

THE RIGHT FEAR OF GOD

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning December 6th, 1868

By Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 11 Number 526

“Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land.”

Psalm 85:9

THIS is the best thing that can be near unto us, and the best thing that we can be near to; for if God be with us in his salvation, then we have everything that we shall need for time, and everything we shall need for eternity. And the longer we live, the more secret, internal, and intense cleaving to the Lord will there be; for every day will bring to light some of our hidden weaknesses, some of the infidelities of our hearts, and our experiences will go on to bring us with more and more force and feeling to acknowledge that it is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed.

I at once then proceed to notice the language of our text. Here is, first, *the note of distinction*, “them that fear him.” Here is, secondly, *the salvation that is near to them*. Here is, thirdly and lastly, *the purpose*, “that glory may dwell in our land.”

First, *the note of distinction*, “surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him.” There is here a twofold contrast, a contrast between the man that does fear God, and the man that does not fear God; secondly, a contrast between the true fear of God, and the mere natural or false fear of God. First, here is a contrast between the man that does fear God, and the man that does not fear God. It is one, perhaps, of the most dreadful views that we can take of human nature presented by the word of the Lord, which says, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Our sins hanging over our heads; our lives as uncertain as the wind, and death not only certain, but near at hand, even with those that have the longest to live, and escape from judgment literally impossible; the soul immortal, everlasting punishment before us, the fire that is not quenched, the worm that dies not, while the Lord himself is the Judge, and there is the sentence of everlasting banishment recorded. And yet these thunders of heaven have no saving effect upon any man under the heavens but those that the Lord is pleased to quicken into spiritual life. With you, then, that do fear the Lord, that was a happy day when you began to think seriously about your soul, when you began to think seriously about God and godliness; when you began to see that there was something in godliness that could not be found anywhere else; that there was something in the friendship of heaven that could not be equaled by any other friendship; that there was something in the gospel of God that contained an adaptability to your condition and necessities that was to be found nowhere else. It

matters not at all how the work in the beginning was first developed; the great thing is, is it begun? whether you then began to think seriously, and a little conviction now, and a little conviction then, and you went on by degrees until more and more your lost and ruined condition became apparent to you, until you began to sigh out, in the language of Holy Scripture, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Thus you began to fear God; you came out from an ungodly world, you came out from the vices and from the vanities of the world, and you began to have a respect to them that feared God; and you would read such a scripture as the following, and would feel a response in your own minds, where David said, "I am a companion of all them that fear you;" and again, "Come and hear, all you that fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul." At first, when you began to fear God, you thought perhaps it was your own prudence, your own foresight; you did not know that this movement towards God, this separation from the world, this increasing earnestness and solemn concern for your state, was nothing more and nothing less than the Holy Spirit having quickened your soul unto eternal life. Some of old said, "We have not heard whether there be any Holy Ghost," and yet the Holy Ghost had quickened them, and they had been baptized, and the apostle took them and baptized them again. So, they were baptized the first time in blindness. And so, when the work is first commenced, if you have not been at all among the people of God, perhaps you have hardly ever heard that there is such a thing as being born again, that there is such a thing as the Holy Spirit quickening the soul. But when you find out that there not only is such a thing, but that no soul can be saved without it, that there can be no entering into the kingdom of God without it, you then begin to inquire what it is, you then begin to inquire what are the marks, and evidences, and characteristics of those in whose experience the Lord has fulfilled that promise, "I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me;" and in the Lord's own time you will come into the very selfsame experiences; and as you come into those experiences, the name of the Lord will become particularly hallowed to you; and that name will command your deepest reverence. You may hear a few loose professors habituate themselves to take God's name in vain, but that only shows that their religion is vain. They can take the name of the Lord and the name of the Savior in vain on almost any trivial occasion; there are professors of this stamp; and you, the little ones, will wonder how they can do it. They do it, friends, because they have not that pure, solemn fear of God before their eyes that the people of God in all ages have had. Hence you read of "that great and fearful name," "that great and terrible name;" and you will tremble at the majesty of the great God. And then, when brought to see him in Christ reconciling you unto himself, not imputing your trespasses unto you, but having imputed them unto One that could bear them, and has borne them, and taken them away, then you will begin to have hope in the Lord's mercy; for in this movement towards God, in this fear of God, there is strong confidence; and in one place you read that the Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy. They that fear him, then, are moved away from the law, where there is no mercy; they are moved away from all human merit, worth, and worthiness, and brought to hope in Jesus Christ; and the Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that thus hope in his mercy. So that where this fear is, it will bring you into all the hallowedness of the gospel. And those of you that know the Lord, that have known him for a long time, that have walked in the fear of the Lord for many years, and have found out that by faith in Christ you can and do depart from every evil; that by faith in Christ God approves of you and accepts you, and from time to time blesses you; you know that I speak the truth when I say that every testimony of the new covenant pertaining to your eternal welfare, to that salvation I presently have to notice, you can bear testimony that every one of those testimonies is dear to your heart, dearer than thousands of gold and silver; sweeter to your taste than honey and the honeycomb. Oh, what can equal in value the

