

# **RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD**

## **A SERMON**

**Preached on Sunday Morning November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1868**

**By Mister JAMES WELLS**

**AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET**

**Volume 11 Number 522**

**“So also, is the resurrection of the dead.” 1 Corinthians 15:42**

THERE is no one essential truth of the gospel which has not been in different ages, by mere professors, contradicted. Hence there were some in the apostles' day who denied that there was to be in future any resurrection of the dead. But it is our mercy that the Lord's word shall not return to him void, but that it shall accomplish that which he pleases, and shall prosper in the thing where to he may send it; so that this denial of any one essential truth of the gospel by professors, is not to shake for one moment the confidence of the saints of God. Shall the unbelief of such professors make the faith of God without effect. It is therefore a great thing to be kept in the simplicity of Christ, and in the sincerity of his love. “Grace be with all that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” The apostle, therefore, had to introduce this great subject that our text brings before us with great simplicity; and yet the few words which he uses in his introduction contain a vast amount when looked at in their proper meaning. He says, “I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” You see, the rule he brings forward includes the whole of the Old Testament; “and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” So, the apostle was determined to have enough on his side to prove that what he had said was the truth. Now, notice the last clause, that “he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” How, then, can some learned men in our day say that the Old Testament saints knew nothing of the resurrection? It was a doctrine which was not revealed to them, say they, and therefore, they were ignorant of it, and lived, and died, and got to heaven without it. Now, without blaming these men for anything willful on their part, there is one that I will blame, and that is the great enemy of our souls. He puts these notions into the heads of these learned men in order that they may use their learning to do what they think is the service of the Lord, but which is in reality the service of the enemy; because, if you can once establish the idea that a man can get to heaven without believing God's truth, you may then go on to set aside one essential truth after another, until you get rid of the whole, and thus contradict God himself; for it is written that “all shall be damned that receive not the love of the truth;” and how can they receive the love of the truth if they do not believe it? Therefore, we shall have, this morning, to show very clearly that the apostle was right in saying that Christ rose from the dead according to the Scriptures; and there would be no propriety in his using that mode of speech if the Old Testament Scriptures did not declare and set forth the resurrection of Christ. If they did not do so, there would be no propriety in saying that he rose from the dead according to the Scriptures; because then the answer would be that the Old Testament Scriptures, to which the

apostle is referring, say nothing about the Savior rising from the dead. But in the apostle's estimation, the Old Testament Scriptures did say something concerning Christ's rising from the dead, and that he rose from the dead according to those Scriptures; and by him the resurrection of all for whom he died. I will, therefore, at once proceed to notice the subject. First, *the order of this resurrection*, "So also is the resurrection of the dead." Secondly, *the fourfold representation which the apostle, by metaphor, in this chapter gives of the resurrection*. Thirdly, and lastly, *the practical admonition that the apostle founds upon this great doctrine of the resurrection to eternal life*.

First, *the order of the resurrection from the dead*. As you are aware, the regeneration of the soul is after the same order as the resurrection of the body at last; for the apostle said concerning regeneration that "we are quickened together with Christ, and raised up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus;" and this regeneration is the first resurrection; and "blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection; on such the second death has no power;" because he is one with Christ, who has destroyed, on behalf of such an one, the second death; therefore, the second death on such has no power. But the rest of the dead that lived in the first Adam, will not live again until the last great rising day. While the saints of God will rise from the dead by virtue of their oneness with Christ, the others will rise from the dead by virtue of their responsibility or accountability to God; for all must appear before the judgment seat. In this same chapter we find that the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the people are put together. The apostle says "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen;" but if Christ be risen, his resurrection is their resurrection; and so sure as Christ is risen, they shall rise. But let us clearly understand this matter; it is important that we should do so. What is the kind of relation, then, that the people have to Christ, that they shall, by virtue of that relation, rise from the dead? The Lord Jesus Christ has, by his atoning for their sins, and by bringing in everlasting righteousness, made their resurrection a matter of right. He has made their regeneration first a matter of right; they being redeemed, he has made it a matter of right that they should be regenerated and brought to Zion; and he, having thus risen from the dead, for he was brought again from the dead, by the blood of the everlasting covenant, thereby proving that he had fulfilled his suretyship responsibility, he has made their resurrection a matter of right, legal, right, and proper. By virtue of this, then, they will rise from the dead. Only do not lose sight of one thing, that our God provided this right; that our God has so arranged it that he will be just and yet their justifier, not only now, but at the last great day; that our God has so ordered it that all his perfections sweetly harmonize in their resurrection to eternal glory. So, then, they being related to the Savior, and he having laid this foundation in Zion, this is the ground upon which they must rise from the dead; for God is faithful to his Son and to his saints. Our God is not unrighteous, to forget the Savior's labor of love, and the work which he has accomplished. Therefore, by virtue of what he has done, they are to rise from the dead. Let us examine this matter. The Old Testament saints were all well acquainted with Christ; that is a self-evident truth; and we will try, as it were, to transpose ourselves back into the Old Testament age, and see if we can realize in some measure how the ultimate resurrection of the body to eternal glory appeared in the eyes of the Old Testament saints. We will take the first promise: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." In the 2nd of Hebrews you find that this bruising of the serpent's head means the destruction of Satan's power over the people of God; therefore, it is written that "as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death; that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Now Abel would read out this truth in the first promise: "The seed

