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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

IS THIS THE RIGHT MEANING?

—

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 2ND AUGUST, 1868,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”—ISAIAH xi. 9.

HAVING already had two Lord's day mornings upon these words, I shall try this morning to close what I have to say upon this great and interesting subject. The first thing we have to attend to is *the safety of the people and their inheritance*—“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain;” secondly, that *the holy mountain and the earth here spoken of are one and the same thing*; thirdly, *what we are to understand by the fulness of knowledge here declared that shall be possessed*; and lastly, *the meaning of the magnificent object brought before us*—“as the waters cover the sea.”

First, *the safety of the people and their inheritance*—“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.” This fairly implies, as we have before said, reconciliation to God; but my first point shall be their safety. Hence that great declaration of the Saviour with which we closed last Lord's day morning,—“Nothing shall by any means hurt you;” and in the 16th of Mark, “If they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.” Let us take those deadly things to mean the tribulations of which they must more or less be the subjects. And if we can once get an assurance of this, that there is not any trouble that can finally hurt the true Christian, what peace does that impart! As we all know, a very little trouble can sweep away all that we have on earth, and sweep us away as well; our poor mortal lives depend, as it were, upon a thread, and are snapped in a moment. But here, in this life in Christ Jesus, nothing shall by any means hurt you. Once lay hold of this truth, it is

wonderfully supporting in trouble. Then connect with this that Scripture in the 32nd of Jeremiah,—“I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” Just mark the Scripture that I have quoted, describing the character that the Lord takes care of. “I will put my fear”—and mind, he there speaks as a covenant God, he there speaks in the language of the everlasting covenant;—“I will put my fear,” after the order of this everlasting covenant, “in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul.” And then you find also in the Book of Revelation, when the people of God were likely to be exposed to hurt, see how the Lord steps in. Hence you read in Revelation vii. of Satan's position, represented by four angels. John saith, “I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.” Let us see if we can understand this. These four angels of course do not mean angels literally; they mean human agents. The “four” seems to have an allusion to the four ancient empires—that each is striving for universal dominion; so that Babylon saith, Nothing shall move without me, if I can help it; I will have universal dominion; and Persia saith, I will have universal dominion; and Greece saith, I will have universal dominion; and Rome Pagan and Rome Papal said, We will also get universal dominion. Now all these four powers are each trying to bring the earth under its own dominion, and to prevent any one moving except at its own pleasure. Each would hinder the glorious gospel of God; and if these agents could get their way, the preaching of the gospel would be at once put down, and the people of God swept from the face of the earth. But while these powers were thus ready to hurt, the Lord took care of his own, for he will not suffer them finally to be hurt. “I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God; and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of God in their foreheads.” This is to show us that if a trouble is coming, whether it be domestic, personal, or national—whatever the trouble may be,—we should look to the Lord, with a full assurance that he will take care of his own. He will take care the flood shall not come till the ark is finished; he will take care that the mighty reservoir of vengeance shall not break forth till Lot is out of Sodom; he will take care that the sea shall not close in till the Israelites are saved. Then in the 9th of Revelation there is a beautiful testimony of the care the Lord takes of those that are brought to what our text calls the holy mountain. “I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth, and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.” The star there of course does not mean any particular person, but it means a ruling power; and there is nothing in the original about a bottomless pit; it would read very much better if our translators had only just Anglicized

