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# Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

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A RICH KINGDOM FOR POOR PEOPLE.

## A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 20<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSBY STREET.

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*"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for their's is the kingdom of heaven."—Matthew v. 3.*

THESE notes of distinction are one of the most difficult parts of true religion to read out. To know who is born of God and who is not is very difficult indeed. It is very difficult to say how far natural conviction, without the grace of God in the heart, and without regeneration, may go. It is difficult to say how far a person may go in confessing that he is a sinner, and at the same time be destitute of that poverty of spirit that makes way for the kingdom of heaven. And yet at the same time, while I thus speak, this note of distinction—that of the poor—is to the tried, and the spiritually poor, made conscious of what they are—one perhaps of the most encouraging features given in all the word of God. When the child of God is reduced so low that he seems to have no will, no desire, and seems as dead as he well can be, and scarcely has concern enough to say—

*"Hardly, sure, can they be worse  
That never heard his name;"—*

he seems to wander about, as David says in his 102nd Psalm, like a pelican of the wilderness, or like an owl of the desert, or like a sparrow alone upon the house top; he seems driven from every evidence of interest in eternal things but this one, and this one he cannot under any circumstances be driven from;—at all times more or less his leanness rising up in him bears witness that he is a poor, lost, depraved, helpless sinner; that he has no more help in him than an autumnal leaf or a blade of grass. Such people at all times more or less recognise this; but there is at the same time so much sin and wretchedness in the experience of such, that for want of judgment in these matters they take all these to be evidences against them. And yet at the same time this breaking up

of the fountains of the great deep within is to make us come to where the Lord has said his people shall come;—"Ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight, when I am pacified towards you;" and our God is never satisfied until he has made us low enough, and poor and wretched enough, and miserable enough, to receive what he hath provided for us. Not that any one knows his own poverty, misery, and wretchedness to perfection. There never was but one, and never will be, that entered into the full extent of our wretchedness, and misery, and poverty, and that is that Person who said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful;" yea, exceeding in sorrow all the people of God put together, and perhaps all the lost put together; for what he endured we shall perhaps never fully know. And it is this experience I shall have to deal with this morning that distinguishes the people of God from others, and makes them so glad of what the Lord has provided for them. Hereby their ears become closed against all false gospels, and nothing but that gospel, wherein the Lord himself satisfies the poor with bread, can satisfy the souls of the spiritually poor and needy.

We shall take our text in a threefold form. First, *the note of distinction*—"the poor in spirit." Secondly, *the remedy here presented*—"their's is the kingdom of heaven. Thirdly, I will look at the whole text as *an infallible testimony to the truth*.

First, *the note of distinction*. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." I do not feel disposed to dwell upon the poverty of spirit here spoken of apart from that to which that poverty leads those who are so taught as to know their own poverty. And therefore in those scriptures where this poverty is named there are things connected with it to which it leads the soul; so that if we are taught our real poverty, it will lead us to receive the same things; so that our receiving them will stand as an evidence that we are made to see our destitute condition and our need. Let us first take what is said of the Laodiceans, who were neither cold nor hot. We must understand this spiritually. They were neither cold nor hot towards God's truth. They were hot enough towards the world; they were warm enough towards the things of time. Everything seemed to have gone well with them temporally, and therefore just a little religion to keep up a decent appearance was all they cared about. The language of the majority of them was, "I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." That must be taken, I think, in a twofold sense. First, in a temporal sense—everything was easy and smooth; and secondly, they were got by this temporal prosperity into a very pharisaic state—"rich, and have need of nothing." Let us hear what the Saviour saith as to their real condition. There were some among them alive from the dead, and the Lord set before them their real condition, in order to convince them of their need. "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched." Now, in the 2nd Psalm, God the Father saith to the Saviour, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." When God takes a sinner in hand, he dashes all that sinner's

