

THE END OF TROUBLE

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning November 15th, 1868

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AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 11 Number 523

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Revelation 7:17

IT is ever a matter of importance to distinguish those to whom the promises of God belong from those to whom they do not manifestly belong. Yet there is a tendency very generally in the day in which we live to put off the souls of men with something short of a vital and real evidence of interest in eternal things. Hence, they say, “If we believe, that will do.” That is a truth, but at the same time what kind of faith is it with which we must believe? It must be the faith of regeneration, it must be the faith that is implanted in the soul by the power of God, it must be the faith that stands or will stand connected, as it becomes developed, with all the truths of the everlasting gospel. How essential it is that we should from time to time be careful thus to distinguish character; and there is not any ground upon which a minister is more encouraged to hope for success, to the good of those that know not God, in convincing them that they are out of the secret, and to the good of those that do know the Lord, demonstrating to them the great things God has done for them. Hence the Lord said, and a good ground of encouragement it is, “If you take forth the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth;” as though the Lord should say, Do this, and I will set in with you; for the Lord confirms the message of his messengers; and if the Lord give a man a word from His throne, it finds its way to its object, and shall not return void.

I have taken this text more as a kind of summary of what is said in part of the preceding chapter, and of what is said in all this chapter, and therefore, shall this morning deal more with the spirit than merely the words of the text; and in so doing I will first point out with all the care I can *the character to which this promise belongs*, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;” secondly, *how the Lord accomplishes this desirable and glorious end*.

First, *the character to which this promise belongs*, I will go back so far as the 12th verse of the preceding chapter in order to begin, and as I go along we shall find that the people to whom this promise belongs are a people that are brought into the bond of the new covenant. Secondly, that they are a people that are brought to receive God’s religion in contrast to man’s religion; and thirdly, that they are a people that undergo personally a most wonderful change. We have all this even in the first part of the description of their character. Hence the words, beginning at the 12th verse of the preceding chapter, down to the end of that chapter, have a threefold application: first, the abolition of the old covenant, and the bringing in of the better covenant; secondly, the

overthrow of heathenism, and the establishment of the Savior's name; thirdly, that work of the Holy Spirit by which the soul is brought into those sorrows that make way for the coming in of God's mercy to wipe away their tears. When the sixth seal was opened, "there was a great earthquake." This refers in the first place to the abolition of the old covenant; "and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair." This does not mean the sun literally; the heavenly bodies there referred to are referred to only by way of metaphor; for the circumstances there meant have nothing whatever to do literally with the heavenly bodies, but those heavenly bodies are spoken of figuratively. "The sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;" that is to say, the old covenant lost its light, for Christ left it; the old covenant lost its life, and it died. That is what is meant by the moon becoming as blood. "And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind;" that is, all the ruling powers connected with the old covenant, or the Jewish nation, they lost their power, lost their life. "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together;" that is, not the starry heavens, but the Jewish heavens; "and every mountain and island were moved out of their places;" that is, the governments in that land were overturned; and then you find from the highest to the lowest, which we shall have to deal most with when we come to the third idea, there was that alarm that they fled to the dens and the rocks of the mountains; that I shall treat of when we come to our third idea. This is what is meant, then, as it appears to me, by the sun becoming black as sackcloth of hair. The apostle says in the 10th of Hebrews, "He takes away the first;" what Isaiah calls the first heavens, "For the former heavens and the former earth shall not come into mind." John says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea," or no more trouble. The apostle says, "He takes away the first, that he may establish the second." Now the people to whom this promise belongs are brought into that second covenant which God has established. But let us be careful here. In the 10th of Hebrews the apostle is speaking of the will of God, and God's testamentary will in the old covenant was accomplished, and he took away that, and established the second, namely, the new covenant, by the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ said, "Sacrifice and offering you would not, but a body have you prepared me." So, then, "by the which will", this new testamentary will, "we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." And you will see that this offering of the Lord Jesus Christ accords entirely with the new covenant; that covenant is ordered in all things, and sure, and so the atonement of Christ is in every respect sure; whatever character it bears, it is in that character sure; but I will name only one aspect here. The apostle says, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all," that is, once, and only once. God having given the people to Christ, and imputed their sins to him, and imputed his righteousness to them, he has accomplished in actuality that which God had settled in purpose before the world was. Here, then, is the mediator of the new covenant, and here is the new covenant of the mediator. Here you have a sun that will never be darkened, a moon that will never withdraw its brightness, prophetic stars that will never fall from heaven; here you have heavens that will never depart, islands and mountains that can never be moved out of their place. The more clearly you understand this great matter of the new covenant in contrast to the old, and the more you are brought into an acquaintance with the completeness of the Savior's work (and the Lord abides in the immutability of his covenant by that work), I am sure the more glorious the Lord will be in your eyes, and the more eagerly, cheerfully, and delightfully will you serve him. I do not feel that I can live the life that even some good people seem contented to live. They seem so content without any understanding of these things. They read these scriptures, and they appear to them to be altogether incapable of being understood. But if you take what is there said of the sun, moon,