testimonies of God's word in favor of those that fear him; for it shall be well with them that fear him, with them that fear before him. It is a very hallowed, sacred, and profitable feeling. We cannot preach without this reverential fear; we cannot hear acceptably without this reverential fear; we cannot pray, we cannot read the word if this reverential fear be absent, which it very frequently is as regards the exercise of it; we find then that our services are, as it were, very mechanical and formal. But when we have this hallowed feeling, this filial, childlike fear, ah, then we can enjoy a little of what Jacob enjoyed when he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." He was greatly afraid; there was a terror at the first, but that terror subsided into hallowed, filial, childlike reverence, respect, and fear. "Ah," he said, "the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful." how solemnizing, how overwhelming, "is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this the gate of heaven." Ah! what seasons are these, when these hallowed feelings are brought into exercise! This is what Peter aimed at when he said, "I say these things to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance." And you will always find that anything in the minister, anything in the hearer, anything to interfere with the worship of God, what a tendency it has at once to destroy this hallowed feeling. Yes, what would heaven be without this reverence? what would heaven be without this hallowed feeling? What hypocrisy for us to call God our Father, and yet his name not hallowed to us. "Our Father which are in heaven, hallowed be your name." It stands out, therefore, as that eternal name, that strong tower, that immovable rock, that wonderful shield, that sure defense, and that glorious refuge; for in the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; the name of the Lord is a strong tower; and those that fear the Lord run to that strong tower, and they are eternally safe. So, then, the people of God in all ages have very much delighted in the fear of the Lord; they have very much gloried in the fear of the Lord. Let us, then, before I leave this part, just stop and look back at the time when we did not fear the Lord; and bless his holy name that ever mercy constrained, us to begin to fear him. And this is how it was with the thief on the cross, he himself seems aghast and astounded at the deadness, and hardness, and blindness of human nature; and he himself, his eyes just opened, said to his fellow thief, "Do you not fear God?" as though he should say, "Is it so that we are in such a state by nature that we can be brought to the very gibbet, and put to death, and in the very article of death be thus blinded by Satan?" For we find that both the malefactors, though they themselves were suffering the tortures of the cross, yet joined to revile the Savior. But then the fear of God was put into the heart of one, and he said to the other, "Do not you fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we, indeed, justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing amiss." So, the dying thief seems to have got hold first of the purity of Christ's manhood, and in getting hold of the purity of Christ's manhood and the perfection of his life, he then got hold of his deity, and what his covenant relations were, and what his mission into this world was, that it was to accomplish salvation on earth, and then go to heaven, and plead in heaven what he had done on earth on behalf of sinners. Therefore, that prayer which, he prayed was composed by the Holy Spirit, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

