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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE RIGHT DOOR..

A SERMON

PREACHED ON WEDNESDAY, EVENING, 22ND MAY, 1867,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.”—Revelation iii. 8.

It is a great mystery, but so it is, that Satan has ever had a savage delight in keeping us from God; and not only so, but in keeping us unconcerned under such circumstances as being without hope, and without Christ, and without God in the world. And while in this state, we think we can open for ourselves the door of heaven at any time; we think we can go to God and go to heaven just as we please. But when the Lord is pleased to command the light to shine into the soul, and to show unto us that which is needful to bring us to God, ah, how the scene is then changed. Then it is such an one begins to knock at the door of mercy by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; such an' one then begins to be in earnest, and he is led to see that escape from his direful condition can be only by faith in the dear Saviour. What mercy then for the Lord to bring home with power such words as these;—“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” If we apply this, which of course we do, to eternal things, there this testimony is of infinite and everlasting value. And we may apply it also to providential things, for there is a special providence over the people of God. Brought to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he will take care to lead them in the way that shall be for their ultimate good, for the manifestation of his wonderful mercy and wisdom, and the deep counsels of his will.

I will then take a three-fold view of our subject this evening. First, *the characteristics of this open door*. Secondly, *the lawfulness implied*:—it is the door; here is no climbing over the wall, but entering by the door. And thirdly and lastly, *the authority by which this testimony is sustained*:—it is the Lord himself that so speaks;—“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.”

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First, then, *the characteristics of this open door*. And I will notice four scriptures upon this matter. First, then, it is the door of access to God; secondly, it is the door of hope; thirdly, it is the door of salvation; and fourthly, it is the door of heaven. First, it is the door of access to God. One can hardly read the first chapter of Leviticus, as well as other similar scriptures, without the heart bounding with some degree of love and gratitude to God. When they brought the offering, they were to bring it to the door of the tabernacle, and in that way they were to have access to God, this being a type of Jesus Christ as the way. It saith, "He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him." Now, look at this as it points to the Lord Jesus Christ, and I know not anything that can equal it in blessedness;—that this sacrifice was brought to the door of the tabernacle by which he had access to God, and it is said, "It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him." Let us view the door in this light,—an atonement. Here then is, in the first place, the forgiveness of sin. "Little children," saith John, "I write unto you because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." Here is the delight of God's love, for it is the delight of love to pass by transgression, to hide the multitude of sins, to think no evil, to do everything that is needed for the objects of that love. "It shall be accepted for Him. Here is the open door. Then you go a little further with this, and you find not only here is forgiveness of sin, not only pardon of sin, not only the blotting out of sin, but the sin is atoned for. The reparation is made. Jesus Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and His sacrifice is eternal. So that sin can only come back again before God against the people for whom Christ died, when His sacrifice shall cease to be, when the price that He has paid shall lose its force, and when His precious blood shall lose its power. Here, then, reparation has been made, "and it shall be accepted for Him." Now, just mark, friends, how this door of access to God by the blood of the everlasting covenant, accords with that beautiful word in the New Testament, which we would not part with on any account—I mean the word, "whosoever." The Lord commanded them thus to bring the sacrifice; and the language of the New Testament upon this is, that "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." When a sinner is convinced of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of his own condition and state as a sinner, he is ready to think then that God would save any one except such an one as he feels himself to be; and that Jesus Christ may be accepted on behalf of any one except such a poor creature as he sees and feels himself to be. Oh! how this conviction of our state, that leads us to believe in Christ with a living faith, how this changes our thoughts; for, while in a state of nature, what is our language? Our language then is this, just showing our blindness—"If the Lord does not save me, what is to become of that man? and if the Lord should curse me, then what will become of that man? because I can point out a great many that are much worse than I am." But when called by grace, oh, it comes home then; then you realize what is said of the prodigal—and a very significant scripture it is—"He came to himself." Now, when the Lord calls a man by His grace; He calls that man to himself—to the man's own self. Saul of Tarsus was busied about everybody but himself; but when the Lord began His work, Saul of Tarsus was called home to himself, to see what he had in his own house, in his own heart; and when he found out how matters were there, then he stood aghast at himself, then he felt and saw that if the Lord saved him, he could not despair of any man. He could not then, when he was thus called home to himself to know what he himself was in the sight of God, he could not then see any of his fellow