the Greek word—namely, the word “abyss;”—“there was given unto him the key of the abyss;” and the abyss there means the deep mystery of iniquity, as the connection easily proves. “And he opened the abyss; and there arose a smoke out of the abyss, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke.” The smoke of course means a body of false doctrines that ascended from the deep contrivances of the mystery of iniquity; and the sun being darkened is to denote that the gospel was darkened. And that has ever been the object of Satan—to darken the gospel. Hear what the apostle saith upon this very matter:—“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” Satan dreads the thought of salvation being to you a shining light; he does not like the truth of God to be to any man a shining light; Satan does not like the yea and amen promise of the everlasting covenant to be a shining light. But in spite of all that Satan shall do, God will command the light to shine into the hearts of his own, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Christ Jesus. Then there came a voice again, saying to this very power to whom it was given to hurt the earth—mark that, to hurt the earth,—what is the history of the world? Little else but a history of wickedness, of bloodshed, and of the awful judgments of God. I think no man can read the history of any nation without feeling what an awful history it is. So that it may well be said, “to them it was given to hurt the earth and the sea.” Great warriors are so praised up, when the fact is they were nothing but great murderers. Yet there was an abiding place then, and there is an abiding place now, where the people of God are beyond the reach of hurt. Therefore the command came to these monsters, to these mighty powers, destroying their fellow-creatures,—“it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.” The grass represents the people of God, the little ones, the new-born babes, just springing up into spiritual life; and the green thing represents them as herbs; that is, they are gone on a little further;—“Thy dew is the dew of herbs;” and the trees represent established Christians, that are rooted in God’s eternal truth, and begin to bring forth fruit unto God. So then the people as standing in God’s love are safe, as standing in his choice are safe, standing in the Saviour’s mediatorial perfection are safe; under the quickening power and leadings of the Eternal Spirit they are safe. Why, my hearer, talk of religion—what poor, miserable, wretched creatures are we without it. Why, take away religion, what is your all? That that may be gone in a moment. But if brought into an understanding of God’s truth, led to receive that, and to rest in it, then thou art indeed safe, no plague can come nigh unto them.

But I will now notice rather what is expressed in our text. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.” The word of God saith, “If the foundations are destroyed, what shall the righteous do?” and it implies that the righteous themselves have no desire to set those foundations aside. Those foundations are the glorious testimonies of God’s eternal truth. The testimony of his love is a foundation; “we love him because he first loved us.” The testimony of electing grace is a foundation; the testimony of his great decree in ordaining us to life is a foundation; and the testimony of what Christ has done is a foundation; in a word, all the promises of the glorious gospel of God, these are the foundations. Now the people of God shall not hurt nor destroy, nor attempt to set any of these aside. But we will go a little further, and show in few words that their inheritance is such that it cannot be

hurt. While they have no will to hurt it, it is such as cannot be hurt; and God also will take care that it shall not be hurt. Take in the first place the life they have in Christ Jesus; that cannot be hurt; it is an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Israel by sin easily destroyed his life in the land of Canaan, and he was banished, and that state of captivity is called death. Therefore, when it is said that when they sinned they were to die, it meant they were to die to all they there had. That inheritance was easily destroyed; that house in which they met was destroyed. But here, by Christ Jesus, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Can that be hurt? Can that be destroyed? Is there the slightest danger there whatever, or the possibility of danger? Then again, their city was destroyed. But who can destroy the new Jerusalem, where the walls are salvation, where the gates are praise, where there can be no violence, no wasting, no destruction? The land of Canaan was in a sense destroyed; but the inheritance we have by Jesus Christ is exposed not to the slightest danger whatever. And their harvests were often destroyed; we have never had spiritually but one harvest, and that harvest was, and is, and will be eternally safe. The Saviour describes it when he saith, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Now Jesus Christ did die, and he rose from the dead, and he has brought forth all the promises of the gospel; he has brought forth all the blessings of the everlasting gospel; therefore, it is that he has brought forth, indeed, fruit that endureth to everlasting life. So that David might well say, "I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Now was the Lord Jesus Christ ever hurt, that is, finally so; or can he be hurt? No. There was only one thing that could hurt Jesus Christ, and if he keep clear of that one thing, then he comes off at last unhurt. When the three worthies came out of the fire, no hurt was found upon them. The Saviour passed through a greater fire, and yet no hurt was found upon him. And Daniel came out of the lion's den unhurt; the Saviour went through and came out of a more terrible den, for such was this world to him; yet on earth there was but one thing that could hurt the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are all, I am sure, as satisfied that he kept clear of that one thing as we are of our existence. And this brings me to the very point of the necessity of faith in him, of making him our life; then we shall have a life that can never be hurt; of making him our sanctification, and then we have a holiness that can never be tarnished. Creature holiness cannot take you to heaven. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" but it must be divine holiness, it must be a holiness that comes from heaven, or else it will never take you to heaven. Creature holiness can no more take you to heaven than creature righteousness can; Christ must be your righteousness. Hence the infinite importance of faith in him and receiving him. There was only one thing that could hurt him, and that was sin. If Satan could have contrived to get a lodgment for one impure thought in the Saviour's pure mind, that one impure thought would have defiled his manhood. But sin could never find a lodgment in his pure mind. If the Saviour had said an erroneous word, or made one mistake, or done one wrong thing, then he would have been hurt. But no; our sins could not hurt him; all he suffered could not hurt him, and all men did could not hurt him, or stop him in his progress, or deprive him of that glory into which he entered at his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Now if we would live a happy life, it must be in Christ; if we would live a godly life, it must be in Christ. And if you live this godly life that is in Christ, you will have everybody against you, the professing world especially. They cannot understand it. Hence the apostle saith, "He that will live godly," but then it must be "in Christ Jesus;"—they will say, What a strange sort of man that is; he