But again, it stands not only in contrast to those that do not fear God at all, but secondly, this fear of the Lord stands in contrast to the false fear of God. You may reverence the supreme God, but your fear nevertheless may not be accompanied with salvation; you may not be of the stamp here described; "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him." This fear is the new covenant fear of God. "I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me." This is one of the promises of the new covenant. And wherever there is this saving fear, it will contrast the people not only with what they once were, as having no fear of God at all; but it will contrast them with

those that have merely a false fear of the Lord. We have plenty of instances in the scriptures, but I will mention only two or three. Take first, Cain and Abel. You see Cain feared God, and he brought an offering. But while he thus feared the supreme God, and did him reverence in bringing an offering, nevertheless Cain was ignorant of his need of Christ's work, and was in a state of enmity against God's truth; and being in a state of enmity against God's truth, we see what effect this had upon him, that it led him to slay his brother Abel. Now Cain had a fear of God, you see, but he had not that true fear of God that accompanies eternal salvation; that new covenant fear associated with a conviction of our need of God's salvation that leads us to embrace that salvation. There is something corresponding to this, which I will just name in what the apostle says of the Jews in relation to their ignorance of God's righteousness. They had a zeal of God, but it was not a true zeal; it was not a zeal that brought any good to their souls. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness." Just catch that little sentence, "going about." What does that mean, "going about"? Why, it means this, that under the Old Testament dispensation the righteousness of the Jew consisted in his conforming to that covenant, his going up to Jerusalem three times in the year, and back again to his home; so that he had a great deal of going about in order to be righteous in the mere temporal, old covenant sense. So, then they never stopped, they were always going about to establish their own righteousness. Not so with the man that is made acquainted with Christ's righteousness. He says, I am got to the place; Christ is the place where I am righteous, where there is a righteousness that makes me righteous; therefore, I have not to go about; I shall stop here at the feet of Christ, because here is all the righteousness I need, here is all the redemption I need, here is everything I need. See then the difference between the former righteousness which the Jew, by his conformity to that covenant, was trying to establish, in order to bring himself to heaven; and that righteousness which the Savior has brought in; and faith bringing us to the feet of Jesus, we stand still, and enjoy our justification, we stand still and see the salvation of God. The prodigal had not to go about and borrow a little here, and beg a little there, and take a little there, in order to obtain a robe; he had to stand still while the robe was put upon him. And so "you are complete in Christ." Now the fear of the Lord will thus bring us into this order of things. Cain had, I say, a fear of the Lord, but not that fear of the Lord that led him to receive the truth. Take the twenty-ninth of Isaiah upon this subject of a false godly fear. The Lord there says, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me;" evidently pointing forward to that time when the truth was brought to these people by the Savior, and they at once showed their deadly hatred to him and to the truths which he advocated. Thus, then they boasted that they had one father, even God, they boasted that they were the children of Abraham and that God was their Father; but when God drew near to them in the testimonies of Christ, they proved that their hearts were far from him. And how was it that their hearts were far from him? How was it that their hearts were removed so far from the truth? and for the heart to be moved from the truth is for it to be moved from God; for God is in the truth, and the truth is in God. That twenty-ninth of Isaiah explains it, "Their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." Ah, look at that. Do not our fellow-creatures tell us, "never mind if we are sincere"? Ah, the Jews were sincere in their traditions; but nevertheless, in the 15th of Matthew, the Savior, touching upon the same subject, said, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." In the Old Testament you see they were rejected because their hearts had no sympathy with God's truth, and they were taught to fear God erroneously. So, in the 10th of Matthew, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." We here see, then, the solemn importance of receiving the truth as it is in Jesus. Now our fellow-creatures say, "Oh, if we are sincere we can't be wrong." But that the

Lord's people are taught to see is only a piece of delusion. For, friends, I suppose no man could be sincerer than was Saul of Tarsus; and yet if he had died before the gospel fear of God, the new covenant fear of God, had been put into his heart, he certainly would have been a lost man. And look round upon our fellow-creatures now. I do not look upon Roman Catholics as a body of vagrants, and vagabonds, and rogues, and scoundrels. Thousands that are as sincere as you could wish them to be. At a Puseyite church just by me, how many services they have in the week I don't know, but I should think fourteen or fifteen, a great many more than we have. Am I to believe they could go on like this from time to time if they were not sincere? Why, it is an awful truth that the more absurd a system is, and the farther it is from God's truth, Satan has the more power to make men the sincerer. Who is sincerer than the Brahmin? Who is sincerer than the Buddhist? See what they will undergo in reference to their delusions. We see, then, that men may be sincere, and yet at the same time as wrong and as surely lost as though they made no profession at all. "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." You must be brought down to the Savior's feet; you must be brought down to God's new covenant; or else your fear of God, however sincere you are, is not that fear of which he is the author, and that will accompany salvation. How could Cain's fear of God accompany salvation? There was no salvation in his religion. And how could salvation accompany the fear with which the Pharisees feared God? There was no salvation in their doctrine, in their religion. And how can the fear wherewith the Roman Catholic or the Puseyite fears God, how can that fear be accompanied with salvation? Why, God's salvation is not in their doctrine, it is not in their religion at all.

