

WISE COUNSEL

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning June 30th, 1867

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AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 9 Number 450

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:13

ALL the advice which the Lord gives is to our own interest; and when we can see that, it will have the greater weight with us. He never advises us to anything that is not especially to our own good. Even by our sin we cannot hurt him; for “if you sin, what do you unto him?” You cannot dethrone him, you cannot move him, you cannot spoil him of any of his happiness. And “if you be righteous, what give you him?” or “what receives he of your hand?” He is therefore altogether, in his own entity, in his own eternal being, perfectly happy, and cannot be made any the worse for what men may do, or any the better. And yet, though he be thus independent, happy in his own eternity, and though there be an infinity of disproportion between him and us, yet he condescends to look upon that man that is poor in spirit, that is humble, and that trembles at his word; and he has by the incarnation of the divine word; he has, by the work of his dear Son, and he does, by the putting forth of his power, and bringing us near unto himself, unite us to him in his infinity and eternity, into a spiritual, vital, saving connection with himself. Hence, then, our text is a very loving, gracious, and kind scripture. It is the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of his servant Peter, speaking unto us; and he is also speaking unto us by the Lord Jesus Christ, for the grace is to be brought unto us “at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” And of course, he is speaking unto us by the good will of God the Father, for this grace being brought unto us by the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing else but expressive of the good-will of the Father. We may therefore look at our text as a fourfold lesson of instruction from our triune Jehovah, Father, Word, and Holy Ghost. The Lord help me to go through these four parts in a way that shall be profitable unto us, and glorifying unto that God who of his own good pleasure has thus condescended to take us up into this wondrous relation with himself, and to speak unto us as to his children, unto his loved, chosen, and redeemed children; to speak unto us as those that shall be with him, and he with us, while the countless ages of eternity shall roll along.

First, then, *preparation*, “Gird up the loins of your mind.” I get this thought from the 12th chapter of Exodus. When the Israelites were about to leave Egypt, and to partake of the Passover, it is said, “And thus shall you eat it with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, your staff in your hand;

and you shall eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover." You will observe that all this indicates their preparation to leave Egypt. I shall therefore first describe what it is to be prepared to leave this world, what it is to be prepared to die; and then as I go along, I will show the analogy between the way in which the Israelites left Egypt, and the way in which the dying Christian leaves this world. Now you observe that the Israelites departed out of Egypt without dying; but the firstborn of the Egyptians left Egypt by dying, they were slain. Pharaoh and his host, in a sense, left Egypt by dying; but the Israelites left without dying. So, the Christian lives in God's love, Christ is the Christian's life; "one with Jesus." And though we shall have to die as to the body when we leave this world, yet we shall not have to die spiritually. This is what the Savior means when he says, "He that believes in me shall never die." With the Christian death is only a shadow. Their path as they left Egypt was overshadowed with death, take the sea as the symbol of death. Their path was overshadowed, but it was but a shadow. But to Pharaoh and his host it became substance. This is called in the 11th of Isaiah the girdle of righteousness, "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins;" that is, that which shall brace up the mind, and prepare it to leave this world. Righteousness, what a sweet thought! The very word itself, when viewed there in its proper meaning, is full of fragrance, full of everything that is blessed. Hear what the same prophet says of it in another scripture, that "the work of righteousness" and you know whose righteousness this is, that it means the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, "the work of righteousness shall be peace;" peace with God, bless his holy name for that; peace with Jesus Christ; peace in the soul, peace with heaven, peace with eternity; whatever wars there may be in other directions, all is tranquil there "the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever." To be prepared to leave this world is to be made acquainted with Christ's righteousness; to let that be, as it were, the girdle of our loins; let that be our strength, let that brace us up, let that embolden us; because it is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ that puts everything right between us and God. Now you that know the Lord knows very well, if that one point be cleared up, that you are a receiver of Christ's righteousness, and you are a believer in it, that that righteousness really is imputed to you, that it is set to your account; and of course that carries the other truth with it, that if that righteousness be set to your account, then all your sins were set to his account; and your sins consequently are gone, and you are complete in him. Let the Lord be with you by this righteousness, then you will see and feel that you are prepared to leave this world. Ah, you may say then:

"Come, welcome death, I'll gladly go with you."

