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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

FINAL JUDGMENT.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 26TH APRIL, 1868,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“And they were judged every man according to their works.”—REVELATION xx. 13.

THE Holy Scriptures are clear in pointing out a day, called the last day, in which the Saviour will descend with his mighty angels, for he it is that the Lord hath ordained to be judge of quick and dead; and he will judge the world in righteousness at that day. And there are but two rules of righteousness—the legal rule and the gospel rule. By the legal rule, or by the law, no man can be justified. Whatever the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, and the law never has, since the fall of man, and never will, say a good word for or to those that are under the law. On the other hand, those who are born of God, and have thus passed from death unto life, these are they that shall not come into condemnation. These are they that shall stand in the judgment; these are they to whom the victory shall be given, and that shall be found at the Saviour's right hand at the last.

I will at once, then, proceed to notice the subject before us; and in so doing I notice, first, *the secrecy of the time as to when this judgment is to be*. Secondly, *the rule of judgment as here declared*,—“they were judged every man according to their works.” Thirdly, *the opposite destiny of the two peoples*.

First, *the secrecy of the time as to when this judgment is to be*. No lightning flash ever did or ever will come more suddenly than will the judgment day. Whenever that time shall come, it will be as instantaneous as lightning. In the twinkling of an eye all the ungodly will be thrown into consternation; but not the people of God; for every child of God that is upon the earth shall be changed, and find himself quick as lightning on the Saviour's right hand, ranked and ranged with a number that no man can number, redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb. But let us look at that which may appear to be a sign and symptom of the last great day. While that sign is very instructive to read and to meditate upon, yet it is a sign perhaps that scarcely any one is capable of judging by. Let me first observe that in the 24th of Matthew, the 13th of Mark, and the 21st

of Luke, we have presented by the Saviour, forty years before it took place, the destruction of Jerusalem. There the Saviour laid down certain signs by which Christians might know the near approach of that destruction, and follow the Saviour's direction, and so escape. Hence he saith, "When ye see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel;" and, of course, that abomination of desolation was nothing else but the Roman army. The word "abomination" is a frequent Scripture phrase to denote idolatry; the Romans were an idolatrous power, and they came and encamped around Jerusalem. There was the abomination of desolation. But how came they there? How was it that they were permitted to be there? Well, it was because there was an abomination of desolation that preceded the coming of the Romans, and that was the Jews themselves. They had followed human tradition, and thereby so perverted the Scriptures that by that perversion they were led to persecute, slander, and crucify the Lord Jesus Christ. Thereby they made themselves desolate. You cannot imagine anything more desolating to the souls of men than to be persecutors and enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, as they were turned enemies, the Lord let the enemy in upon them. When Christians saw this they began to think of escaping. And the Lord said, "Pray that your flight be not in the winter;" because, of course, at that time of the year it would subject them in their escape to greater hardships and dangers; "and pray that your flight be not on the Sabbath day," because many of them were very superstitious as to the distance they ought to go on the Sabbath day, and if it took place on that day, there would be a danger of their stopping short and the enemy overtaking them. "And woe unto them that are with child and that give suck in those days!" meaning that their sufferings would be greater, they in their flight would be subjected to greater miseries. So, then, there were signs, and all Christians did escape. But what is the reason that while there were signs given of the destruction of Jerusalem, there are no signs given of the last great day, as to when it will take place? Of that destruction the Saviour saith, "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." But of the last day of all there is no sign given. What is the reason of this? The reason is very clear and simple. I should like you clearly to understand it. It suggests itself. The reason is this, that at the last day of all the righteous will not be exposed to the slightest danger whatever. Now at the destruction of Jerusalem the righteous were exposed to danger, not indeed as to their eternal salvation, but as to their personal safety. But when the last great day shall come, and the Saviour shall come down the parting skies as suddenly as cometh the lightning flash, the righteous will be exposed to no danger. Therefore you do not need a sign before the end to caution you to escape. At that day the people of God will be exposed to no danger whatever. On the other hand, the sign of its near approach to the ungodly would be of no avail, because for them there is no escape. The apostle saith, "They shall not escape." So, then, the one is exposed to no danger, and consequently needs no sign; for the other there is no way of escape, therefore signs would be useless. So that it is useless for us to attempt to guess as to how long the world will yet stand. We do know there is a judgment day, and we do know from the Lord's word that it will come as suddenly as the lightning flash. And the advice the Saviour gives in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem may apply in relation to this—namely, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." Now taking, as I do, this 20th chapter of the Revelation to represent the gospel dispensation from first to last; taking the thousand years to mean a long period of time, know