Pharisaism, his false confidences, his idols, all to atoms; and the man is torn all to pieces. He feels he is a poor wretch, that in himself he is an infidel, an atheist, a devil, a beast;—"I was as a beast before thee;" and there is nothing degrading to which such is not willing to compare himself. "Wretched!" Ah, he says, I am a poor, wretched, undone, miserable creature. Talk of human merit, holiness, righteousness, or goodness! why, all mine has been as the early cloud and the morning dew, it is all gone; I am a wretch undone, and I can hardly believe the Lord will ever save such a wretch as I am. And yet this is the very man that God chooses and honours. Ah, but, says such an one, I am so rebellious (I do not say that all go the length I am now describing), my mind is full of blasphemous thoughts, and I have sometimes outwardly, and many times inwardly, cursed my very being. Now then, what is the remedy the apostle presents, when he himself tells us of himself, "O wretched man that I am!" After a few more words he brings in the remedy;—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." In myself, according to what I am, there can be nothing but condemnation; but as I stand in Christ there is nothing but justification; not a fault laid to my charge. "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable." Ah, is it not so with some of you? What miserable hours you have sometimes; miserable when you go to rest, miserable when you wake in the morning—some sort of foreboding; miserable when you attempt to read the Bible, miserable in hearing the word; and sometimes cross providences will come in and make you very miserable; and you will feel so unhappy you hardly know what to do with yourself. All this is to humble you, and to bring out what you are, that you may hereby learn what God can do. What is the remedy for this miserableness? Here it is:—"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished." What, are they so miserable that nothing but the fact that Jesus hath conquered every foe, and established eternal victory, and that that victory is received by precious faith—that nothing but this can be the remedy? "Her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned," before she knows it, hears of it, and receives it. "For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." In receiving Christ she receives grace here and glory hereafter; for the man that has thus savingly received Jesus Christ has thereby received all the grace he can need here and the glory that he is to have hereafter. See how the Saviour is the remedy, then, for the wretchedness and the misery. And then, not only wretched and miserable, but "poor," the language of our text. Where is the remedy for the poverty? Here it is. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich." Our sin is our poverty, for what is sin but a privation in every sense you can name? Christ took our sin, and in so doing took our privation, took our poverty, that we, through his poverty, might be made rich. "And blind." What is the remedy for the blindness? Jesus Christ, when he toucheth the eyes, when he is pleased to anoint the eyes with the eye-salve of his truth; for "the en-

trance of thy word giveth light;" it "giveth understanding unto the simple." Those who have eyes to see their own wretchedness, their own blindness, they want to see something else; and in due time what do they see? One of the most wonderful sights that can be seen;—they see that the great God has seen for them; and he so saw for them as to bless them with all spiritual blessings, after that order of things in which the blessings could not be lost, nor the people either; and that our God has seen for them as to what kind of a Saviour they need; and he has seen for them as to where they are, to what dangers while in a state of nature they are to be exposed; and how carefully he will make one thing tell upon another until they come to the time and to the place where he shall quicken their souls and bring them to know his name; and that our God has seen all the way through the wilderness for them. He has looked out our path for us; he has chosen our inheritance for us, he has chosen our eternal destiny for us. Once ascertain this, that the Lord foresees unmistakably, and has arranged everything that we might feel after him and find him, we then see that he has seen for us, and then we pray that we may see him ourselves as far as we can; that we may see Jesus in his adaptability, and see our God in the dear relations into which he has taken his people; and this will enable us to cast our care upon him. He sees clearly and unmistakably, and therefore he saith, "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known." There shall be some very crooked things, but I will make them straight; some very rough places, but I will make them plain; some very dark clouds, but I will turn them into light. And all this is done by the revelation to them of the Lord Jesus Christ. "And naked." Now if conscious of this, that we have nothing in which to appear before God, I will now name two scriptures;—if we have this real poverty of spirit we shall admire the one, and we shall join with the other. 61st of Isaiah;—the prophet was made conscious that the fall of man had stripped him of all holiness, and righteousness, and comeliness, in which he was created, and that now he could appear before his Maker with acceptance in nothing of his own; it must be something from heaven, something divine, something immortal, something that God himself hath wrought and revealed, and brings the soul into. The prophet recognised his acceptance in the beauty of Christ, in the charms and attractions of Christ, arraying the soul so beautifully and so gloriously before God; for "the king's daughter is all glorious within" by the work of the Holy Spirit, and by the righteousness of Christ; she sits at the king's right hand as arrayed in gold. The prophet saith, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God." What, in nothing else? No; it is in the Lord, in Jesus Christ, in my covenant God, in his love, choice, promises, and perfection. "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation;" he hath clothed me with the holiness of Christ as my sanctification, and has brought my soul into perfect and infallible harmony with his own pure nature; "he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness," and brought me into sweet harmony with all the demands of justice and the perfections of his nature; "as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." This is language he uses to denote the beautiful adornment of the soul before God. Oh, my hearers, those of you that do know your poverty, you cannot know too much of the meaning of those beautiful scriptures, one of which saith, "approved in Christ;" another of which saith, "accepted in Christ;" another of which saith, "The Lord is well pleased for Christ's