The next feature of this preparation is that of faithfulness, "And faithfulness shall be the girdle of his reins." To be acquainted with what Jesus Christ has done, that justification is by faith in his righteousness that it is unto all and upon all them that believe. "Now to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly," this is the way the Lord appears to his people, this is the way in which they are safe. Oh, to be unfaithful in this! Let me here just say you cannot be too serious, too earnest, too faithful, too particular, in standing out for this infinitely delightful truth, that in the Lord alone have you righteousness and strength. Ah, then, if you have not the girdle of faithfulness, your conscience will tell you that one doctrine suits you as well as another; and that Satanic lies, if they serve your present purpose, will do for you as well as God's eternal truth. Thus, while you have the righteousness of Christ professedly, yet, if you are not sincere in it and decided for it, and feel that you must and will, God enabling you, stand fast in the liberty you have by that righteousness, then it is of no avail. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,

who walk” not after unbelief, but after the faith, “not alter the flesh,” or carnal enmity against God, but in reconciliation to him. So that if your conscience bear you testimony of these two things, first, that his righteousness is that that strengthens you; secondly, that you can truly say, as in the sight of God, that you can listen to nothing else, you have no refuge anywhere else; you have no life, no light, no peace anywhere else, however feasible the so called good works and systems of men may be, and however many scriptures they may bring apparently to build up their systems, if you are taught of God you will come to the conclusion that the life you now live is by the faith of the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you. Thus, so far you are prepared to die. “These all died in faith;” prepared to leave the Egypt of this world. Thirdly, this girdle is spoken of as the girdle of truth. “Having your loins girt about with truth.” Now let us go back again to the Israelites. There was a certain truth with which they walked, braced up, as it were, and encouraged. And I must refer to those Israelites that understood the promise of God to Abraham of their deliverance. The right-minded Israelites would see that the promise of God to Abraham was positive as to their salvation from Egypt; they would lay hold of and abide by that promise, and that would strengthen them. So, the Lord said to Abraham that in him and his seed, namely, Christ Jesus, should all the nations of the earth be blessed. So that if I am rightly taught, then I shall put on the sworn promise, the truth of the gospel, and that will enable me to leave the world happily. Now, in order to be prepared to die, to be prepared for heaven, you must bare these three things: you must have the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you must have a faithful heart to abide by him, to evidence that you are born of God; for it is unto such that the Lord will say, “Well done, you good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.” And then, thirdly, you must have God’s truth; there must be a reception of his yea and amen promise; there must be a reception, to the exclusion of all others, of his sworn promise. “You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden parts you shall make me to know wisdom;” that is, make me to know Christ; and in the soul where the truth is received Christ is thus known. Thus, then, the girdle stands as one of the signs and symbols of preparation to leave Egypt. They thus became prepared to leave Egypt; how they left we will presently notice. And what is there to equal this, namely, preparation for death? Because if you are prepared to die, you are prepared for heaven; “absent from the body, present with the Lord.” I will, at the hazard of sameness, just repeat those three again, namely, that you must be brought to feel and see that your own righteousness’s and doings are as filthy rags, and that you must receive the testimony of what Christ has done; that is, the wedding garment; and then, secondly, that you must be sincere, sacredly so, in the sight of a heart-searching God, to this blessed gospel which you receive, or in other words, to the Lord himself; and then, thirdly, you must receive his sworn, his yea and amen truth. I will here quote one scripture, which, though I have so often named, I have never named with all the emphasis I could wish; it does appear to me to be of infinite importance, namely, where the Lord lays in the new covenant, not in the old, “I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them in their hearts;” now just notice, and where “put these laws in their minds and write them in their hearts, there their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” Now that is the language of the new covenant. We are apt sometimes to be misled by the word “law;” but, brethren, know you not that faith is called a law? Know you not that love is called a law? Know you not that the perfect freedom we have in Christ is called a law? Know you not that the eternal priesthood of Christ is called a law? Now what is the law of faith? Why, the law of faith is this, “He that believes has everlasting life;” and “he that believes shall be saved.” And what is the law of love, love to this covenant God? Why, the law of love is that “eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor entered into the heart of man, the things which God has”, in this new covenant order of things, “prepared for