only to the Lord himself, the latter part of this chapter pretty clearly points to the general judgment. Here the sea gives up the dead which are in it, and here death and hell, or death and the grave, give up the dead which are in them, and small and great are all ranged and stand before God. I think, therefore, there cannot be much doubt but that the final and general judgment is the theme of the close of this chapter. It appears that Satan, in the beginning of the gospel dispensation, was so bound, that the Gentiles should be unbound,—that God's elect, east, west, north, and south, should be unbound; and now it seems that while Satan is under ail that restraint essential to the deliverance of all the people of God, towards the end of this dispensation, just before the general judgment, Satan's liberty shall be enlarged; he shall be loosed out of his prison, out of the restraint under which he is, and "he shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea." These terms, Gog and Magog, are applied in the 38th and 39th of Ezekiel to the Roman power; but then the description points forward to the ungodly that shall live in that day. Satan shall gather them together. He shall go out to deceive them. How shall he deceive them? Why, he shall go out to persuade these people that they ought to do away with that high doctrine religion; that they ought to sweep those high doctrine people from the earth; that they ought to establish their own religion, that it ought to have universal sway. And we see how they are deceived, for when they come to compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city, it does not appear that in this last attempt of Satan, when he shall have a little more liberty, it does not appear that any of the people of God will suffer death or be subjected to the miseries they have endured in ages gone by; for as soon as ever Satan gets his armies marshalled, fire cometh down from heaven and devoureth them. Do you not see here how Satan deceived them? Did not Satan deceive the old world when he inspired them to despise the preaching of Noah, when he tried to persuade them the flood would never come; it was only the whim and the fancy of Noah; for Noah was a preacher of righteousness? But the flood did come. Thus Satan deceived them. And did not Pharaoh, as led by Satan, deceive his army and the people of Egypt when he proposed to follow after Israel? Oh, he said, we shall conquer them, and bring them back, or destroy them. Here, again, Satan deceived them, and they ran, as all such must do, to their own destruction. I need not remind you of the Canaanites, when Satan brought them against the Israelites; see how they were deceived. And when Nebuchadnezzar was coming to Jerusalem to destroy the city, see how Satan by false prophets deceived the people, saying this destruction should not come. And in the Saviour's day, it is enough to make one shudder to think of it, that they had such notions concerning Christ. Satan had got such complete dominion over them, that they thought that if they suffered this Jesus Christ to go on, God would be so angry with them that he would send the Romans against them to take away their place and nation; therefore, said one, the only remedy is to crucify this man out of the way; and in so doing you will so please God that we shall be safe. Thus it appears that just at the end of this dispensation Satan will have vast numbers on his side, even as the sand of the sea; that he shall make a vain attempt once more to bring the people of God under his power.

Now it does appear that at the last there are very few true Christians. Satan's host is to encompass "the camp"—a little camp of Christians travelling through this world; "and the beloved city"—a little city, a few men within it. Therefore I think that the chief sign of the approach of the ultimate judgment day will be that there will be but few real Christians. The 18th of Luke is upon this wonderfully significant.