and stars as the abolition of the old covenant, and all that pertains thereunto, for the bringing in of the new covenant, and the bringing in of that eternal perfection that is in Christ, what difficulty is there in it? It has no reference to the last great day, the end of this world; for it there says, "they hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;" but there will be no rocks, or dens, or mountains to fly to at the last day; because at the last day the earth itself and the works therein shall be burned up. And besides, the human race then will be divided into two classes, the one on the right hand, they will not have to fly anywhere, the other on the left hand, they will have no opportunity of flying anywhere, because there is the sentence upon them. Therefore, the words have no reference whatever to the last day. This, then, is one application, that the Lord does bring his people to understand what the new covenant is, and what Jesus Christ is in the confirmation of that covenant; there is the death of the testator perfecting forever them that are sanctified. Shall we while we live, shall we to all eternity, get weary of the blessed truth being brought before us, that we are complete in him? But, secondly, this subversion of the heavens some learned men, and I think with a great deal of consistency, have applied to the overthrow of heathenism; that when the Christian religion began to establish itself in the Gentile world, then the heathen sun went down, the heathen moon was, as it were, turned into blood; the heathen rulers fell, as the fig tree casts her untimely figs when shaken with a mighty wind; and when the apostle went into the Gentile world, by the power of the eternal Spirit, there was indeed a mighty wind that brought poor sinners from death to life, from darkness to light, and enabled them to contrast the heathenism under which they had hitherto been with the wonders of the new covenant, the wonders of this Mediator; and in the contrast of the two how did they detest the one, and with what eagerness did they embrace the other! saying, "Come and speak to us the same words the next sabbath;" and the next sabbath there came almost all the city together to hear the word of God. They cast their idols to the moles and to the bats; and thus, the old heathen heavens and earth were all passed away. Here is a new life, a new light, a new day, a new scene altogether, and a new scene, too, that can never grow old. That is another application of those words.

I shall come now, under the third head, to very close quarters. When the sixth seal was opened there was a great earthquake; that is the first thing that is expressive of Christian experience, that is expressive of the work of God. When God convinces a sinner of his state, what is the first thing? What does an earthquake figuratively mean? A revolution; revolutions in nations are figuratively called earthquakes. When a sinner is convinced of his state, what does it do? It darkens all the hopes he had before, darkens his prospects, brings him into darkness; and it is that kind of revolution that swallows up everything. Hence when God met with Saul of Tarsus, there was a mighty earthquake, that swallowed up all his confidences, all his religion, all his holiness, all his righteousness, all his strength, all his wisdom, and there he was left, feeling that for aught he deserved, the earthquake might also swallow him up. One of old, who underwent this revolution of character, was brought into such a state of alarm that he said, "Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me." Some of you may think, perhaps, this language is rather too sublime and too strong to apply to the circumstance of regeneration; but if you study for a moment what regeneration is, the mighty change brought about by it, I think you will say it is not too strong a figure to use. Just look at regeneration, look at the change which it makes. Time would fail me to enter into a definition of the contrast between a lost and a saved sinner. What an infinite difference between the two! What an infinite gulf fixed between the two! What a mighty revolution, then, is regeneration, to bring us out of darkness, condemnation, sin, woe, and hell, I may say, itself, out of God's wrath, into the life of God, into the light of God, into the holiness, righteousness, and salvation of God.

So that the sun now, all your false hope, becomes black as sackcloth of hair; the noon becomes as blood, and all the ruling powers that seemed to govern you before are gone; and now you are alarmed. John, then, saw into the Gentile world, and he saw that at once which we see only by degrees; and he saw that from the mightiest monarch to the humblest slave they were all alarmed, and they fled to the dens and rocks of the mountains. Just so every sinner, when he is first awakened, if he does not happen to have some knowledge of God's truth, he is sure to fly to some supposed rock or other. The first rock that I fled to was the Church of England; the next rock of the mountain that I fled to was Wesleyanism; the next rock that I fled to was duty-faith-ism. There I was, fearing the wrath of the Lamb, saying to these mountains, "Fall on me." I do hope the Church of England will protect me. And then I hoped the mountain of free will would protect me; but still none of them were Mount Zion; and so, I remained, could find no rest, no peace. Here is a mighty revolution; here is an earthquake that swallows up all your false hopes and then, fearing you will be lost, and seeking a refuge,

"Whither shall I flee,
To hide myself from wrath and Thee?"