creatures worse than himself. Now his language is—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance; that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." If we are thus sensible of our state, and are seeking to escape and to enter in at the open door, we have the atonement of the dear Saviour; there is, as I have said, the beautiful word, "*Whosoever* believeth in Him." But then, of course, it must be a living faith. A mere intellectual, natural, moral faith is of no avail: it must be a faith connected with conviction of sin. The Saviour Himself describes, very particularly, the work of the Holy Spirit upon this matter; and ever remember, we can no more be saved without the quickening power of the Holy Spirit in our souls, than we can be saved without the mediation of Christ, or without the mercy of the Father. The Saviour saith—"He shall convince of sin, because ye believe not in Me." That is, if you are not convinced of sin, you will not believe in Him; and, therefore, in order that you may believe in Him, the Holy Spirit convinces you of sin, and that will lead you to believe in Christ. "And of righteousness, because I go to my Father; because I have accomplished that which he sent me to do; I have established and brought in everlasting righteousness. And "of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged;" that is, that Satan is finally cast down. There is an essential difference, after all, between living faith and a mere natural faith. Now where is the man that can rejoice, where is the man whose soul can be made like the chariots of Amminadib; where is the man who from his own soul's experience can say, "He maketh my feet like hind's feet";—where is the man who can say this? None but the man that feels that he is helplessly shut out, as far as creature power is concerned, from all hope in God. Then, when the Lord reveals to him this door, this way, by this atonement, and brings home, if not the words, yet the import of the words, that "We have boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter into the holy of holies;"—ah, let this be seen, let this be understood, let this be recognised, and such an one will indeed bless God for the unspeakable gift of his dear Son, especially when he traces up this heavenly way of access to God to the original source, which is nothing but God's everlasting love. "God so loved the world"; that is, there is a world that he has loved; he has embraced a world of people in his love, and that world of people the Holy Spirit shall convince of sin, and that world of people shall appear at the last in everlasting glory. The church is all the world to Christ, and God has loved this world, and given his only begotten Son, that "*whosoever*"—there comes the beautiful word; what a pity that that beautiful word should be so perverted and abused as it is:—"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." Men make use of this word "*whosoever*" to indicate that it is in the power of the creature to come to Christ, and to believe in Christ, and accept Christ, and receive Christ. But for myself I have never so learned Christ. I have learned from solemn experience that faith is the gift of God. I have learned from solemn experience that without Christ I can do nothing. I have learned from solemn experience that I can come to Christ only as the Father draws me. And therefore the use I make of the "*whosoever*" is simply this—that the man that is convinced of his state thinks that he is the very last man in the world that God would show mercy to. Then comes in the word "*whosoever*"; so that such an one cannot shut himself out if he would. "*Whosoever*;" let him be as benighted and degraded as he may, whether like Manasseh, or Saul of Tarsus, or any other; there is the "*whosoever*." "I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it." Now this was a great transaction, to break the gates of brass that shut us out from God; to cut in sunder the bars of iron of sin that shut us out from God; and to shine into our souls, and make this a matter of infinite and eternal concern unto us; for what, after all, is there so worthy of our anxiety and con-