of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Abel would see that that meant the destruction of death itself, the eternal dethronement of Satan, the resurrection of the body to eternal life; or else Abel's sacrifice would be senseless. Abel did not get rid of his sin by the sacrifice he offered: he was not made righteous by the sacrifice that he offered; he was not accepted of God in the new covenant sense of the word by his gifts; for the word of God declares that those sacrifices cannot take away sin, cannot make a man perfect pertaining to conscience; that in them there is a remembrance again of sin. Abel well understood that his sacrifice was only a representative sacrifice, and that the Messiah, the promised seed, should put away sin, and thereby destroy death, and bring in eternal life; and the Lord bore witness, Abel thus looking forward, that Abel was righteous. What do you think was the righteousness by which Abel was made righteous? It could not be any righteousness arising from the sacrifice that he had offered; but it was that eternal righteousness that should be brought in by the promised seed. And how absurd the idea of his being made righteous by an eternal righteousness, and yet not include in that the resurrection of the body to eternal life. He saw the resurrection of the body, he saw the eternal glory which should be by Christ Jesus the Lord. We will come to Abraham. Did Abraham understand that there should be a resurrection of the body? did he believe it? The Savior said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad." Are we to exclude from what Abraham saw the resurrection of Christ? Are we to exclude from what Abraham saw the great truth that the resurrection of Christ was the first fruits of the rest, and virtually the resurrection of the rest? And he being the first fruits, their resurrection was included in his. Abraham saw this. If he did not see this, how could he rejoice in the immutability of God's counsel? He would trace out salvation step by step, not only in the personal experience of it, but in God's successive steps in carrying out this great matter; and so, he would see this eternal life, the resurrection of the body. Abraham thus saw the Savior's day, I may here quote that scripture where it says, "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." Was not Christ's resurrection a part of the glory that should follow? Was not the ingathering of a number of precious souls to God another part of the glory that should follow? Was not their preservation from time to time by the tender care, the mighty power, loving kindness, long suffering of the blessed God, another part of the glory that should follow? And "absent from the body, present with the Lord," was not that another part of the glory that should follow? Does not David say, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with your likeness"? Was not that another part of the glory that should follow? And did not the Old Testament saints sing of God's eternity? "From everlasting to everlasting, you are God; your mercy is from everlasting to everlasting." Thus, then, the Old Testament saints saw this delightful truth. There is something in the resurrection that one dwells upon with such pleasure; when you look at the fact that you are to be raised up in the image of Christ. The presence of a sin, the presence of a fault, the presence of a spot, the presence of an accuser, the presence of an adversary, the presence of a cloud, the presence of a trouble, the presence of a fear; why, how can it be? They are to be raised up in the likeness of Christ; and you might just as well talk of the Savior being arraigned at the great tribunal, questioned, catechized, and half received, half rejected, as to talk of any spot or fault being found in the saints of God. Their sins may be sought for, but they shall not be found. They shall appear unblameable, unproveable, in his sight, "To him give all the prophets witness." Then we come to Isaac. Would not Isaac see in what was brought in to release him the resurrection of the dead? For a substitute merely for this life would be an unmeaning thing. The ungodly live without fear, and there are no bonds in their death, they