What have not sinners, when first awakened, fled to for shelter! Perhaps I am speaking to some this morning who feel a concern about their state; there is a mighty change wrought in you; you do not as yet understand the change, and perhaps you have fled to prayer, saying, your own works, your own doings, anything and everything except to Christ Jesus the Lord. How let us see what becomes of this same people that have undergone this revolution, that are brought to know something, or shall do in the Lord's own time, of the Mediator of the new covenant, that are brought to know something of that religion that descends from above, in contrast to that religion that is manufactured and maintained by men; and that are brought to know something of all their former hopes and confidences being swept away, and having nothing left now as their confidence, which perhaps as yet some of them do not understand, but will in the Lord's own time, but Jesus Christ, and the sworn yea and amen promises of the blessed God, that are in and by Christ Jesus the Lord.

Now when persons are thus made concerned for eternal things, there is a universality of power against them. John says, "I saw four angels," that is, Satan's 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." The literal reference there, of course, is to the four ancient empires, and each empire was saying, "I will rule universally." If any one of those empires could have done so, not a soul could have been saved; but they never could so rule universally as to hinder the salvation of sinners. Hence there comes the command to this universal position of the adversary on all sides, an angel ascends from the east, or from the sunrising, that is, Christ Jesus appears in the light of the gospel, "saying. Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." Now let us look back at the time when we were alarmed, some of us; we knew not what would become of us; things seemed to set in against us all round; but there was God's restraint upon the adversary, the adversary's object with us was to do away with this alarm, that he might substitute a false peace into the place of it; to do away with this trembling, that he might substitute some delusion into the place of it. Hence how many in our day are alarmed, and by a false gospel find peace! just showing that the peace they find is a false peace, and that they are put off with that which is not God's truth; and the man that finds peace without finding

God's truth, without finding God's covenant, without finding the Mediator of the new covenant, you may take it for granted that man has not obtained real peace by the Spirit of truth; that his peace is like the gospel he holds, it is false, it is lying, from beneath, from Satan. And this is what Satan aims at, to do away with your uneasiness, and your concern for your soul, and to satisfy you with something short of God's truth. On the other hand, the Lord will so deal with you as to increase your alarm, your concern, your dissatisfaction. I look back at the time when I could not understand the matter, but I can now; I can see the two elements at work, the one trying to quiet me, the other would not let me be quiet, no, uneasy, unhappy; I was afraid of the wrath of the Lamb; nothing could satisfy my soul but that divine sealing that should give me the assurance by the power of God's eternal truth of my interest in these eternal things. Thus, then, regeneration works a great revolution, darkens everything that before was light, and brings us into a new scene altogether. The adversary tries to overcome this concern; and, indeed, not only when we are first concerned, but even now. Why is it that we are so thin sometimes on Sunday, and on Wednesday and Friday evenings, and why is it that most of the places where the truth is preached are not better attended? We, it is true, in this respect have much more to be thankful for than some; but how is it that we are not better attended? It is because the adversary partially prevails, and robs us of that wholesome concern, that wholesome cautiousness, that wholesome alarm, and that solemn interest in eternal things, that we get into a kind of sleepy state, and care but little either for the means of grace or for the grace of the means. Think you not, friends, there is a solemn meaning in that scripture which says, "Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light" Think you not there is a solemn meaning in that scripture, "What mean you, O sleeper? arise, and call upon your God"? Think you not there is a meaning in that scripture, "Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city;" put off the world, put on Christ; "for henceforth there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean"? You have everything to encourage you. And ministers must go on, not only to preach the gospel, but even to sound an alarm in God's holy mountain. So here is the adversary trying, if possible, to overcome our concern. I find him working with me pretty often, trying to get me fast asleep and unconcerned, dull, and disinterested; but I can tell you one thing, my conscience would smite me to the ground if I were not as zealous in private, when no eye sees me but God, in prayer for myself and for you, and for Zion at large, to read his word and meditate thereon, if I were not as zealous in private as I appear to be, and, I hope, am, in public. Religion is not a fit and start sort of thing, it is an every moment thing, an everyday thing, an every place thing, and an every circumstance thing; there is not a single circumstance in our lot that our religion has not to do with, that our God has not to do with, "casting all our care upon him." I say not this by way of reproof to those that are here, nor to those that are not; I merely make the remark to show that the adversary, with his four agents, working all round, east, west, north, and south, is trying to make us unconcerned, and to reduce us into mere formalism, and to say, My past experience is good, and my practice is good, and it is all pretty well, and so to wrap it up. Thus, the devil would get you to rest upon something past, instead of joining with the apostle when he says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Those of us that have undergone this revolution, whose first heavens and first earth have passed away, and all things become new, may the Lord still go on to keep us, to revive us, and to make us lively; that when we come to die it may be merely going from the lower to the upper house, merely going from a world of thorns to a paradise of pleasure; merely passing from that that we are glad in many respects to leave, and going into possession of that that we are forever to enjoy. Why should we go croaking and grumbling along, as though we had neither God, nor Christ, nor promise, nor mercy, nor salvation,