righteousness;" another of which saith, "that in this way the Lord will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel." Now the Lord teacheth those whom he makes sensible of what they are; he rebukes them for their worldly mindedness, and brings them out of it; he rebukes them in his dealings with them for their Pharisaism, and brings them out of it. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; he zealous therefore, and repent." "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire;" and what is that gold but faith; and such begin to cry, Lord, increase my faith, that faith that worketh by love, that faith that saveth the soul, that shall bring me the victory, that shall bring me into the embrace of God's eternal love. Lord, increase my faith, and let it be tried, let the trial be what it may; it may be sharp, and it may make me rebel; never mind, Lord; I would rather that than carelessness—

"More the treacherous calm I dread  
Than tempests bursting o'er my head."

See then, the remedy. Am I wretched? There is the remedy—in Christ, no condemnation. Am I miserable? The warfare is accomplished. Am I poor? Through his poverty I am made rich. Am I blind? In his light I see. Am I destitute of anything in which to appear before God? We read the account of the prophet, and we admire it, and say, Would that that was my experience; but it is not. Very well, there is something precedes that. If we cannot rejoice with Isaiah, in his 61st chapter, let us leave him, and tell him he has got on farther than we are; we should like to be where he is; and we will leave him, and go to one that perhaps will keep company with us for the present a little closer. We find one standing before the angel of the Lord, clothed with filthy garments. This angel of the Lord is the messenger of the new covenant; "even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." You delight in Christ as the messenger of the new covenant. What a paradox this seems. I venture to say there are Christians in the world, perhaps some in this congregation this morning, that can say they do delight in the dear Saviour as the messenger of the new covenant, and yet for the life of you you cannot call the Lord your's; you cannot say that he has yet clothed you as he did the prophet, you cannot say as yet that this God is your God; and yet you can say that there is something so pleasing in the Saviour being the messenger of the covenant that you do delight in that covenant, and in that mediation, and in that gospel; nothing else will do. Just so it was with Joshua; there he stood, and of course Satan at his right hand to resist him; but he could not move him; Joshua still remained. And just as the Lord came to Joshua, He will to you that are thus poor and needy. You will not wait in vain; the Lord will step in at an hour when you think not, to your unutterable delight. "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" and then comes the command to clothe him with change of raiment, to set a fair mitre upon his head, to denote the completeness of his consecration to God. "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged." So will the Lord appear to you in his own time; there is a set time to favor Zion. The Holy Spirit, saith Christ, "shall take of mine, and shew it unto you." If he is the Spirit of liberty, he brings the soul into liberty; and if he is the Spirit of promise, in his own time he will seal home the promise. Do not stop short of this; that is to say, do not content yourself without this. If you have it not yet, wait for it, for "the vision is for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not tarry." One more scripture upon this subject. "The Lord maketh poor;" that is, by stripping us, convincing us of our state; "and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill." I like that very much. I look back

at the time the Lord brought me down. Why, I said, I am a mere dunghill; my sins are a dunghill. The world to me was a dunghill; human life to me was wretched to the last degree. But shall I ever forget?—not to eternity—the 8th verse of the 54th of Isaiah: “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.” Those words came in, lifted me up, and made me as satisfied of the forgiveness of my sins and of God’s love to my soul as I am that I am standing here at this moment. I have never been thrown down from the truth from that day to this, and what is more, I never shall; no, the Lord will fulfil his own blessed word, “with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee.” Thus, then, “he lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory.”

