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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

A TRIBUTE OF HONOUR TO THE DEAD, AND A
WORD FOR THE LIVING.

A FUNERAL SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, 17TH FEBRUARY, 1867, BY
MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“But my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”—Isaiah liv. 10.

WHEN the Lord is pleased to take away a valuable relative or friend, taking one and another away, especially if an old friend, a great friend, a sincere friend, an undeviating friend, we begin to look around and say, How shall we get on now? Ah, saith the poor widow, How shall I do now I have lost my husband that was so excellent? Saith the widower, How shall I do now, having lost the wife that was my helpmeet and my desire? Ah, say the little children, how shall we do now we have lost our parents? And how often are we also led to tremble at the loss of our friends, and we think, What is to be done? What will become of us? How shall we do without their kindness? The Lord steps in, to show that his kindness nevertheless still remains. “My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” I have known some people outlive all their relatives, all their friends, and seem to be left in that isolated state that they know nobody, and nobody seems to know them. I have within these very few years attended two funerals where persons had outlived all their relatives and friends, and there was not a soul to follow the corpse in either of those cases but the doctor and myself; and those funerals seemed very solitary. But then we were cheered with the assurance that the departed died in the Lord, and “blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.”

I shall not this evening be guided exclusively by our text, but partly by the circumstances under which I feel led to make the remarks I intend to make, and then partly by the text, bringing in the text at the last as the best possible remedy for all human woe. “My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” Then, if we know we have the

sympathy of our Creator, the covenant promise of peace of our Creator, that we have his mercy on our side, then we can say, If father and mother, our kindred friends, near and dear, are taken from us, the Lord will take us up.

Now you may be sure that there is one thing under the circumstances very much impressed upon my mind, and that is this—that your having in so short a time erected this building (and we shall soon, I trust, come to the end of what is owing in relation to it), and our departed sister having been so entirely one with you in the work, for her very heart and soul were in it; as yours have been; under this feeling I shall first show that it is the order of our God that his service on earth, his cause, should be carried on by his people at certain personal cost. Then, when I have shown this, I will secondly refer to our departed sister, as well as to other friends. And then I will, thirdly, bring in the text as the remedy for whatever may befall those that love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, then, the first thing is that the Lord has ordained that his cause shall be carried on upon the earth at the cost of his people. He blesses them with a knowledge of himself, and makes them know that they are bought by an infinite price; he makes them feel that they owe him a debt of infinite and everlasting gratitude, and he makes them see and feel that there is not anything they can do that he is not worthy of, that his cause is not worthy of; therefore, with hand and heart they set to, and serve him at any cost, let the cost be whatever it may. If their very lives are called for, they will lay them down rather than lay down the service of God; whatever is called for, they will part with rather than part with the truth of God or the service of God. Let us trace this through the Scriptures carefully, because it is a department in which some are not very well versed, in which some are not very well practised, and with which some are not very much pleased, or very much delighted. Therefore it is important we should understand the service of our God. The Bible is full of this first proposition. I might go back to Abel, but I will not go back so far as that. I will begin with the ark. That ark cost money. There is no doubt that Noah laid out all he had to buy the materials, and to build and complete this ark. And no doubt there were plenty of people that ridiculed him for so doing, despised him, and thought the man was out of his mind to lay out all his estate, and part with everything, just to build this ark. But the solemn moment comes; the windows from on high are opened. That they are not so very much alarmed at, at the first; but presently the fountains of the great deep are opened up, and the southern oceans begin to roll over the northern continents. Then the world begins to sigh, and to tremble, and to see no way of refuge or escape. Who is the fool now? Do you think Noah has done wrong? Which is the wiser man of the two? You see the consequence; the thing speaks for itself; I need not enlarge. Then you come to the tabernacle in the wilderness. Here is a tabernacle to be built, at the cost of the people. There might be some among them that might be very angry with Moses, and say he had no authority from God to make such demands upon the people. And I dare to say there were some that said, It is monstrous to build a tabernacle; you ought not to make such demands upon us. To go to build a tabernacle for this Moses! Why, he is fourscore years old; and lived forty years after that, as you know. Where is the propriety of building a tabernacle for a man so advanced in years? If he were young I would give something. Thou wouldst not; not if thou hadst the covetous heart to govern thee that thou hast now. But the tabernacle was not for man, but for God; it was not for any man, individually speaking, but it was for God. The people willingly gave, until they had to do with them as we shall have to do with you by and by;—we shall have to restrain you, no doubt. You will come in with your fives, and tens, and scores, and hundreds, when it is all paid