nor heaven, nor eternity, nor anything else? whereas the people of God are the only people in the world that have ground for real liveliness. And I am sure the Lord is not displeased to see us cheerful, earnest, and lively in his service. "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." I know as well as any that this can be done only by the power of God; still, at the same time it becomes us not to be satisfied with anything short of fellowship with him from time to time.

Now we will go on, and see what becomes of these people that have undergone this revolution, whose former heavens and earth are passed away; and for happiness they are now placing their hope where happiness shall surely be had; for safety they are now placing their confidence where safety is certain to be found; for enduring substance they are now seeking, and they shall not come short. "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment; that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures." Am I speaking to some that have undergone this revolution, and not yet been assured? These people are to be sealed. "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea;" he will restrain the enemy, he will restrain your troubles; he has put the statute of limitation upon everything that stands against you, "Hitherto you may come, and no further." He will not suffer you to be tried so as to drive you to absolute desperation, but will at the proper time appear, and manifest the greatness of his power and love, and will wipe away all tears from the eyes of such. Now they are to be sealed. I will try and explain this sealing in a way that the least among you shall understand it. I do not know any scripture more expressive of what this sealing is than that in the 1st of Ephesians, where the Savior is represented first as an object of God's confidence, then as an object of our confidence; then the apostle proceeds to describe the sealing in a most beautiful manner: "Who first trusted in Christ." God the Father trusted in Christ; and God must know whether the Savior was to be trusted or not. God did trust him. And did the Savior honor the Father's trust and confidence in him? He did. "In whom you also trusted;" now comes the sealing; "after that you heard the word of truth," that begins to prepare the heart for the sealing, "the gospel of your salvation;" so, then, the word of truth is the gospel of your salvation; "in whom, also, after that you believed", "after you believed;" does not this meet many of you? You have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and because it sets before you salvation, it is to you worthy of all acceptance; and you have believed: but as to being sealed, that you have not yet come to; you could not for all the world say that God is yours. How is it? It is because you are not yet sealed; that is the reason. "In whom also after that you believed" how long between the time you receive the gospel in the love of it, and the time you are sealed, is a matter that lies with the Lord. But what is the sealing? "You were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." Now, mark, this promise is in Christ, and, therefore, yea and amen. "When the Lord is pleased to bring home a promise with power to your soul, and give you such a sight and sense of his love to you, and such an experience of pardoning mercy as to enable you to say with David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name, who forgives all your iniquities, and heals all your diseases," when this promise shall come with power, that will be the sealing. You are as safe without it in reality as you are with it; but you are not so happy. I know the seal the Lord gave me, there it is, 8th verse of the 54th of Isaiah. I am never ashamed to tell people how I came by my religion; I came by it honestly; I received it not from man, nor was I taught it by man; it was the revelation of Jesus Christ to my soul. Here is the sealing, then, some promise brought home with power enough for you to rely upon it, to lay hold of it, for you to feel, in a great measure, it is yours; and I will go so far, I like to be encouraging as well as searching; I will go so far as to say that if the promise suits you, and you know what the promise is, yea and amen. As