Secondly. I notice *the remedy here presented*:—“their’s is the kingdom of heaven.” A great many things are here implied. It implies that they are children of God, that they are heirs of God; for, if the kingdom be their’s, the King is their’s, God is their’s; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Observe, that this kingdom means their eternal inheritance; and as they themselves are by the work of the Spirit conformed to the kingdom, whatever is said of the kingdom applies to them. One thing said of the kingdom is that there is no end to it: “He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.” Now those who are thus born of God, they cannot die any more. They died in the first Adam, but they can never die any more; they are alive, and that for ever. There is no end to the life, the joy, the glory they have before them. Secondly, if the kingdom be immovable, so are they. “They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.” Who can climb the heights of heaven, and get into the mind of God, and turn his love from you, or make him alter his choice? Who can undo the work of Christ? Who can shake a single promise in the Bible? The heavens and the earth may pass away, but God’s word shall not pass away. Thirdly, if it be said of this kingdom that it ruleth over all, what is said of them? “He that overcometh,” that is, by receiving Christ’s victory, “and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers.” There is not a combination against you, within or without, that shall not, by faith in Christ, be broken to shivers. “And I will give him the morning star,” that is, the ruling power, and Christ is the ruling power: he gives you himself, and gives you to be like him, for they that thus overcome shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. One more thought; it is a consecrated kingdom to God. There is no kingdom like it—a kingdom, as far as the people are concerned, formed by a world being taken out of another world. Hence, in the 19th of Exodus, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians;” how I left them to go on in their own way, and how I have dealt with them according to their sins; but I have not left you nor dealt with you according to your sins;—“and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.” Now comes the commencement of uncertainty as far as that people were concerned, but when taken in the new covenant sense, there we have real certainty. The Lord says, “If ye will obey my voice indeed.” Ah, say some, how do you get over that? In two ways: first, that Jesus Christ did obey God’s voice indeed; and secondly, that my faith receives him. Our obedience is the obedience of faith, faith receiving him. “And keep my commandments,” which Christ did literally, and we also by faith;—“then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people”—a high doctrine people; “for all the earth is mine, and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy

nation." Now hear Peter's comment upon this:—"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

I come now, lastly, to *the infallible testimony to the truth*. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven." Now remember that those who are born of God are born of an incorruptible seed, that liveth and abideth for ever. Now no affliction, no circumstance—and one I shall mention particularly this morning, that is, that of insanity, for a reason I shall presently state (I have a personal reason for so doing)—neither insanity nor any other affliction can destroy the immortality of the soul. Insanity destroys the exercise of reason, it distorts the mind, it harrows up mysterious feelings, and makes most of the subjects of that affliction very unhappy, generally throws them into a kind of despairing state. But then, if they are born of an incorruptible seed, that seed, we are told, liveth and abideth for ever. The Saviour here saith, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven." Take, for instance, a man that knew his poverty, believed the truth, loved the truth, and every one that knew him believed that he was a good man; but yet he was never able to call the Lord his;—we will suppose this. Suppose by-and-by hypochondriac feeling lay hold of the man; he becomes melancholy, and despairs of everything. By-and-by death overtakes him; he dies; and those with him try at the last to comfort him, and they say, "Jesus Christ came to seek and save that which was lost." The man says, "Very true; I believe it; but He did not come to save me; I am lost, I am lost." Well, now, is that man lost? Does not my text say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven." And then that man's disbelief—he does not disbelieve in the truth—mark that; he does not disbelieve in Christ; but he never did, and much less now can he believe that he is interested in him. Can that overturn the truth? Shall not that man go to heaven all the same? Now here, before I come round to the particular circumstance to which I wish to refer—one of our own hearers—I will just say there is a certain theory which some men form, and when anything takes place, contrary to that theory, of course the man's sent to hell directly. The theory is this: Some pretend to understand and know what the Lord will leave his people to, and what he will not leave them to; and so, as they undertake to say what he will not leave his people to, if any one of their's should happen to die in any of those circumstances to which they say the Lord will not leave his people, of course to maintain their theory the man is sent to hell. I will now say just a few words of encouragement, after I have just observed that a Christian friend, who had heard with us somewhere about 30 years, fell some time ago into a hypochondriacal state of mind, a depression of spirit, and that depression of spirit continued, and gained at last such mastery, that he despaired of everything; and when in his own comfortable house, with every comfort about him, he thought he had not a halfpenny to call his own, that he ought to be in the work-house—he despaired of everything. Now all this arose from physical disease. He died, but I had almost said that he left no testimony;—but he did; he left the testimony of his life. And when they said to him at the last, "Jesus Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost," he said, "Not for me;" and so he died. Well now, what am I to say to such a man as this? Am I to allow insanity, or anything else, to undo the work of Christ, the counsels of God, the work of the Holy Spirit? How many are afflicted in the same way. Was not our friend, Mr. Gosling, of Camberwell, taken with the same kind of affliction, and did he not die in the same state? And our poor afflicted friend, Drawbridge, who is now in that condition, if he should die as he is, without any manifestation of the Lord's mercy, he will die in apparent despair. But when the soul is born