off; and we shall say, We cannot receive it; the work is done, the tabernacle is complete, and we need no more. And so their liberality was restrained, and the Lord filled the tabernacle with his glory. Now the Lord says, As you have shown this love to me, I will dwell with you; I will be in your midst; I will guide you, I will guard you. And so all that believed were brought into the promised land. Then, again, Solomon's temple cost the people a vast amount of money; but it was the test to which they were to be put; and they went to work every man according to his ability. Those that could fell timber did so; those that could hew in the quarries did so; some did one thing, some the other; there was something for all to do, and the temple was finished, and the glory of the Lord appeared therein. I need not remind you of the second temple, the same. Then again, the service of God in that dispensation was carried on at considerable expense to the people. There was a lamb in the morning, a lamb in the evening, bullocks and so on; extra sacrifices at the three great annual feasts; and of course a great expense to the people. And I need not remind you of the New Testament—when grace entered into the hearts of the people, they came, sold their possessions, threw down the money at the apostles' feet. And from that day to this the cause of God has been carried on thus by the instrumentality of the people. Now let us see what the Lord saith of these services. Let us see whether those who do so are right or whether they are wrong. I need not remind you of the Lord's approbation of the ark, his approbation of the tabernacle, his approbation of the first temple, and of the second temple, and of the services of his people; but we will have some scriptures upon this matter. Now the Lord speaks very encouragingly to his people on this subject in the 3rd chapter of Malachi,—“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house; and prove me now herewith; saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.” Then again, you will see when the people would not go to any expense in the service of the Lord, what was the consequence? There were locusts, cankerworms, caterpillars, palmer worms, famine, plague, pestilence. “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.” And “Why? saith the Lord of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste.” That is the reason of all this adversity. “Go up to the mountain, and bring wood;” go to some expense, and show that you are the true servants of God, determined to maintain and carry on his cause in the world; “and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord.” And when they did so, their captivity was turned, and everything went well; they had all the prosperity they could desire. Hence stands the scripture, “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” “Let them rejoice that favour my righteous cause.” Then again, the Saviour saith, “He that shall give a cup of cold water to a disciple,” because he is one of mine, belongs to me, “shall in nowise lose his reward.” Now distinctly understand that the people do not by any of these services merit anything at God's hand; that the people do not by these services entitle themselves to anything at God's hand; but the great God is pleased, in his lovingkindness, to attach a vast importance to our little services. There is a cup of cold water given, and the Lord attaches great importance to that.

Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, sympathized with Jeremiah when he saw he was persecuted, and cast into the dungeon. Ebed-melech ventured his life in going in unto the king and interceding for Jeremiah, and got him up out of the dungeon in the most tender and kindly way he could. The consequence was that the sword of Nebuchadnezzar could not touch Ebed-melech; that the general destruction that came could not touch Ebed-melech. Then again, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward;" and a prophet's reward is to shine as the stars for ever and ever. He that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." And is it not very remarkable, and worthy of your attention, that he who was heir of all things actually lived while he was in this world at the expense of those that loved him. For one ministered to him, and another ministered to him, and so he was from time to time supplied;—that while the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, he had not where to lay his head; yet he condescended to be supplied after this manner. So then God has established this order of things, and attaches a vast importance to all the service that is done unto him. Time would fail me to run through the many scriptures upon this subject.