talks in a way we cannot understand; he says that Christ is his all and in all. So it is: "He that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Here, then, they shall not hurt nor destroy in the whole range of the gospel; everything remains invulnerable, uninjured, holy, and untarnished.

But I notice, in the next place, that *the holy mountain and the earth here spoken of are one and the same thing*. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Now I say this holy mountain and the earth mean one and the same thing. It cannot refer to the globe we inhabit. There is not a scripture from Genesis to Revelation to authorize the notion that this earth ever will be full of the knowledge of the Lord. And you will observe the Lord said to Abraham, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Now that has never been and never will be the case, not in the sense in which men are disposed to take it. The fact is, this is a truth which none of us acknowledge upon this matter until experience brings us down to a sight and sense of our nothingness and our need of what God is in covenant; then we begin to read the Scriptures in a very different way. Therefore, when it is said, "In thee and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed," we look at events, we look at what takes place, and in looking at what takes place we arrive at this conclusion—that there are two orders of families. There is the family of the wicked one, who will remain the family of the wicked one; tribes that never did and never will call upon the Lord's name; on the other hand, there are people out of all kindreds, and nations, and tongues; they are the families that the Lord hath blessed. There is no allusion to domestic families in our sense of the term. The word "families" there is a kindred term to that of "tribes;" and so the Lord saith in Jeremiah xxxi. 1, "At that time will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people." Now take away the word "families" there, and substitute the word "tribes," and then you will get a pretty clear understanding of it. "At that time will I be the God of all the tribes of Israel, and they shall be my people." Now mark, "At that time;" there is a contrast intended there between the Jewish and the Christian covenant. In the Jewish covenant the ten tribes left the other two tribes, and they all apostatized, and were scattered, and God ceased to be their God; he said, "Ye are not my people, and I will not be your God." But in the Christian covenant, when we come to the man who is a Jew inwardly, who is an Israelite truly, not after the flesh but after the spirit—in the Christian covenant, he saith, "I will be the God of all the families," that is, of all the tribes "of Israel." And then just see where these tribes are brought to. The next two verses will show you. First, they escaped by the paschal lamb the sword. "The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest." Now the sword there seems to refer both to the sword that cut off the first born of Egypt, and to the sword of Pharaoh that pursued the Israelites. By the paschal lamb they escaped the judgment of God and the sword of the enemy. Just so now, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we escape the penalties of sin, the curse of the law, the avenging sword, and are brought into such a position that as Pharaoh could not penetrate the cloud, and would have to overcome God Almighty before he could reach the Israelites, because God was between them and him; just so now, still carrying out the idea of safety in Christ Jesus, they found grace in the wilderness; that is to say, favour. So the Lord brings us into a wilderness state, to make us feel our need of the freeness and riches of his grace. "When I went to cause him to rest;" so the Lord comes to cause us to rest, to release us from all our burdens. And now, just mark where he brings them to. Jeremiah saith, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I