cern as this way of access to the blessed God? Jesus Christ, then, is thus by his atonement the open door. "The atonement shall be accepted for him." What a sweet doctrine this is—Jesus Christ accepted for us; the fire falls upon him, and we escape; Jesus Christ accepted for us, and we accepted in him. But, secondly, it is the door not only of access to God, but the door of hope; and a blessed hope it is. I refer now to the 2nd chapter of Hosea; "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope." You have there in the first place the hope of victory; you then have the hope of safety, you then have the hope of dear relation to God; you then have the hope of eternal plenty; so it is the door of hope in all these things. First, you have the hope of victory: "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." Now there is the victory. It is to point our attention back to what the Lord did in delivering his people from Egypt, and giving them, as he did give them, the victory. When he brought them out of Egypt is beautifully set forth in the 15th chapter of this book of Revelation; that they that gained the victory over the beast, and over his mark, and over his image, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God, and they sing the song of Moses as the type, and of the Lamb as the antitype. Here then was the hope of victory. What a vast amount of learned *nothing* has been written upon who the beast is, and what the mark is, and what the number of his name is. But if we keep close to the scriptures there is no difficulty whatever. The wild beast—for it means a wild beast—denotes the whole body of sin and error. That is the beast. People say it is Popery, or Mahometanism, or this, and that and the other. Take it to mean the whole of Satan's power, let it appear in what shape it may; it is the one great wild beast that destroys the souls and bodies of men; the one great body of sin in all its shapes and forms, let it be in what shape it may. By receiving the Lord Jesus Christ in the warfare that he has accomplished, you gain an entire victory; the victory is complete; there is not one department left unconquered. His victory in this sense is universal; there you may stand and shout universal and eternal victory through the blood of the Lamb. And as to his image, why, that depends upon circumstances. He has a thousand images;—images are representations. Now if I want to represent a public-house, I should do as the boy did;—I think that boy ought to have had a little present for his wit;—when a drunken man fell down before a publican's door, the little boy looked in,—“Oh master,” he said, “here's your sign fallen down.” The publican came out to see, and there was the drunken man. So the Pope is the image of Popery; the Sultan is the image of Mahometanism; and the Czar the image of Russianism, and Canterbury the image of Church of Englandism; and whoever stands at the head of any system is the image of that system. Whatever, then, you have to encounter, faith in Christ will give you the victory. “I have set before thee an open door,” of victory, “and no man can shut it.” None of these images, none of these powers, can hinder you from the victory; and “this is our victory, even our faith.” What, when the power of God rests upon us, can hinder us from believing? Believing is a secret act, as well as a sacred act. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” And as to his mark, what difficulty is there in understanding the mark. I will go back to my little boy again:—“there is your sign fallen down.” Now that man's being drunk is a mark of that part of the beast, that is, subscribing to it. And so, if I subscribe to any system—for instance, if my faith be the faith of a Roman Catholic, that's the mark. If my faith be the faith of Mahometanism, that's the mark. Whatever the faith is is the mark. “According to your faith be it unto you.” If it is a false

faith, then your destiny will accord with it, dying in that state: while if you belong to God, and have the faith of God's elect, that faith is the mark. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Precious faith in Jesus Christ will overcome all false systems. "And the number of his name;" take the devil there to be the head, and take the whole of the human race that serve him to be the number; it may be six hundred and sixty-six millions, or whatever it may be;—there it is. But you will overcome them all. David refers to this when he saith, "Though ten thousand set themselves against me I will not fear." So the Israelites, then, overcame Pharaoh and all his host, not by any power of their own, but by the interposing power of the blessed God. Therefore it is said, "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall sing there, as in the day of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt." The dividing of the Red Sea was the door that the Lord opened; and I reckon Pharaoh would have been very much pleased to shut it: I think Satan himself would have been very much pleased to shut it. The Lord opened that door, and he kept it open till his own people were safe, and then shut the door against the others.

But again: it is also the hope of safety. "In that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground; and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely." Now this covenant made with the beasts of the earth means that the adversaries are restrained; they are permitted to go so far, but no farther. We have so many instances of this in the Bible that I need not here stop to amplify them. Take the beasts of the field to mean one class of enemies, the fowls of heaven to mean another, and the creeping things of the ground to mean serpentine, sly, wily, crafty enemies;—he perceiveth their craftiness. Take this covenant then to mean the restraint that the enemies of the Lord's people are under. Goliath did not know where he should be obliged to stop; and when Satan came against Job, he did not know at first where he should be obliged to stop. If then we have enemies, let us leave them to the Lord. If there are some fowls of the air, some high-flying ones, going to pounce down upon us, they shall be restrained. There was that high-flying Haman:—Ah, he said, I will pounce down upon that Mordecai: I will fasten my talons upon him; I will stick my beak in him; I will pretty soon have him. But we see how matters turned out; we see what the end was. So then it is the hope of safety. "I will make them to lie down safely;" safe in the keeping of God their Father; none shall pluck them out of his hands. We are safe in the keeping of the Great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls; safe in the keeping of the Eternal Spirit. "He that keepeth thee will neither slumber nor sleep; he shall preserve thee from all fatal evil; he shall preserve thy soul." And then it is the hope also of dear relationship. "I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness,"—the righteousness of Christ; "and in judgment;" that is, it shall be done after such a wise manner that it can never be undone again, and will not need to be undone again; "and in lovingkindness," to make the whole of it pleasant; and in mercies," to counteract our miseries. "I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord;" that is, thou shalt know him in this eternal and indissoluble relationship into which he hath taken his people. These are blessed things, to be made acquainted with;—to have access to God, to be blessed with this victory, with this safety, and this dear relationship. Then it is also the hope of eternal plenty. "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear saith the Lord; I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel." Now that is what some divines would call, I