We will now just look at the other side. There are some people who will take good care that their religion shall cost them very little. They have the serpent without the dove. We would not wish a man to be constituted of the dove without the serpent, and to be silly, and to give everything, whether he can or not; but there are some with the serpent without the dove. Some perhaps of you. I don't say it is so: I must leave it to your own consciences;—you profess to belong to God; you profess to belong to Jesus Christ; you profess to be redeemed at an infinite cost, and yet no secret sighs before God for the salvation of your children, for the salvation of your fellow-creatures, for the ingathering of others. If there be, then you will say, In what way can I help that noble cause? Is the minister in trouble? If he be, let me do something to try to set him free, that he may go on unfettered, and be the more useful. Hence the apostle Paul, see how he appreciated the favour shown to him. "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. . . The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day; and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well." The Lord deliver us from hypocrisy. Oh, if you profess his name, and yet cannot consecrate any part of your substance to his cause, though in so doing you bring a blessing into all the other, what reality can there be in your religion? I say, by so doing you bring a blessing into all the other. Jacob saith, "Of all thou givest me I will surely give a tenth unto thee." Jacob well knew that that one-tenth consecrated to God would bring a blessing into all that he possessed. So let us view the other side then. Yes, I pay for my sitting. Of course; you can't get one without it. And I give at the collection. Yes, a penny piece, or a threepenny piece, back handed, so that no one should see through your hand what you give, and you give that just to save appearances. There are some of that stamp. What does the Bible say of such? Why, that that I should think must make you tremble. "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." And if those same people are included in the first clause of the last verse of that chapter, they were cursed bitterly indeed. "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord, but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." And I may here also say that a very few of this hypocritical, Sapphira, Ananias, Judas-like spirit—a very few of such in a congrega-

tion will do infinite mischief, by suggesting to others to do as they do. And hence Judas, he succeeded in corrupting the minds of the other disciples upon this very subject of the costliness of the service of God. I will prove it. 12th chapter of John, six days before the Passover, there is a woman anoints the Saviour's feet with costly ointment; and Judas saith, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" Why is it bestowed upon Jesus Christ? What do you give it to the minister for? He has got enough. And, besides, saith one, I have always held that the minister is either an angel or else an ass;—that either when he has done his work he goes off out of the world, and comes back again when it is time to go into the pulpit; he does not want anything to eat or drink, nor clothes to wear, or else he is an ass, to be turned out into the field, and there live on the grass till it is time for him to be yoked again. Now, saith Judas, why was it given to him? Why not sold, and given to the poor? Now mark, this is the 12th of John—six days before the passover. Here Judas had it all to himself. You can almost hear the disciples saying, Judas, what made you talk like that? Talk! why, you are all fools together. You should take care of your money; you save it. Don't you be a fool; don't you part with it; eat, drink, and take your ease for many years; never mind what the Bible says. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Now I go to the 14th chapter of Mark, and there, two days before the passover—that is four days after,—another woman anointed the Saviour's feet; and then the disciples—mark that,—they themselves were corrupted. So that it took Judas only four days to convert the disciples in that respect to his own Judas spirit. And so "there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?" Why not given to the poor? Woman, thou art wrong in giving anything to the minister; woman, thou art wrong in anointing his feet; woman, a little cup of oil, a couple of pennyworth of oil, would have done as well as that three hundred pennyworth of ointment. But the Saviour soon set them right; and they, having grace in their hearts to listen to him, their Ananias; Sapphira, Demas, Judas-like spirit departed from them. Now, then, saith the Saviour, so far from this woman doing wrong; "verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." There was one in the Saviour's day so taken up with God; she had but two mites. Now I have been at the washtub, or something else, and earned these two mites, and I feel I must give them to God. So she cast them into the treasury. The others gave a little out of their abundance, taking care not to give too much. Now, saith the Saviour, "This poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into treasury; for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." Why, she will have to go without food all day to-morrow; she will have to work all day to-morrow before she recovers those two mites. And you may depend upon it the Lord would strengthen her so to do. So, then, if there be any among you of this Judas, Sapphira, Ananias-like spirit, may Jesus Christ dispossess you of such a spirit, bring you into your right mind; and it is never too late to mend while you are living. Now suppose you of such a Sapphira, Ananias-like spirit were going to die to-night,—and you do not know you are not,—and to meet your Judge to-night, do you think he could gratulate you, and say, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me"? Do you think he could? Be assured of this. Your creed may be as sound as a bell, and your faith

may appear as strong as a lion; at the same time, faith that hath not works is dead, being alone, and so, to thy cost, thou wilt find it at the last.