have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." Thus then, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed;" that is, that order of families that stand in God's love, that stand in his eternal choice. It never has gone beyond these; there it is; circumstances are clear, and the word of God is clear. Well then, here I may say that those ministers that tell us that this earth is to be full of the knowledge of the Lord, and that a universal conversion of the teeming millions of the earth is to take place—God grant it might be so; for myself nothing could rejoice my heart more than such a thought; but at the same time we must not deceive ourselves, nor rebel against the holy scriptures; my conclusion is that such ministers are deceived. Mind, I am not charging them with anything wilful; they themselves sincerely think that that will be the case, that the whole population of the globe will be converted; they tell others so. And we live in a day of not much research. Most professors in our day are too content with what they hear from the pulpit. There is not quite enough of the Berean spirit in our day—not so much as I should like to see. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so." But let me show you that the holy mountain and the earth here spoken of are one and the same thing. Did it ever strike you that the whole land of Canaan is called a mountain, because the Lord exalted the people in bringing them into that land? So the word "earth" here must be understood as in another place—the new earth, or the promised land. The whole land of Canaan is called a mountain. Exodus xv.—"Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance." So then for the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord here means not this globe, but the antitypical earth, the promised land. And you observe the metonymical form of speech here. You cannot take the earth literally; though the container is mentioned—namely, the holy mountain, called in the next clause the earth;—these are the containers that contain the people. It does not mean, of course, that the holy mountain itself or the earth is to know the Lord; but it means that the people that dwell in this holy mountain, in this land, that they shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. They are safe, and their inheritance safe.

Let me now notice, thirdly, *what we are to understand by the fulness of knowledge here declared that shall be possessed.* Let us have a few scriptures to show who the *all* are that shall be filled with this knowledge. First, the 54th of Isaiah: "All thy children"—there is a promise to the city of Zion; the church is there spoken of a city;—"All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children." Their peace is great because Jesus Christ is their peace. And all that are taught of the Lord, one of the first lessons they learn is their need of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as in the 31st of Jeremiah, the people that form the families that are blessed, that inhabit this promised land, are led, as you there see, into the love of God in the beauty and attractions of it; so here in the 54th of Isaiah what are they led into that are thus taught of the Lord? Why, they are led into the certainty of the gospel, reconciled to God by Jesus Christ. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord;" does that mean the whole human race? No; it means the chosen race, the seed of Abraham, those that shall be thus reconciled to God, brought to understand his truth, and receive it in the love thereof. Then you go to the 31st of Jeremiah, and there the Lord speaks in the language of the new covenant, "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of

Judah." You must understand the Israel and Judah there in the Christian sense of the word, as explained in the New Testament. Now it is said of this people that are included in this covenant, "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." So then this new earth, this promised land, this covenant people, shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea; that is the *all* that shall know him. Then, lest we should be mistaken upon this matter, in the 8th of Hebrews we find the apostle quoting these very words,—“All shall know me from the least to the greatest.” And then the apostle would give us to understand what the Lord is known by, and how he is known; he is known by that which infinitely, supremely, and eternally endears him. The apostle goes on, and varies the Old Testament words a little, but containing the same subject: “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” Thus you see who the *all* are, namely, this covenant people, that shall know him from the least to the greatest. Then in the 10th of John the Saviour saith, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.” But does this mean all the human race? The doctrine of universal conversion is nothing but delusion; and it is one of the doctrines by which the sovereignty of God is kept in the background, by which the great truths of the gospel are smothered, and by which the people of God are hated, cast out, and persecuted. Let us, then, have decision for what is God’s truth. But while we hold this doctrine of universal conversion to be delusion, does that hinder us from preaching the gospel to every creature? Certainly not. Our object is to bring in as many as the Lord our God shall call; we do not wish to bring in any others, because they would have to go out again; but those that the Lord brings in will never have to go out again. Mark the Saviour’s words, again, in the 17th of John, “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” Now while in the first Adam they have hurt themselves, and destroyed their inheritance, destroyed all the holiness and righteousness, and everything good that they had, yet in the last Adam, not a single thing destroyed, nothing hurt: “Ye are complete in him.”