The Saviour there saith, "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" What a remarkable thing that the Lord should place that interrogation in close connection with eternal election! "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?" that is, they are constantly seeking the Lord; they do not seek after him to-day, and seek to get away from him to-morrow; they do not express their approbation of him to-day, and their disapprobation of him to-morrow; they do not stand out for him in one place and at one time, and turn their backs upon him in another place or at another time. No; they are spoken of as crying unto him day and night. Now these are God's elect. "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Will there then exist much of the faith of God's elect? That faith connected with eternal salvation is called the faith of God's elect. It is a solemn thought that while Popery is losing ground in all the civilized world, yet that which is taking its place somehow or another is not in some respects much better; it is merely artificial. You may be surprised perhaps at my opinion that Popery's losing ground in all places; but so it is. And if you ask how it is losing ground, my answer is very simple. It is not losing ground as to wealth; it is not losing ground as to numbers; but it is losing ground as to its hold upon the minds of the people. There are two doctrines that have now been started, and those two doctrines will, I think, make a great many converts; and when all the civilized world are once converted to those two doctrines, then of course the power of Popery and every other persecuting power is for ever gone. The one doctrine that is now broached, and indeed is pretty extensively held, and will yet be more extensively held, is that the New Testament does not authorize any ecclesiastical power or establishment in connection with the civil power whatever. So that the doctrine now abroad is that the disestablishment of every ecclesiastical establishment is one essential to the progress of the human race and to the welfare of men. The other doctrine that is progressing very fast is that of religious equality—that each man and each woman, independent of any and of every human authority, has a right to judge for him or for herself; because each will appear at the judgment bar of God not by virtue of connection with any establishment whatever, but by virtue of what each is in his or her own individual character, included in this right of equality, for all is of course the entire disendowment by the civil state of all. Now these doctrines getting abroad, I say Popery must hereby lose ground, and is losing ground; for these doctrines are now spreading faster on the Continent than they are with us; and I am glad to see such doctrines progress. Nevertheless, while they are progressing, we do not yet see anything taking their place that we should like to see. But coming back to the point: whatever may take place as regards the spread of the gospel, and the ingathering of many out of the teeming millions of the population of the globe—whatever may take place in a way of mercy in this respect between this and the last day, it does appear, according to the Saviour's words, and according to the latter part of this chapter, that there will be at that day comparatively few real Christians. Then, again, Satan, at the beginning of this dispensation, was cast, this chapter says, "into the bottomless pit," which ought to have been rendered, "into the abyss;" that is, into this world, and into the deep mystery of iniquity. Popery may well be called an abyss, or, if you like, a bottomless pit; for it hath its cursed foundations laid low as the deeps of hell. So of all delusion, Satan being thus cast into the world, called the abyss, and restrained is one thing; but you read that at the judgment day, or before the judgment takes place, Satan is cast into the lake of fire. Now for him to be cast into the abyss, or the world, and there to range

and reign over his own, is one thing; but when you come to the ultimate judgment, he is cast into the lake of fire, where the beast is, that is, the whole body of those that have followed error; and the false prophet, that is, the false ministry; the whole body of ministers who have adopted these iniquitous systems; and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Thus then it is solemn to contemplate, first, that the time must come; second, that no one knows when it shall be; third, that there are reasons to fear that there will be at that day but few on the earth that know the truth; but few or many, the Lord will have them that are his. I say this not to discourage ourselves; because we have every encouragement still to go on to seek the progress of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Secondly, then, let us look at *the rule of judgment as here declared*. "They were judged every man according to their works." I do not think I can make this part clear unless I first take into consideration the people of God as they shall appear in judgment; and I think I can show the utter impossibility of their doing otherwise than give a good account. Let us read the matter out, and that will enable us to understand the position of the lost. Now in 1 Cor. xv. we read that the Lord Jesus Christ is the firstfruits of them that sleep. You recollect what the apostle saith upon this subject of the firstfruits in Rom. xi.,—"If the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy." Now if Christ be their firstfruit, then he is their representative; "the firstfruits of them that sleep." So that in receiving Christ Jesus, you thereby become holy and righteous, faultless, everything that He is, pleasing to God even as He is pleasing to God. Now that chapter, the 15th of 1st Corinthians, very beautifully contrasts our present with our future state. "One star differeth from another star in glory." Take away the word "glory," and substitute the word "brightness," for that is the meaning; and then you will understand it clearly. "One star differeth from another star in brightness; so also is the resurrection." The apostle is not there contrasting one Christian with another, as though there would be degrees of brightness or degrees of glory in a future world; but he is there contrasting our present with our future state. Hence he goes on, "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption." See how beautifully that accords with the soul born of God, born of an incorruptible seed, that liveth and abideth for ever. "It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body"—that is, a mortal body,—"it is raised a spiritual body." All we are naturally, we derive from the first Adam; all we are spiritually, we derive from the last Adam. Our bodies at present are dead in sin; our spirits are quickened, but our bodies are dead in sin now, as they were before we were called by grace. Hence the apostle saith, "The body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness." Now, saith the apostle, "When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written," in the 25th of Isaiah, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Now if the people of God at the last day are thus to appear before him incorruptible, immortal, in all the brightness of the immortal body of Jesus Christ; if they are to appear before God in all the glory of entire conformity to Jesus Christ; if the victory be given thus to them; if the sting of death be taken away, and Christ hath swallowed up death in victory, then what judgment will they have to undergo? Why, just none at all, except the judgment of justification. The Scriptures are clear upon this. The very state in which the people are will demonstrate what they are. Then let us hear some other scrip.