of God, it is born of God. Now, some letters were written respecting our friend who died recently in this state. I have got a letter in my pocket, studiously and intentionally insulting. I would not have named it, only for the sake of saying a word of encouragement to any who may have friends dying in that state. This writer casts it upon me—says that I am the cause of the man dying in that state! Very nice, is it not?—very nice indeed. And the writer says, “What a mercy to be under better teaching.” No doubt it would be, for the better the teacher the better; I would never deny that. And he says that our departed friend could not feel that he was one of God’s elect. Election is a truth, the writer hints, not to be said much about. And therefore, as our friend could not feel he was one of the elect, he died in despair. This, therefore, is the way in which this writer treats the matter. It first shows what a nice position the minister stands in; whereas, in fact, nothing but mental disease was at the root of it all. With regard to election, what I have always said is this:—that where true experience is, it will bring you down low enough to receive all God’s truth in its new covenant order; and to feel I am one of God’s elect is to feel I have the characteristics of God’s elect. My text says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their’s is the kingdom of heaven;” and “the kingdom shall be given unto them for whom it is prepared.” For my part, believing as I do the man was a good man, I am not at all shaken. I do not feel it was my fault the man dying as he did; and when some of our people die exceedingly happy and triumphant, I do not feel that that is my doing; no, I do not. I feel that the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the death of the people of God, as well as in their life. I visited the man, and engaged in prayer with him, and felt liberty of soul; and I have heard others say that they did so too. I could have no reasonable doubt as to the man’s salvation. And therefore, if we allow that anything can undo the work, we had better give up our principles altogether. Let us therefore form no theory as to what the Lord will leave his people to, and what he will not leave them to. The truth is this—that grace can afford every thing but one. I know not of more than one thing that grace cannot afford; I know not of any other, and there I leave it, after I have quoted another scripture. The only thing grace cannot afford is to part with one redeemed soul; grace cannot afford that—no. God in the deeps of his sovereignty leaves people to mysterious afflictions, and during those afflictions they do mysterious things. There is not anything too hard for the Lord. However mysterious things are, he can understand them, and he brings them right. Grace can afford anything except that of parting with them; that it cannot afford, that it never will afford. I will just quote one scripture which ought to be encouraging. The apostle saith, in the 2nd of Hebrews, “That he might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage;” mark that, friends, “all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Our departed friend, Mr. Duprey, was under the affliction of aberration, partial aberration of mind—not wholly so, but partially, and that took a despairing turn. There was therefore in him a bondage through fear of death unto the last moment. But then, the scripture saith, “Absent from the body, present with the Lord.” For myself, I hate that mawkish belief that would allow that anything can undo the work where it is once begun. Our God’s work must prevail, His truth must prevail, and grace must reign.

So, then, the kingdom does belong to the poor in spirit, whether they see and feel it is theirs or not. The Saviour says it is theirs; and which of the two is to prevail—their afflictions or the testimony of God.