them that love him.” And what is the law of liberty? Why, you are set free from every spot, wrinkle, blemish, blame, or any such thing, and the blessed God would no more think of laying a fault to your charge than he would to the charge of his dear Son. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” God laid all the sins of all the people to the charge of Christ, and he has put them all away. Here is the law of love, the law of faith, the law of liberty, and the law of Christ’s priesthood. There is a change of priesthood, therefore there must be a change of law. By the new priesthood, the priesthood of Christ, the law of sin is changed, and the law of death is changed, and the law of God is changed, and the law of tribulation is changed, everything is changed. How is the law of sin changed? Why, by the first priesthood the law of sin was to reign over us, for those sacrifices could not take away sin; but when Christ’s sacrifice comes in, then sin loses its power; and so, it is no longer in the power of the law of sin to keep people away from God. Christ has put that away from them that kept them away from God; and so, the law of sin is changed. The law of death is changed. The natural law of death is to deprive us of everything; but the Savior has changed that for us, to die is gain. The law of tribulation is changed, for the natural tendency of tribulation is to drive men to destruction; but by the coming in of the work of Christ tribulations work together for good instead of bringing about destruction. And the law of God is changed in its aspect. Without Christ it is a fiery law, as at Sinai; but by Jesus Christ it is a quiet law, as in the ark in the tabernacle, when engraved on the tables of stone. The law, therefore, is as quiet as death itself. Ah! what a mighty change is brought about by this wondrous work of Christ. But again, how did the Israelites leave Egypt? By the difference, the Lord made between them and others; that is how it was they left Egypt without dying. And just so now, the Lord has made us to differ from what we were. We speak of differing from others, but perhaps it is quite as profitable a way to look at ourselves, and to see how we are made to differ from what we were; for the Scriptures do instruct us to look back to what we were, and to see the change wrought, how the Lord has opened our eyes, and so opened them as to make us love the light and turn to the light. And then, secondly, it was not only by the difference the Lord made, but also by the paschal lamb. Just so now the Lord has enlightened us and turned us towards the light of his eternal mercy; and then in came the Paschal Lamb, Christ Jesus. By his precious blood we get out safely. There was no death, not one was smitten, and the angel of death did not touch one. And then, thirdly, by the attractions of the cloud. And this cloud I take to be, as heretofore, a figure of God’s blessed truth; and in that blessed truth there is the Angel of the everlasting covenant. And then, fourthly by the protection of the cloud. The Israelites as they were departing were very much alarmed. There were the Egyptian hosts close upon them. And it is not at all unlikely that some of you, how many of you I cannot say, it may be my own lot, I cannot tell, when you come to die, when you are on a dying bed, the Lord, for purposes that he understands, will let all your heart sins, lip sins, life sins, errors and mistakes, come up before your eyes, and you shall see no Christ, no salvation, no light; all your sins will be with you, and the scene shall be awful. Many a child of God the Lord has thus dealt with just before their departure. Oh, what a scene! Every sin has become a fiery serpent, every sin has become a thundercloud, every sin has become like a mountain, every sin seems to secure and make sure of the eternal damnation of the soul. But I have never known an instance yet where such is the case, but just before you depart the cloud comes in. The Lord interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptians, and they never saw one of those Egyptians afterwards, except when they saw some of them dead upon the seashore. “The Egyptians whom you have seen today you shall see no more forever.” Ah, the oppressed soul then rises, like a sinking ship just going down, all at once, by some mysterious hidden law, it springs up, and darts forward as though it was sensible of the danger it was in, and of the destruction it has escaped. So many a dying Christian has been thus