But now I come to the more pleasing part. I will just say that the departed Mrs. Sarah Cooke was a good sample of the Surrey Tabernacle people. She was with us about twenty-five years, and it was at the Surrey Tabernacle that her soul was first brought out of darkness into light, out of bondage into liberty, out of guilt into mercy, to enjoy the liberty of the gospel. Her highly esteemed husband the Lord took to himself a little more than three years ago, and his death was happy. They were both members; I had the honour of baptizing them both, and they were true friends to the cause. Mrs. Sarah Cooke worked hard personally in her business, and she told me herself that she would have left her business some time ago, but she said, "I should like first to go on, and work hard to see the debt of the Surrey Tabernacle entirely paid off, and when I can see that paid off, then," she said, "I think I shall retire from my business," because her health had not been very good even for many years. These were her feelings. And the poor will deeply miss her; and the cause will miss her, spiritually and temporally. Spiritually, because she was a praying soul, a truth-loving woman. And I do not believe that she did, during the whole of that twenty-five years, ever utter one word of disrespect towards her minister, or ever sanction any one else doing so. And as to the magazines, and paltry monthly journals, and squibs and letters that were written against me on the Rahab question, why, they were all to her what they were to you—like feathers against a stone wall. She remained unmoved. She felt that God brought her to London, that God brought her to the Surrey Tabernacle, that God gave her the business, that God gave her prosperity in the business, that God gave her a heart to join with you, and to do as you have done, and will, I am sure, to the uttermost do.

I am not taking the departed as an exception, but as a sample of the main body of the Surrey Tabernacle people. I solemnly declare if I did not see the building before my eyes, and knew well that you owe not so many hundreds as you did thousands—were not these actual facts before me, I never could have believed that you could, in so short a time, have done what you have. But again, she understood the truth well, abode by it, never deviated from it or thought of doing so, and for consistency she could not be surpassed by any one. Unblemished was the reputation with which she went down to the grave.

I saw her about an hour and a half before she died, and she was too happy to believe she was dying, and she did not believe she was dying. Happiness filled her soul, and brought a parting smile upon her countenance, and she fell asleep in Jesus without a sigh, without a groan. Her religion was vital; her religion was practical; her soul was safe; her death was as happy and easy as any death any Christian could wish to die. There are a great variety of manners and diseases by which people die; but here was an instance of the peculiar mercy of the Lord.

And now I will just say a word or two, in all affection, to the survivors. The secret, I may say to you her dear relatives, of her love to me as a Christian minister, and her love to this people (for this people was her people), and to God, and to his truth, and to his ways,—the secret of it all was the mercy which by Jesus Christ she had obtained. Here the word was blessed to her from time to time. Hundreds of times during those five-and-twenty years her poor heart was cheered, strengthened, and delighted; and that which the Lord made her delight at the first—namely, himself—was her delight at the last. And it is my solemn prayer to the Lord that you, the worthy young couple—the nephew of the deceased, into whose hands her business has come, may be led in the same path. And I am sure in the last hour and a half of her mortal existence you must have seen the hand of the Lord. You see in what a position things

were, and you see how, by a sudden astonishing turn of Providence, everything came into accordance with her wishes in that respect; you know what those wishes were. You therefore, I trust, will not look at it as merely happening by chance. You may look around and say, there are many other things happen like it. Very true; and where these things happen, people do not see the hand of the Lord, and so they walk off, and pay no respect to the Lord. And I am glad you have taken two sittings here, with a desire, so far at any rate, to walk in the steps of your dear departed relative. May the Lord bless you both with a saving knowledge of his dear name, keep you listening to his truth, bless you, and your offspring as well, and that ere long we may have the happiness of seeing you both come forward and say, Now I can understand the religion of my dear departed aunt. She loved you most sincerely, as she has shown; and your conduct towards her, from her own testimony has been, I know, most praiseworthy. I respect you for it, I admire it very much. May God Almighty bless you and your offspring; bless the work of your hand, guide you and guard you, and that you may be brought into the same salvation, the same truth, the same mercy; then you will understand the whole of it. I am glad, I say, that you have taken two sittings in the chapel, and I hope nothing will tempt you to cease from coming. Walk in the way; for, saith one of old, "I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." And the other dear relatives, may the Lord bless you, make the solemn event sink down deep into your hearts. While to those of you that know not the Lord, it is a mystery why she should cleave to us as she did, while she should feel so much interested as she did. But the whole of the mystery is, as I have said, the mercy and the salvation which she realized. What I have here said of one is true of other departed friends.