suppose, rather a knotty scripture, but still, if we keep in the light I think we can understand it pretty clearly. "I will hear the heavens." I take the heavens there mystically, for I will pass by what is literally meant, and come at once to the spiritual meaning—that Jesus Christ is the heavens. Hence we read in Isaiah, "That I may plant the heavens." When Jesus Christ became incarnate, the heavens were planted in our world. The Lord says, "I will hear the heavens," alluding literally to the clouds interposing, and wishing to go down and satiate the thirsty earth. So we have Jesus Christ interceding for poor sinners, that he may come down upon us like rain and distil upon our souls as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb. "And the earth shall hear the corn and the wine and the oil." Let us take the earth there to mean the promised land, as a type of the gospel; and the corn says to the earth, Let me grow in you; and the vine says, Let me grow on the sunny side of that mountain; and the olive tree says, Let me grow there. So the promised land agrees to grow the vine, the olive, and the corn. "And they shall hear Jezreel." Jezreel means "the seed of God." And so when you call for the corn it will come; and when you call for some wine (better wine than you can get in this world) it will come; and when you call for the oil it will come. Well, say you, you are putting us into a nice position now; you are making out that here is corn, and wine, and oil, and that we have them by calling for them. Well, I think Moses sums up all this when he says, "What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" O Lord; give me a little bread to strengthen my heart; give me a little wine to cheer my heart; give me a little oil to make my face to shine, for thou hast said, that the corn, and the wine, and the oil, shall hear the seed of God, and thou hast never said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye me in vain." "I have set before thee," then, "an open door," a door of hope—the hope of victory, the hope of safety, a sure hope, the hope of dear relation, and the hope of eternal plenty. Religion—I know the longer I live the more precious it is to me. Oh, what a gospel is the gospel of our God, and what a God is the God of the Gospel! A better definition was never given than that given by the apostle himself when he saith, "That I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Here, then, we have hidden treasures—the deep that coucheth beneath.

Then it is the door of salvation. The dear Saviour saith, "I am the door: all that ever came before me are thieves and robbers." Well, it was a fraud, certainly it was, for people in the Old Testament age to pretend to be mediators. There were many men that came before Christ that pretended to be mediators. So they set up the golden calf in Moses' days. All that ever came before the Saviour, and pretended to be mediators, were thieves and robbers. Now it was bad enough then, but only think of it now, in our land, only think of one of our bishops telling us that the political parsons (for you must understand that the Church ministers are constituted ministers by political acts, by acts of parliament, by human authority; there is no more religion in making a church minister than there is in making a man a member of parliament—it is all human together;)—the bishop tells us that these parsons have power to turn the bread and wine into the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ! I wish the poor dear man would bring something to prove it. So then, these men set themselves up as mediators, but you and I know that they are thieves and robbers. They would rob God of his glory, they would rob Christ of his honour; they would shut the door of heaven and open the door of hell, and try to persuade us that the door of hell is the door of heaven. So it is a great mercy to be kept from going in at the wrong door. The Saviour saith, "I am the door;" "if any man by me enter in, he shall be saved." Oh, how nicely I can! and I trust you can too, set your seal to that—that

if you enter by him you are sure to be saved. "He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him." "And shall go in and out," range over the promises, "and shall find pasture." We cannot always find it when we would, but we shall find it. The ancient oriental shepherds had to take their sheep sometimes scores of miles; they had a long distance to go sometimes over very waste, barren land between one oasis, one spot of pasturage and another. Just so it is with us now; the Lord leads us sometimes a long way before he gives us the pasture; but he always does give it us. The last characteristic of this door which I notice is that it is the door of heaven. 4th of Revelation;—"I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven; and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, "Come up hither, and I will show things which must be hereafter." It is a wonderful mercy for the solemn judgments to come to be so strikingly revealed to our minds as to move us to look to Christ as the refuge. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." And on the other hand, there were not only the solemn judgments to come, but the glories to come: and John was led, as you see, in this book from one degree of glory to another, till he saw at last the city of the living God, and traced it out, as you know, in detail. "I will show thee things which must be hereafter." So it is with us; the Lord will do nothing but that he revealeth his secret concerning futurity unto his servants; for "the secret of the Lord"—what he intends to do in the future—"is with the righteous, and he will show them his covenant."