dealt with, and before he has left the body his happiness has been greater than he could bear. The sudden incoming of the Angel of the covenant, the sudden hiding of every one of his sins, and the sudden presentation of the Lord in all his love, mercy, power, goodness, have made the soul happier than it was miserable. Now it can triumph, rejoice, and glory in the Lord, and sing, even as it passes through the valley of the shadow of death, "I will fear no evil." So, then, you know not what struggles await you yet. People that have been near death, that have been almost drowned and have recovered, they have told us about some strange things upon this very subject. It is a great mystery. If what I am now saying be true, we may well pray with the apostle, "That I might know him." We shall want Jesus Christ then and we know not how far we shall want him; we may want him farther than we think. But bless the Lord! if he should so deal with us in our departing hour, we shall be in no danger from it. Not a hoof was left behind; yes, said David, there was not a feeble one among them, not one was destroyed. The Lord stepped in, the enemy was beaten back, and all was well. So, they left Egypt, then, without dying by the difference which the Lord had made between them; second, by the paschal lamb: third, by this interposing power; and then fourth, by dividing the sea. There was the display of his power in making a way for them to pass over, and by his presence, there was his presence, and what cannot the presence of the Lord do?

Now I might have gone this morning in other directions upon this subject; but I somehow or another, not from any outward circumstance whatever, but simply from my own feelings, have felt disposed to speak thus, because I thought it would be pleasant to those that know the Lord to think, Well, if I live I am the Lord's, and if I die I am the Lord's; and if preparation for death, to leave this world without dying spiritually, consist in thus receiving Christ, in thus being sincerely decided for God in this order of things, and receiving his truth in the love of it; if these are pledges and assurances, if these be the grounds, if these are the signs that I am prepared to die, and that the Lord will be with me; if he should allow hosts of sins to be at my heels just as I am dying, yet he knows what they are doing; he is there, and he will step in in time and will give me the victory. I thought it was worth our while to contemplate the same. And I have felt a solemn desire that those of you (for I cannot think that you are all Christians) that are not Christians may see, if it be the Lord's will, the awfulness of knowing nothing of receiving God's sworn truth into your heart, for without this there can be no acceptance: without holiness, and without righteousness, and without truth, no man can see the Lord; and the only holiness by which you can see the Lord is the cleansing blood of the Lamb, the only righteousness by which you can see the Lord is the righteousness of Christ, and the only truth by which you can see the Lord is his own sworn covenant. None ever got to heaven any other way, or ever will.

Secondly, I notice *the consideration*, "Be sober." Now I will not handle this part of our discourse literally, by exhorting you not to be drunkards. I should feel I was insulting you; because "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires (for so it ought to be rendered), We should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world; looking for that blessed hope;" ah, it is a blessed hope; all other hopes are blighted hopes, but here is a blessed hope, "and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us" came into our place, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity." Our iniquity brought us under a demand from divine justice that we should suffer eternally, but Christ has paid off the debt of suffering we owed by taking our suffering into his own person; he himself has suffered our sufferings, he himself has suffered our curse, he himself has suffered our wrath, the wrath due to us; he himself has suffered the bitterness of death,