are not plagued as other men. Isaac, therefore, understanding the spiritual and ultimate meaning of the substitutional sacrifice that released his body, would see that that was a slight outline and representation of that wondrous substitute that released his soul from the bonds of legal responsibility, from all guilt and sin; he would see in that substitute eternal triumph; he would see the resurrection to eternal glory, for Isaac himself was received from the dead in a figure. And do you think that Jacob would not see the same in the promise made to him that they should come from the east, and the west, the north, and the south? Do you think that he did not see the same in the ladder that reached to heaven? What did that mean but Jesus Christ as that mediator that could reach down to us, and could at the same time reach up to God, and be a way for us from the lowest depths of sin and misery to the highest mountains of eternity itself? Jacob, then, saw this glorious truth, and rejoiced therein. Have we any doubt about it? We cannot of course, we should not be able to see the doctrine of the resurrection so clearly in the bush if the dear Savior himself had not pointed it out. You know what the Savior said upon this matter, "That the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush." Now I feel I should never have seen that; I should have passed by that scripture; it does not seem to me as if it ever could have struck me; for I see nothing there at first that seems to argue emphatically of the resurrection of the body. But Christ sees something in it that does, and he says, "That the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living." So that they are still living in heaven, and waiting for their bodies, waiting for the last day; not that time hangs heavily on their hands, for they have done with mundane time; there is no night there, no alternative seasons there, no succession of days and hours there; yet they are nevertheless waiting, for all must be there before they can be numerically perfect. I need not remind you of the several Psalms that speak of this subject of the resurrection. In the 2nd Psalm, "You are my Son; this day have I begotten you." I never should have thought to find there the resurrection of Christ, and of course his resurrection means his people's resurrection too. But the apostle said, in the 13th of Acts, "God has fulfilled the same unto us, in that he has raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, You are my Son, this day have I begotten you." The apostle's interpretation is as much inspired as the original record; so that we may make our anchorage in each with full confidence that each is infallible. Then in the 16th Psalm I also get the resurrection of the Savior: "You will not leave my soul in hell; neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fulness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore." I need not remind you of the 110th Psalm, where we have the Savior exalted; I need not remind you of the 19th of Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Do not think that Job meant a mere temporal redeemer; he meant Jehovah of hosts, he meant the Redeemer that should obtain eternal redemption, that should redeem by his precious blood, by his death. And when Job said he knew that his Redeemer lived, and should stand upon the earth at the latter day, that is the latter day of the appointed time; God appointed a time in which Christ was to die, and at the latter part of that time he was born, the latter day of the Old Testament dispensation. Job knew that a new dispensation should then commence; he knew that his Redeemer should found a kingdom on such foundations, and with such materials, and after such an order, that that kingdom should never be either destroyed or moved. Then Job goes on to look at the glory that should follow. "Though after my skin", his skin was gone, disease had eaten his skin away, "Though after my skin worms destroy this body", that will go next, "yet in my flesh shall I see God." I shall rise, my flesh will then be spiritual, immortal, incorruptible; and in my flesh I shall see God: "whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another;" I shall not have to ask another who or what he is, for I know him now in part, and when that which

is in part is done away, then that which is perfect shall come. Then I come to Isaiah: what is meant in his 35th chapter by the ransomed of the Lord returning, and coming to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, but the resurrection? What does he say in his 26th chapter? "Your dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake, and sing, you that dwell in dust, for your dew is as the dew of herbs." Again, in Hosea, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be your plagues; O grave, I will be your destruction." What is this but the triumphant, glorious resurrection of the saints of God? You know the Savior said all that are in the graves shall hear his voice; and "he that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." And the apostle Paul said there shall be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust. The doctrine therefore is clear.