tures. In the Colossians it reads thus:—"You hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight." Again, "He loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, and present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." And again, "To present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." What then, in the name of the Lord, and I was going to say in the name of common sense, have you to fear through life? What have you to apprehend? The Lord is with you every moment, in your houses, in your families, in your souls, in the world, in your circumstances. And when you come to die, you die in all the blessedness you have in Christ; and when you rise, it will be in all the glory there described, to take possession of the kingdom, and to meet his gratulation to each,—“Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Well might old Simeon wish to depart, to have perfect possession of such blessedness as this; well might the apostle call being with Christ “far better.” But my text stands true, that every one shall be judged according to his works; that is, according to the nature of his works. Ever remember that “without faith it is impossible to please God; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Therefore the works of the people of God are works of faith, and they are summed up in one respect in a small compass. First, they receive the truth; and in receiving God’s truth they receive God’s Christ, they receive God’s Spirit, they receive God himself. Let a man make what profession he may, if he does not receive the truth of God I cannot see how such a one receives the Christ of God. This is one part of their work, then, by which they shall be judged—they have received the truth in the love of it. Then the second is, they abide by it, as firmly under all circumstances as Rahab did. She will shine in that day; and the very things that men that are seeking the applause of the world condemn, those very things God will justify at that day. I believe if one of the spies were now to appear on this earth, he would stand aghast at the carnal, ungodly things that have been said against the faith and faithfulness of that woman. Talk about my holding ungodly doctrines! They have held the ungodly doctrines; they have advocated treason, they have advocated hypocrisy, and roundly said that they would not move one of their fingers to save the life of a brother. Is that the spirit of Christ? I say nay; it is more the spirit of Judas. And as long as I feel I am right I will stick to it; and when I am convinced I am wrong I will give it up; but that will never be. Thus, then, the saints shall abide firmly by the truth of God, and by the cause of God. Come, Moses, cannot you go into the idolatrous temple? cannot you worship Bacchus, and take a drop too much sometimes, and be a little bit happy and merry, and not go into the dull company of these poor afflicted Israelites? Cannot you enjoy yourself with us? No, I would rather suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. I would rather be in their humiliation than in Pharaoh’s exaltation. Nothing could keep him away from the cause of God. And while he made a mistake in slaying the Egyptian, and was gone forty years, yet in his heart and soul he never forsook God; he still thought of the promises and the cause of God. These are they, then, that shall be judged according to their works. What is to become of their sins? say you? They are done with. The very song in entering heaven is, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God.” So, then, all these will be judged by their good works; the bad ones are gone, lost for ever. Go carefully through the whole New Testament, from the 1st verse of Matthew to the last verse of the Revelation, and see if you can find one instance of any

one of the faults of the Old Testament saints being named. Their excellences are named, but not a word about their faults. I do not believe any Christian in this assembly has ever yet recognised fully the advantageous position into which the Lord has brought him. You are infinitely better off than you think you are; your position is infinitely better; it surpasseth all that you can either ask or think.

But, on the other hand, those who are not brought to receive the truth in the love of it, they are still under God's law; and would you believe it? their good works shall be reckoned bad ones. Well, but, say you, I have known a man so full of good works: I have known a man such a learned man—he understood fifty languages pretty nearly; a wonderfully persevering man; got on in the world most wonderfully; and as to his charity, why, he gave all his goods to feed the poor, and died in the workhouse at last; and he would have given his body to be burned if he could have done so. Well, that was very excellent. What do you say to such a man as that? I say this, that if he had not the love of the truth, all his doings will be set down to the flesh, to pride, to self, to carnality; and when the law comes, it will turn all his supposed good works into sin, and his very good works will form a part of his eternal damnation, seeing that he put these good works into the place of God's eternal truth. It works good in themselves, but, wrongly placed, turns them into sin. True faith receives the truth in the love of it; and *whatsoever* is not of this faith is sin. If you have not the love of the truth, you have not the one thing needful. The truth must have all your heart and all your soul; I mean that yea and amen, eternal truth, by which we have eternal life and eternal glory, in and by Christ Jesus the Lord. Besides, let us not lose sight of one thing—that all of us by nature are under God's law. Now, in this assembly this morning, those of you that know not what the spirit of grace and supplication to God is, that are not concerned about your state, that are not seeking after the Lord, you like to go and hear the word; and that is all excellent in its place, and the Lord will even accept that as homage done to his name, his cause, his people, and his ways. But if you try to make that a part of your salvation, then it will become sin, because it is brought in to take the Saviour's place. Now, you that are strangers to soul-trouble, you are under God's law; you do not know it, but you are; and if you were to die now, you would die in the strength of your sin, for the law is the strength of sin; and you would die in the strength of God's law, and in the strength of God's wrath; your lost soul would in the twinkling of an eye lift up its eyes in hell. "Ye must be born again." In a word, in order to stand accepted at the last we must be brought to dwell in God now, or else we shall not dwell in the house not made with hands hereafter; we must be brought into the kingdom of God now, or else we shall not be brought into the kingdom of God hereafter.