taken the sting away; he gave himself for us, his infinite self for a poor, mortal, dying creature like you. His little finger, I was going to say had more worth in it than your whole person. Yet he gave himself, God, and man, for you; hereby God becomes your God. "And that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." There are two orders of good works of which these people are zealous. First, the good works of the Lord; they are all zealous of them, and they shall proclaim the works of the Lord. Also, they are zealous of all those good works that the gospel commands. I think as a people, and God forbid I should get old and stupid, and begin to flatter you, but I think as a people your works praise you in the gates. I need not say a word of what you have done for the poor, and what you have done in erecting such a house as this for God, and what you have done privately; it altogether satisfies my mind. I bless the Lord, whatever few exceptions there may be among you, and I think those exceptions are really so few as not to be worth naming, that he has made you zealous for the good works of the Lord, and that you love to hear those works from time to time proclaimed; and he has made you zealous for every gospel work, every work of brotherly love and gospel faith; not in the spirit of the slave, no, I hate all that, but in the spirit of the freeman. Now there is a great pleasure in sobriety. But let us come to the essential. There is such a thing, of course, as being drunk mentally or spiritually, and that is the way you must deal with this second part. A drunken man is very foolish, yet conceited; and he is quarrelsome, and hazardous, and he would lie down and go to sleep anywhere. First, he is foolish, and yet very conceited. Now there is not a man nor a woman under the canopy of heaven, apart from God's grace, that is not a spiritual drunkard, not one. "I will make them drunk in my fury." People think themselves wise in the wisdom of this world while they are mentally drunk; that man was mentally drunk when he said, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years eat, drink, take your ease." We will have the big barns, and a long life. The man was mentally drunk. If he had been spiritually sober, he would have said, "If the Lord will;" and he would have said, This is a poor subject, to eat and drink, and take my ease here. What ease shall I get? How long will it last? Ah, the words were hardly out of his mouth before the sentence came, "You fool, this night shall your soul be required of you; and then who's shall these things be?" Be you not therefore like unto him; you look for ease in the Lord; you look for treasure in the Lord. Then, again, in all ages men have thought themselves very wise in opposing God's truth; very conceited over it. They persecuted the prophets; but it turned out at last it was foolishness and conceit. They thought themselves very wise in the clever way in which they condemned and crucified the Savior; but they found out at last it was foolishness. They were all drunk. So, then, the evidence of the mean and spiritually drunken state of men is first, that they either prefer the world to God and godly things; or else, if they make a zealous profession, they nevertheless oppose God's truth. Now, then, if we are sober, we shall see that eternal things infinitely outweigh time things; and we shall receive God's blessed truth, and acknowledge it is all of grace from first to last, and thus be sober. That Saul of Tarsus is drunk, mentally and spiritually drunk; no use to talk to him. Ah, he is not so now; I have made him sober; I have brought him to his senses; you go. "Behold, he prays; and he is a chosen vessel unto me." So, Ananias went, and found it was some use to talk to that man. It is a mercy, then, to be made a sober-minded man, to leave off quarrelling with God's truth, to come into sweet acquiescence with it, and to love it. The drunken man, also, is a very hazardous man; he will run into anything, do anything. It is a vice that includes every other evil. The man does not care what he does. And the ungodly man does not care what he does to his own soul; he does not care how much wrath he treasures up against the day of wrath; he does not care how he rushes in upon the thick bosses of Jehovah's bucklers; he is a very hazardous man, rushing into hell, and does not know what he is about. But when God lays hold of a sinner, he says, What have I been doing? I

have been like the mad Gadarene; I have been dwelling among the tombs, the congregation of the dead; I have been wounding myself, cutting myself; friends have tried to put me right; but no, nothing would tame me. But the Lord has tamed me. Now he begins to be careful. What will become of my soul? Where shall I be when death shall come? Where shall I be when judgment shall overtake me? No longer now conceited, no longer now quarrelsome, no longer now reckless, no longer now rushes on, neither fearing God nor regarding man; he does it both now, fears God and regards man. The drunken man will lie down anywhere, go to sleep anywhere. How many have lost their lives here! Ah, just so the man that is spiritually drunk will lie down upon his own righteousness; any religion will do for him. But when made sober, then such can rest nowhere but where the flock of Christ rests. When made sober, then the language is, "Tell me, O you whom my soul loves, where you feed, where you make your flock to rest at noon." Let me rest nowhere, Lord, but in your love, in your salvation, in your promise, in your power; and if I am enabled to rest there, I shall rest in safety. Said the Lord, "They shall lie down in safety, and none shall make them afraid." How much kind advice is given in this little clause, "Be sober." What shall I say, I do not know what to say, to the Lord's mercy in blessing so many of you with this sobriety of mind, and making you thoughtful, careful, decided, zealous, and from time to time enabled thus to honor the Lord. I am sure sometimes on a Sunday evening, when I look at the fact that many of you are shut up perhaps all the week in business, and many of you kept up, perhaps, till past the middle of the night on Saturday, and yet on a Sunday night to see pretty well two thousand people here, instead of your going out for a ride, or a walk, or a little recreation, sacrifice all this, which the world would of course say was very proper, very natural, sacrifice it all, and come to the house of God, there must be something somewhere, there must be a good feeling, there must be a sober feeling; or else you would naturally say, It is a beautiful evening, I will have a nice excursion. But then where will the soul be? Will the Lord be with me? If I do this, Will it not gain such dominion over me that by slow degrees I shall forsake the house of God? And then, if the Lord should withdraw his hand from me, where shall I be? This sobriety of mind does us infinite good, better perhaps than we are aware of. Bless the Lord, then, for these manifestations of his mercy.