I will now, before I enter upon the second part, just make a remark or two upon the absurd views that some people take. There are those that cannot believe it because they cannot comprehend it. What have we to do with comprehending it? Dr. Watts, in a work of his, well observes that in these matters we want only two things: first, to know that the Lord has spoken; secondly, that we rightly understand his meaning. Now we know that the Lord has spoken it, that it is his word that sets before us the resurrection; and secondly, we know that it means what it says. We have had some samples of the same; in the Old Testament age the dead were raised; Christ raised the dead. The great difficulty with some is the question of identity. I have not the same body now that I had thirty or forty years ago. How many new bodies I have had since I existed I do not know, or how many changes of body, the old particles going off, and new ones taking their place. But this perpetual change going on does not destroy or even interfere with my identity. I feel that I am James Wells still. I can look back to the time when I was five years old, when I began to work, and I have worked ever since, and have got my living ever since. I can see myself then, I am the same person that was that poor little James Wells cast into the world, wide, bleak, forlorn, without a friend, without a home; and yet God took care of me, and so he will of you. I am the same now. And so, when a man dies, the particles of his body may enter into the vegetation, and a sheep may cut that grass, and you may eat that sheep, so that you may eat particles that have been part of black men, or white men, and perhaps of those who have died of dreadful disease; and those particles that you eat become a part of you, and then perhaps those particles go off, and become a part of somebody else. This is a great mystery; some at the bottom of the sea, and some lose a limb on one side of the earth, some on the other; these particles are scattered; the idea of gathering them together seems preposterous and absurd. And yet the Lord will gather up the identical particles far enough to make it a resurrection, and not a new creation. It will not be essential that all the particles you have ever had should be raised up, in order to constitute you the same person; but there must be enough of the same particles gathered up to form your future body to constitute an identity. Now, remember the omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and infinite perfections of the Savior, and then you will remember it is God's work; and therefore, that which seems absurd and incomprehensible to us, at which philosophers of old laughed, because they could find no principles in nature by which such an end could be brought about, yet God can bring anything about; is there anything too hard for the Lord our God? How many particles are necessary to be raised in order to constitute identity, God alone knows. For myself, I can leave it very comfortably with the Lord. I rejoice in the resurrection of Christ, and in the sure prospect of my resurrection by him. Ah, to rise by virtue of his cleansing blood, his divine righteousness, his immutable love, to rise to be as glorious as he is, for we are to be like him, and to see him as he is! what a wondrous prospect is this.

Secondly, I notice *the fourfold representation which the apostle, by metaphor, in this chapter gives of the resurrection*. He uses a fourfold contrast to illustrate the superiority of the future when contrasted with the present state. Remember, when we handle metaphors in the scriptures, we must take up only those points which form the resemblance. Always recollect that these representations of divine things have more points of dissimilarity than of resemblance; but if there be a few points of resemblance then it does for a representation; and the few points of resemblance form an analogy between the representation used and the object intended. For instance, how readily we recognize the suitability of a lamb to represent Christ. Our minds naturally fasten upon its innocence, spotlessness, harmlessness, and edibility, its being good for food. Yet how easily you may find a great many more points of dissimilarity than points of resemblance; but there are points of resemblance enough to make the lamb a very beautiful representation of Him who is emphatically called the Lamb of God. Just so with the simile here used; we must look at the points of resemblance, but no farther. "Some men will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" To this question the apostle gives a fourfold answer: "That which you sow, you sow not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance be of wheat, or of some other grain; but God gives it a body as it has pleased him, and to every seed his own body." The idea is this: you must look at the grain of wheat in its dying state, and that will represent us in our dying condition; we are poor dying mortals. The grain of wheat dies, and yet there is something in it that does not die; so, your body dies, but you have a soul in it that will never die, Now the new wheat rising up young and fresh is to represent us in our resurrection state. "He shall gather the wheat into his garner, and the chaff he shall burn with unquenchable fire." You see this new wheat represents our new creature-ship; the dying grain of wheat represents our old creature-ship. This I apprehend is the apostle's meaning. The second representation he gives is that he insinuates something, I admit rather politely, but at the same time rather humbling. "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds," as much as to say, that is what you are, and you may call yourself that which you like. So, the wise man said: "That which befalls the sons of men, befalls beasts, even one thing befalls them; as the one dies, so dies the other; yes, they have all one breath; so that a man has no preeminence above a beast." These various kinds of flesh, therefore, are to represent, us in our present degraded state. Hence in Peter's vision there were four-footed beasts and wild beasts, all to represent us in our present deformed state. But when we are raised from the dead, we leave everything of the animal behind; we are no longer then compared to beasts and fowls of the air, because all these deformities are gone. The real dignity of human nature lies in the image of God. Our flesh will then be different from what it is now. We shall have a substantial body; we shall not be shadows, we shall be substances; when the body is said to be spiritual, it does not mean that it is spirit; it is spiritual, but not spirit; but spiritual and capable of seeing, nearing, tasting, and enjoying spiritual things. So, then the apostle speaks of this variety of flesh, as though he should say, Now you are upon a level, as it were, as poor creatures, considered with the very beasts of the earth; but then you will stand above the angels; for Jesus has not taken the nature of angels, but he has taken your nature; and angels are not one with God as man is. Oh, what a mighty change is wrought then, by the resurrection of the body. The third representation he gives is a contrast between terrestrial and celestial bodies. "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another." The first question is: What are these terrestrial bodies? for they are intended to represent what we now are; but the celestial bodies, sun, moon, and stars, are to represent what we are then to be. I know myself of only two terrestrial or earthly bodies (and I do not speak with much confidence here, lest I should

