest throne on earth. "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word;" to revive the spirit of the contrite ones. See, then, the high mountain and eminent. What is there so eminent as the person of Jesus Christ in the order of his services? What is there so eminent as being a child of God, a priest unto God, and a king unto God? The people of God are called kings.

But again, "In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it." That I take to mean two things: first, the perfection of his work, that is the height of Israel; and, secondly, eternal glorification. "Whom he justifies" by the perfection of his work, "them he also glorifies." Here is the mountain of the height of Israel. So, with the Christian. He is to be satisfied with the exaltation that is by the perfection of Christ. We shall be quite satisfied with that height of dignity and glory to which his perfect work shall bring us. Here, then, is the plant. See what care the Lord took of this genealogical cedar. "And I will crop off" mark that, "I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one." "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this way." There you have the supernatural coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, "I will crop." I feel lost when I look at the condescension of the great God in taking such an infinity and eternity of interest in poor dying creatures. God help us to feel more interest in him, more interest in our souls' welfare, more interest in his truth, and more interest in that that is after all of more interest to us than anything else can be.

Now comes *the renown*, "a plant of renown." It shall be a goodly cedar, bringing forth boughs, which boughs I take to be the doctrines of the gospel, and shall bear fruit; and I take the fruit to be, perhaps this is rather refining, perhaps it is; well, forgive me if it does seem to be refining, I take the boughs to be the doctrines of the gospel, and the fruit I take to be the promises of the gospel; and the fruit hangs upon the boughs, produced by the boughs; by the root, the stem, and the boughs. The love of God is a beautiful bough; plenty of promises hanging upon that; and election is a beautiful bough. Why, say you, are there any promises hanging upon that? Yes; "Him that I have chosen I will cause to draw near unto me," take that one; and if some of you have not any delight in that, I am afraid there is something lacking. Divine predestination is a bough, and upon that hang promises. Take this one: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Mediation is a bough, and the promises hang thick upon that, forgiveness, and freedom, and justification, and everything you can wish. The sworn covenant is a bough, and blessed promises hang upon that: "In blessing I will bless you." Who brought forth these boughs, these heavenly branches? Christ Jesus. Take him away, where is the love of God, where is the choice of God, where is the gracious decree of God, where is mediation, where is the sworn covenant?

Again, "Under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell." There may be some people here this evening quite unaccustomed to the Scriptures, and therefore they may wonder what in the world such language means. Now let me say, then, for

the sake of a little piece of ABC information to such, for there may be such in an assembly like this, that you are not to take the cedar there literally, but figuratively, as meaning Jesus Christ, who is frequently in God's word called a tree. You are not to take the birds of the air there as meaning literal birds of the air; but you are to take the birds of the air there to mean sinners of all classes and climes, and of all degrees of guilt. Hence the little bird, the robin, the lark, or the canary, each of these little granivorous things may represent a class of men and women that are upon the whole harmless, and useful, and pleasing in human life. The vulture, the eagle, the great birds of prey, and especially those that feed upon carrion, may represent the carnal, the vile, the profligate, the abominable, the Manasseh's, the Mary Magdalene's, the thief on the cross, birds of every wing, sinners of every sort, sinners of every dye. And who, let me ask this question in conclusion, taking it literally to help us out with the spiritual meaning, who but the Lord himself could impress a feeling upon two creatures to go to the ark, and the others round about the two had no such feeling? There are two more of another species; the same feeling comes upon them; and all these creatures, let them be placed where they may, sought for the ark and they all found it, came safely to it, were received, entered in, survived the flood, and thus became a picture, a figure, of God's saving shiners. "Under it shall dwell fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell." Let us take the matter literally. Suppose a tree were planted in England, or any part of the world, suppose some of every species should be attracted by this tree, and should come and dwell in the shadow of its branches. What a change in these birds! The little lark says, Why, I like the food of this tree; I can live and sing here. The little robin says, I can hop about very comfortably; some nice crumbs here. And the gier eagle, one of the dirtiest birds of the air, would say, Well, I can no more go back to my misty habits; I could not do it, really, I am quite changed; I have no appetite for carrion now. This tree, really what a nice tree it is! I am better looking, and I feel better, and am better altogether. And so, the poor old crow would say, I am better; and they would be all better together. However great the variety of pursuit, and character, and taste, when they are brought to this tree, they lose their differences, they all agree upon the excellency of the tree, the suitability of the branches, the desirability of the fruit. Their former character is gone, and they become *avi paradise*, birds of paradise, to warble out the notes of eternal love to the glory of that God that does such wonders for man. Thus, does the Savior become the plant of good, of great, and of endless renown, bringing forth fruit unto holiness, and the end thereof everlasting life.