Abraham was a pattern of all true Christians in this as well as in many other respects, let us take him. The Lord made a positive promise to him in the 15th of Genesis as to what his seed should be; and Abraham well knew that if that promise came to pass, it must come to pass entirely by the Lord, without anything done whatever by the creature; and Abraham was such a hyper, that he absolutely believed in God's promise, and as he believed, it was counted to him for righteousness; he was called the friend of God, and was thus justified before God. The suitability of the promise lies in its being yea and amen, independently of you. As to conditional promises, they are no use. Old covenant promises were conditional; they are all past and gone. The Lord said, "You shall know my breach of promise;" that is, as they had apostatized from the priesthood, they lost their right to it, and the promise fell to the ground, because it was conditional. But here, in Christ Jesus, the promise, being yea and amen, can never fall to the ground. "In blessing I will bless." Does sin say no? It is gone. Does Satan say no? His head is bruised, his power is lost. Does tribulation say no? Tribulations are God's servants, not his masters. Does death say no? Death is swallowed up in victory. "In blessing I will bless you." Ah, says one, you do not know what a devil of a heart I have got. Well, bless God that you know it, and what does that do? Why, say you, make me ashamed of myself, hate, loathe, and despise myself. All the better. Is that all it does? No, say you, that is not all it does, for it drives me out from those yea and nay, shilly-shally gospels, and now I will have no hope but in the yea and amen promise, "In blessing I will bless; in multiplying I will multiply;" that is, I will multiply my mercies to you as your necessities require. And that promise is by the atonement that has thrown every one of your sins into everlasting oblivion, never to be named again, never to be found. Who shall lay anything to the charge of such? These are they, then, that shall be sealed; and the number specified in this chapter of course represents the whole. Hence it goes on to speak of a number that no man can number that have undergone this revolution, whose former heavens are passed away; and though they fled to the wrong refuge at the first, yet in due time they find the true way, the only way in which they can be saved.

Secondly, I notice *how the Lord accomplishes the desirable and glorious end indicated in our text.* I will just mention five things by which the Lord wipes away all tears from their eyes. First, by the completeness of the work of Christ. 25th of Isaiah, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth." Now we are always more or less afraid of hearing unpleasant tidings from some quarter or another; the death, or affliction, or adversity of a friend; one thing and another. But here, in this standing in Christ, the rebuke is taken away from off all the earth; there is no quarter from which any tidings can come for one moment to at all counteract that blessed testimony; the rebuke is gone, and not anything can be laid to their charge. The second way in which the Lord wipes away all tears from their eyes is by his presence, as shown in the 21st chapter of this book, where you have this very subject repeated, the former heavens passed away and the new ones come; "God himself shall be with them, and shall," by his presence, "wipe away all tears from their eyes." And is it not so? Oh, when he grants us his presence, whether in private or public, how it soothes and takes away our sorrows! His presence does indeed dry up the tears of sorrow, and brings the tears of joy; the heart melted down, Christ precious; and you think, Ah, if the Lord blessed me with the faith that David had in relation to his presence, with what confidence I could look forward to my departing hour; for "when I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me." Ah, when Jesus spoke of leaving them (and it is very much to the credit of the disciples that it was so) he said, "Because I have spoken of leaving you, sorrow has filled your hearts." So, with the Christian, when he does not feel the presence of the Lord, he

is sorrowful, everything is cold and dead. We may turn the “will not” into a “cannot” in one place, where it is said, “The people will not eat till he come and bless the sacrifice, and then they eat that are bidden.” So now we cannot eat till he comes; the bridegroom is taken away, and there is nothing but fasting; but he sees us again, our hearts rejoice, and he blesses the sacrifice, and makes it a blessing to us, and then they eat that are bidden, when he says, “Eat, O friends; drink abundantly, O beloved.” Thirdly, the Lord wipes away our tears by entirely reconciling us to circumstances. Of course, we shall never have while we are in the body a perfect reconciliation; every one’s shoe, I was going to say, pinches somewhere; if not literally so, figuratively taken it is true; that is, everyone has a crook in his lot somewhere, something that he cannot feel altogether reconciled to. But the time will come when these people shall be perfectly reconciled to every circumstance. Ah, the time will come when you shall look back at all the things you have wept over, mourned and grieved over, and have felt there was but a step between you and death, “I shall fall one day by the hand of Saul;” it is all over with me, my profession is leaving me, I am afraid I shall be lost; my heart sinks, ten thousand things to mourn over; yet the time shall come when the scene will be so changed that each will say,

“I know, in all that me befell,
My Jesus has done all things well!”

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his, purpose.” The fourth thing by which the Lord wipes away all the tears of his people is by preserving them unto the end. Ah, to present us faultless, unrepensible and unblameable through the body of his death, namely, through Christ, if we continue in the faith. I know very well it is possible for you to go before a church, and state an experience that you have never had; it is possible for you to write a letter upon an experience you have never passed through. Ah, my hearer, drink waters out of your own cistern, and not of others; if you have but a little experience, a few ears of corn picked up by the way, abide by them, and do not go stealing out of the sheaves, and say, What a great sheaf my experience is! I am bigger than a dozen of you put together; but then you have stolen out of other sheaves; it is not your own; you have not come by it honestly; and some day or other, not being your own, you will manifest the fact that it is not your own. Therefore, let your experience be your own.