But, thirdly, I notice *the opposite destiny of the two*. It is said of the lost (and it is a subject one trembles to enter upon) that they shall be cast into the lake of fire, and that this lake of fire is the second death. There is, no doubt, some degree of analogy between the first death and what is called the second death. The analogy, perhaps, is not very great or very strong; but there must be some analogy, or else why is it said, "This is the second death"? implying that the first death has some degree of likeness to the second. But the first death is not the very image of the second death. Now what is the first death? Why, say you, the death of the body. No, no; ten thousand times no. That is where men have erred. The death of the body is included in the first death, I grant; but the death of the body is not the first death; it is only a part of the first death. Where is the first death? Here it is,—“In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt die.” What did that mean? It meant that he should be alienated from God; die to all holiness, righteousness, peace, comfort,

and everything that he had. "Ye who were dead in trespasses and in sins." The death of the body is included in this,—“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” The first death, therefore, was an alienation of the soul from God into all the filthiness, and guiltiness, and misery, and darkness, and wretchedness of sin. That is the first death, including the death of the body; but the death of the body is only temporary; there shall be a resurrection of the unjust as well as the just. What is the second death? Alienation from God into all the guilt and terror of your sin; and the lost will be just as miserable there as they were sinful here. The man that is the most wicked here will be the most miserable there. The man that has been the most daring, and presumptuous, and ungodly here will be the most miserable there. So, then, the second death has no allusion to the cessation of being, but to alienation from God. I think the persons who hold that the misery of the ungodly will terminate ought to bring some scripture to prove it; I ask this solemn question,—“Can you find one promise made to the lost, as lost? They are cast into the lake of fire. Is that followed up with a promise that they shall some day die, and so their misery cease? or that they shall be annihilated, or that they shall be delivered? Not one promise. Where is your authority, then, to say it will take place? God gives no promise that it will. When the Jews went, in ancient times, time after time into captivity, God gave them promises of return. When their final captivity by the Romans took place, God gave the Jewish nation no promise that they should return. There is not a promise in all the Bible that the Jews will ever return; as we have no promise of their return, we have no authority to say they will. There is no hope for Jew or Gentile but in Christ Jesus. We read of the lost that they are cast into the lake of fire, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Day and night here is a form of speech merely idiomatic, denoting continually—everlasting punishment. Is there any scripture that would warrant us in believing that that “everlasting” must be understood only in a figurative sense, meaning a long while? I think not. I grieve to be obliged thus to speak, for if there were an end of the sorrow and misery of the lost, I would fall in with it in a moment; it would be natural to do so. But we must not be guided by our natural feelings; we must be guided by God’s solemn truth. So, then, I conclude that when they are cast into the lake of fire, the worm dieth not, the fire is not quenched; I have no authority anywhere for any termination. We come now to another circumstance, which will sum up the whole. There were two men—one clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day; and there was a certain beggar who lay at his gate, and desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. The beggar died, and was carried, because he was a good man—not because he was a poor man, but because he was a believing man, who received the truth in the love of it,—he was carried into Abraham’s bosom; because in Abraham’s bosom was God’s sworn covenant, God’s immutable counsel, God’s Christ, the great Melchisedec. The happy soul of Lazarus darts into what he received while here below—the love of the truth. The rich man died also, though he thought he should not die, at least not for a long time, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham afar off. He made two prayers in hell—one for himself, and one for others; and in the answer you will observe there is not the slightest hint given of any termination, much less a promise given that this rich man should some day be delivered from the burning lake. “Send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son”—a professed son of Abraham after the flesh, but not after the spirit, or he would never have been in hell,—“remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”