But lastly, *the meaning of the magnificent object brought before us*; “as the waters cover the sea.” Let us trace this out carefully, in order to understand it. Now of course the question arises—how do the waters cover the sea? And every one of the five or six representations which this evidently contains will apply very nicely to the people of God. First, the waters cover the sea by creation; and so the Christian knows the Lord by new creation,—created in the knowledge of him, “Ye are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.” Without this divine creation our religion is a thing of nought, “Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.” Secondly, that of unity. “The gathering together of the waters called he seas.” So it is now; he gathers his people into the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, gathers them into unity with the Saviour; there they become united to him in all the greatness of his love, salvation, and glory. Then thirdly, that of abundance. How abundant is the sea! how great the knowledge of the saints will be it is not for me to say. The soul of man, as we say, has no plethora; it is wonderful in its capabilities. We stand sometimes amazed at the vast intellectual acquirements in science and learning of some of our fellow-creatures, showing that there are great powers in the mind. And so the greatness of the knowledge of the saved, what is said of it? “We shall know even as we are known.” “When that which is perfect is come, then that which

is in part shall be done away." Fourthly, it means depth. The sea is very deep. And so you read of "the deep things of God;" and the people of God do while they are in this world enter somewhat into the deep things of God, into the depths of God's love, and into the depths of Christ's sufferings, and into the depths of his wisdom and his judgment; and who can fathom the depths of the riches of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? And then independence is another thing. How independent is the sea of man! how independent is the tide of man! So how independent is the Christian of man! The Christian's knowledge being entirely of God, he is independent altogether of man in this matter; man has no control over him. Man has no control over me in this matter; never had yet, and never will. I am a Baptist in my sentiments, and I am a thorough independent; no man ever did, or ever will, have any dominion over me in this matter; and no man ever did, or ever will, have any dominion over you in this matter; you are altogether independent of man. It is not man, but God, that hath brought you to God. It is not man, but God, that is your Saviour; so you are dependent entirely upon him. Another meaning is, that of action. The waters cover the sea by action. Let the tides cease, and the sea would soon putrefy, and would become one mass of putrefaction. So the people of God, but for action what would they be? Why, we get a great deal of good by storms, by being tossed and driven about. Indeed, that is the way the Lord teaches us. It is astonishing what an alteration storms, troubles, and trials will make in the character of a man. When a man is perfectly at ease, when everything goes on smoothly and nicely, and he has no trouble, then he is a very consequential, important sort of being. But let him be tossed about, and rolled about, and knocked and driven about, and almost everything seems to go against him, it will give him such a knowledge, it will make him so lively in the things of God, it will make him love the Lord, it will make him think little of this life, and a great deal of that life which is to come. One more thought, and then I close. "As the waters cover the sea;" I rather think that the simile is used to denote, not only the knowledge in the sense we have stated, but to denote also the object of the knowledge. Hence that beautiful verse we sang this morning concerning the Lord,—

"Thou art the sea of love,
Where all my pleasures roll;
The circle where my passions move,
And centre of my soul."

The sea is a magnificent object; but it shrinks to nothing when set by the side of God's love and God's mercy,—that tide that has been rolling towards us from eternity, that is still rolling through time, and will be our delight for ever and ever. So that the poet is perfectly right when he says,—

"There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast."

Here, then, is the Mount Zion to which men are to be brought, here is the promised land, the new heavenly earth to be peopled; and this is to be brought about by that knowledge which God alone can impart. He alone can cast the stony man out of Townsoul, and set up his new covenant, truth and reigning grace therein. He alone can drive the Prince of darkness out, and God himself shine eternally therein. He it is that chastens the soul down into submission to his truth, and so by new creatureship they shall come into this new earth; neither can they die any more, being the children of the resurrection.