And now just a word upon *the decision*, "Hope to the end." There is another reading of this given in the margin, "Hope perfectly;" because the original word will bear the two ideas, "hope to the end," and "hope perfectly." We will combine the two; and then it stands thus, that your hope is to be in the perfect work of Christ. There you hope to the end of sin, for sin is ended; there you hope to the end of death, for death is ended; there you hope to the end of wrath, for wrath is ended; there you hope to the end of trouble, for trouble is ended; "they shall not sorrow any more at all;" that is not as they stand in Christ. So, let your hope be there. And then to hope to the end of course means to continue to hope in the perfect work of Christ unto the end. "Be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." Now, to my mind, this is very beautiful, that there is a way in which we are to hope in God where sin is legally ended already; wherein the law is magnified, and all is settled already; wherein tribulation is legally and virtually ended already; wherein death is already swallowed up in victory; wherein the promise is already confirmed. So that all your troubles are nothing but shadows, and so you will find them if you are enabled to do just the contrary to what you do sometimes. What is that? Why, you put the Lord out of your trouble and bring yourself into it. Shimei cursing David would have been a terrible trouble to him; but David brought the Lord into it, and so it gave him no concern. Job's trouble would have been a thousand times worse to him if he had brought the devil and himself in and put the Lord out. But he said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away." Satan did it, he did it only as God suffered him; for "Satan goes

about seeking whom he may devour.” The Lord gave Satan permission to devour me in all the respects in which he has devoured me; the Lord has a good end in view; I am sure of that, and so “blessed be the name of the Lord;” it is all right. “Hope to the end,” and “hope perfectly;” perfect in Christ; everything is ended. Every one of your sins were ended before they began; every one of your troubles were ended before they began; and death was ended for you before it began with you, yes; the Lord was beforehand with you; you do not know how good our God is.

But lastly, *the prospect*, “For the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” I will just name three thoughts here hastily. First, what favors were brought to the Israelites when Moses appeared! Just so, when the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to us, the revelation of the Savior to us brings us all the exemption from judgment, all the salvation, all the victory, and all the freedom we could need. And when the good deeds of Mordecai came to light, and he was revealed in his exaltation it turned the tide of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, united into one great empire; the whole tide of all those kingdoms was against the feeble Jews; but when Mordecai was exalted then see what favor came to the Jews. Just so Jesus Christ; his good works are brought to light, and his bad ones cannot be, for he never had any; he did no sin: his work is brought to light, the mighty tide is turned. Now, says Haman, I mean to show openly that I have conquered Mordecai and the Jews. But the Lord ordered it otherwise. Just what Haman meant to do to Mordecai, Mordecai was the means of doing to Haman. Satan crucified the Savior. Ah, says Satan, now I mean to demonstrate to the whole world that I have conquered that Jesus of Nazareth and all his people. But instead of this, the Savior did with Satan just what Satan meant to do with the Savior; for the Savior conquered Satan, and millions of precious souls are the trophies of his wondrous victory. And there is old Satan now hung up so high that everyone may see that he is hanged and gibbeted; everyone may hear his chains rattle, everyone may know that he is conquered; that the mighty tide of hell, of sin, and death, is turned, that things are now set in our favor; we shall go swimmingly on until we sail triumphantly into our desired haven.