be wrong), and these two bodies represent what we are now; and those two are the sea and the earth; there is the body of water, and the body of earth. But the sea is stormy, and so we now, are in the midst of many storms, troubles, and trials. Then there is the earth, but then the earth brings forth its thorns, thistles, and briars, not only literally, but also figuratively so, as we all, by a great many painful experiences, well know. And yet the ocean is a glorious object, and the earth also is a glorious object. But then the celestial bodies are very different. See how calm the sun is, how calm the moon is, how calm the stars are. I speak not now philosophically, but in language, of popular speech; with what majesty they move in their spheres. So that these, earthly bodies are to represent our present condition of tribulations, storms, and trials; but these heavenly bodies represent us in our exaltation, when the saints of God shall be as the brightness of the firmament, and shall shine as the stars for ever and ever. Then, fourthly, the apostle contrasts the heavenly bodies one with another. "One star differs from another star in glory. So also, is the resurrection of the dead." The apostle explains what he means: "It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory." The dim stars represent us in our present mortality; the brilliant stars represent us in our future glory. I will take the most brilliant star in the sky, the Star of Bethlehem, Christ Jesus; he is the Bright and Morning Star, and his people are to be like him. Then I want the moon also in its brightness to help me to understand in some measure the blessedness of this resurrection. "Who is this that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon?" Then I want the sun also, for we cannot stop until we get to the brightest luminary. "Let them that love him be as the sun when he goes forth in his might." "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father;" as Jesus Christ himself shines forth. This is, I think, the meaning of the apostle. He does not mean that one star in heaven shines brighter than another; the apostle held no such doctrine as that of degrees in glory; he is contrasting our present with our future state, and not contrasting one saint with another saint in glory. We have, indeed, a brilliant career before us; we have, indeed, lively, and lovely, and sunny prospects, everything to draw us along. Oh, what a poor, dull, dark world is this, compared with that scene that our God has opened unto us. We are not to be the poor dying grain of wheat, but the new wheat, the new creature-ship; we are not to be upon a level with the beasts, but to be exalted even above angels; and we are not to be as terrestrial bodies, storms, briars, and thorns, but as the celestial bodies, to move along in unrivalled glory in our respective spheres; and we are not to be merely as the stars, or as the moon, but as the sun itself; and as our sun is not to go down, and our moon never to withdraw its brightness, so we are never to lose our standing, our light, our power, but shine on, on, and on, while eternity, with all its mysterious spheres, shall move on with a majesty of which at present we have no idea. Well may the apostle say, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure."

Lastly, I notice *the practical admonition that the apostle founds upon this great doctrine of the resurrection to eternal life*. There is a threefold practical lesson he founds upon it, arising first from the certainty of it, "Therefore my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmovable;" do not move away from it. Go away from the resurrection of Christ, from his achievement, from his victory, be moved away from this, then all is dark, all is wretched. Seeing then that all these things must be dissolved, that that day is coming, that you will as surely be there as that you are here, and either hear the words, "Well done, you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a

few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter you into the joy of your Lord;" or else, "Depart you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "Be you steadfast, unmovable;" no lightness, no frothiness, no mere speculation; look at it as the foundation of your eternal welfare; "for if Christ be not risen, your faith is vain, you are yet in your sins;" but Christ is risen, your faith is not vain, you are not in your sins. The second part of the practical lesson is to go on in the service of God zealously, "always abounding in the work of the Lord;" never get weary of it; not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, not neglecting the bible, not neglecting anything that God has commanded; zealous in every good work; get all the good you can for yourselves, do all the good you can for others; never be weary in well doing, "for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." And then, lastly, the encouragement; "forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Even a cup of cold water is owned of him, not because of anything meritorious in it, but the Lord loves to see his children busied in his service; he loves to see them act as though they knew it was not a vain thing to serve the Lord; he loves to see them follow hard after him; and the little service they may do he appreciates, "I was hungry, and you gave me meat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came unto me." All your worldly interest will soon be gone; but this new creature-ship, this resurrection, this glorious scene of things, will last forever. The Lord help us to understand it, and walk it out in practice for his name's sake. Amen,