Now I have not entered into very minute particulars in relation to the history of any. I do not think it altogether profitable to do so. But mind this—the Lord does intend us to feel these things. Ah, some may say, never mind the loss of Mrs. Sarah Cooke, and of Mrs. So-and-So; the Lord will make it up. I cannot so treat it. I know he will. But when he takes a friend away he makes us feel the miss of that friend; and it is to discipline us—no doubt about that; it is to do us good; it is to remind us upon what a slight tenure we hold everything that is under the sun. I could pray—*could* pray, did I say?—I *do* pray that, if the Lord's will, it may be the lot of you all to be led into an understanding of our text. Whatever you may lose, whatever may be taken from you, oh, if thou art a believer in Jesus Christ, and canst say, Lord, I do not know anything; do in mercy teach me; I do not understand this gospel; Lord, teach me. I do not understand this man; I believe he means well, but I do not understand him; Lord, teach me;—if the Lord is pleased to create such prayers and feelings in your mind, then you will come ere long into an understanding of our text—"My kindness." What is the kindness of God? Lovingkindness. It is the kindness of infinite love; it is the kindness of everlasting love; it is the kindness of immutable love. "My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed." What is his covenant? Why, his covenant is, that he will never leave you nor forsake you. And what can give you so much peace as having the Lord with you? It may well be called the covenant of peace, engaging in covenant decision never to leave you nor to forsake you. And then mark the close—"saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Then do not go away this evening and say, It would be all very well for me to take a little comfort from that text, but I am a guilty sinner; I have hitherto lived without Christ and without God. I have never feared him; I have never prayed; I have never felt concerned about him. Well, then, if that be your feeling, think of the close of our text—"the Lord that hath mercy." Why, Jesus Christ

came into the world on a mission of mercy; the gospel is a message of mercy; the minister is a preacher of mercy—that mercy that is from everlasting to everlasting.

Look at this kindness, the stability of this covenant, and the certainty of this mercy, as shown in after parts of this same 54th chapter of Isaiah! See into what divine stability it brings the soul! In righteousness shalt thou be established, rooted and grounded in the righteousness which is by faith—so as not to be moved away from the hope of the gospel. Here we have victory over the oppressor—here the Lord our God, in kindness, in covenant, in mercy, is on our side, so that we have nought to fear. Here—

“The terrors of law and of God
With us can have nothing to do,
The Saviour’s obedience and blood
Hide *all* our transgressions from view.”

It is true that we must, as we thus stand in the faith, expect opposition; but then that opposition will not be to our harm, but to our good. It is the enemy who must fall; not the three worthies, but their accusers; not Daniel, but his enemies; not Mordecai, but Haman; not the true and faithful Jews, but their would-be murderers; not the Saviour, but his deadly foes. He rises again, but they are fallen never to rise above their sin and woe. And universal is the sweep which the besom of destruction makes of every enemy of the truth and people of God,—it matters not whether they are high or low, few or many, whether Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, or Belshazzar, or Herod, or men of the baser sort, Acts vi. 11; and again Acts xvii. 5, *whosoever* shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake,—the Saviour having given himself for them what is there needful to be done that he will not do for them? How then can *any* weapon finally prosper against them? Not a dog shall be able with effect to move his tongue against them. This is their heritage; while in the Lord they have eternal righteousness and everlasting strength.

Thus, then, I have tried to set forth these three things:—First, the way in which the Lord carries on his cause on earth, and the blessing he attaches to the services of his people. Secondly, that our departed sister was led into these truths, as the secret of all the practical love she showed to God, and to the poor, and to the cause. And thirdly, that our text contains a remedy for all our woe. And you may depend upon it we shall need this sympathy of the Lord; we shall need this covenant promise; we shall need this mercy.

But, after all, I cannot close without saying we have gained our point. Our object was to get the departed—all the departed ones—to heaven. They are got there. Our object is to get you there; and you that love a Saviour’s name, you will get there. Our object is to get there. The Lord has various ways of comforting you. Sometimes he will spare a friend a little longer. There was one man the apostle Paul felt he could not part with. Ah, he says, if I lose that man, what shall I do? Now that man, Epaphroditus, had been of great use to him. He carried the gifts from the Philippians to the apostle Paul. And the devil never lets people give the minister anything if he can help it. Oh, it will make him lazy, set him too free, says the devil, relieve him from anxiety. The apostle felt he could not part with Epaphroditus, and he says, “Indeed he was sick nigh unto death; but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.” So, then, those that have a little more work to do the Lord will spare till that work is done, and when the work is done they must depart.

May it be our happy lot, then, so to come into the service of God as to have on our side the declaration of our text, that “My kindness,” saith the everlasting God, “shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”