I will now hastily notice the second point, which I have already hinted at—*the lawfulness, implied.* "I have set before thee an open door." There is nothing in our religion to be ashamed of; it is all lawful. People of old said,—You must not speak any more in the name of Jesus Christ; it is not lawful. As a church parson said to me some time ago in a railway carriage,—"Sir," he said, "we are the lawful ministers." I said, "That you are: but you are not the gospel ministers; there is a great difference between the two." Now, they said,—"It is not lawful." But the apostles replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." We are doing nothing wrong; we are telling poor sinners round what a dear Saviour we have found. We are saying nothing but what the prophets have said before; we are saying nothing but what the Lord himself is the author of. It is lawful, then; God is just, the people are just. Our religion does not wrong any one, but it rights a great many; our religion does not injure any one, but it does good to a great many. The dear Saviour may well say,—"Whoso is ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed." Our religion is holy, just, and good; heavenly, divine, and eternal; such as devils tremble at, angels adore, saints rejoice in, God dwells in, and will be glorified by, and that for ever and ever.

But lastly, *the authority by which this testimony is sustained*;—the authority of the great God himself; "Behold, I have set before thee an open door." Now some of these authoritative gentlemen that tell us they have got the keys of the kingdom of heaven, let us try their authority by two or three circumstances. We will imagine a Puseyite existing then, with his long robe down to his shoes, to hide the multitude of his sins. He struts up to Noah, and says,—Noah, where are you going to? Going into this ark? Oh, stop, you must confess to me first; you must take the wafer first; you must accept the Virgin Mary first—that you must. Why, Noah would say, what for? The Lord stands just inside the door, and the Lord says, "Come thou into the ark;" and you, Mr. Puseyite, tell me that I must not go in without your authority! Why, Noah would laugh at him; steps into the ark, and the Lord shuts the door. Well, Moses, where are you going to? I am going through the sea. Are you

going to take all this multitude through the sea? Yes. Well, but you must confess to me first; you must take the wafer first; you must own me first. Are you in the Puseyite faith? Are you in the Church? Do you belong to the lawful ministry? Moses would look round, and sternly rebuke the arrogant pretender who should so speak. Well, Joshua, where are you going to? I am going to the promised land. Oh, you must not go without first confessing to me, taking the wafer, and bowing to my long coat—no, you must not indeed. Why, Joshua would have drawn his sword and severed the fool's head from his shoulders. The priests of *God* step into the Jordan, the river divides before them, pays deference to the presence of the God of Israel, and there it remained till all Israel had passed clean over. What a mercy for us, that our faith stands not in the wisdom or authority of man, but in the authority, and power of the blessed God. And time would fail me to illustrate this. We see them taxing the Saviour upon this subject. "By what authority doest thou these things?" You know by what authority he does them; you know he could not do such miracles if God were not with him. Yes, we secretly know that, but then we priests do not like the people to be as wise as we are. Ah, we know that, and you are fools as well as the people. Now come, I will ask you one question,—“The baptism of John, whence was it?” What shall we say? If we say it was of man, that will not do, for the people would throw stones at us; for they hold John was a prophet; and if we say it was of God, he will say, why then do you not believe? Well, we cannot tell. And that was a lie. Well then, “neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.” The dear Saviour again and again said, “I speak not mine own words, but the words of him that sent me.” “I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” And so the apostles could say that they were the servants of Jesus Christ by the will of God, by the grace of God, by the mercy of God. “By the grace of God,” saith that learned man—for a learned man he was, the apostle Paul, passing by all his learning as being of no essential use in the salvation of his soul—“By the grace of God I am what I am.”

Well then, if by the word of the Lord we are convinced of our state, if by the word of the Lord we are led into these things, while we have good will to all men—and when we speak roughly of some, it is more for their good than for anything else,—let us rejoice that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, and that our faith resteth upon an everlasting foundation, that never did, never will, never can give way.

All other doors must indeed be closed against us, but the door of his mercy stands open all day for the poor and the needy, who knock by the way. Jesus is the door, the sheep hear his voice and enter into life, and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him. They will own no intermediate authority between them and the shepherd and bishop, of their souls. Their faith must be in him who saith, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. And in all the respects in which we need doors opened for us in providence as well as in grace, he knows how to go before us, and how to break in pieces the gates of brass, and how to cut in sunder the bars of iron. He knows how to make crooked things straight, and how to turn darkness to light, to open door after door, until at last the door of heaven receive us into the house of many mansions. What, then, should we do but keep close to the door of mercy? seeing it written over the same, “Knock, and it shall be opened;” and if he open, who can shut? who can hinder him? How infinitely contemptible is all human authority in these eternal things!

For the information of friends it is necessary to say that Mr. Wells is recovering from his illness, but finds that he will not be able to resume his labours at present.