:

Now my text says, "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him;" that is, those that fear him truly, in this gospel sense. They are a saved people; they fear him in the order of salvation, they worship him in the order of salvation, they have access to him in the order of salvation, they are beautified with salvation. But I suppose I have said enough upon this, though I felt very anxious about it. In the first place, it is a great thing to have the fear of God at all; in the next place, it is a great thing to be delivered from that false fear, which is by the traditions and doctrines of men, and not by the spirit and truth of the blessed God; consequently such persons, who have this false fear, are ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth; ever seeking to enter in, but shall not be able. From this and every other delusion upon a matter so momentous may the Lord go on to deliver, not only us, but thousands of others as well. In what I say about persons belonging to other sects, the Lord is my witness, I say it not from any unkind feeling towards them, but just the reverse of that. For if God send a man to preach the gospel, he will send him under the law of universal love he will feel for all men without exception: for the soul of one is of the same importance as another, though the minister at the same time knows that while he is to preach the gospel to his uttermost to every creature, yet none can be saved but those to whom the Lord is pleased to carry home the word with power. But that does not hinder the universal sympathy of the minister; he is to aim at all, that he may save some.

Secondly, we will notice *the salvation*. It is beautifully described in the preceding part of this psalm: "Lord, you have been favorable unto your land;" that is, the people of his land; that is, the people that shall inherit the promised land; and these people that are thus brought to fear him, they are the people. And now what the Lord has done as described in this psalm is expressive of salvation. If we take the word "salvation" here in only one of its senses, that of deliverance, we have it beautifully described in the preceding part of the psalm: "You have brought back the captivity of Jacob." That is one part of God's salvation. Sin had held us captive, and was taking us

to hell; but Jesus Christ by his death stopped it by taking away the life of sin, the power of sin, and he thereby turned our captivity. The wrath of God was justly carrying us along; for he that believes not on the Son of God is still under wrath; but Jesus Christ stopped it; he met the wrath, he met the curse, he met the mighty torrent. And death was carrying us along; but Jesus Christ stopped it so effectually that he swallowed up death in victory, spoiled these principalities and powers. Ah, when my soul is enabled to lay hold of him in what he has done, then I feel that I am saved, I feel that I am chosen, I feel that I am free, I feel that this God is my God for ever and ever. But not only has he thus brought back the captivity of Jacob, there is something else, "You have forgiven the iniquity of your people, you have covered all their sin. You have taken away all your wrath; you have turned thyself from the fierceness of your anger." It is remarkable how many times the Lord is spoken of in this psalm; it is all the Lord; it is the Lord that has brought back the captivity of Jacob; it is the Lord that has forgiven the iniquity; it is the Lord God himself that has covered their sins; it is the Lord himself that has taken away his own wrath by the person of his dear Son; it is the Lord himself that has done all these things. Therefore, the church goes on praying, "Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause your anger toward us to cease;" and so it goes on. Here, then, is the salvation, and the church is careful to attribute, the whole of it to the Lord. You see our text is very careful upon this: "Surely his salvation" I like that, "his salvation," not the salvations that men prescribe and advocate, but his salvation. And his salvation is thus defined by the prophet Isaiah: "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; and shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end." It is "his salvation." Now this deliverance, this salvation is said to be "nigh them that fear him." I will notice a fourfold sense in which this salvation is close to such. First, it is close to them in endearment. Hence, we say of that which we love, it lies very near the heart. And so, it says in one psalm, and you must be blind, and deaf, and dead, I was going to say, going to hell, as sure as you are here this morning, if you cannot in some humble measure join in with the scripture I am about to quote: "Let them that love your salvation." Now come, if you can't say you love God, if you can't say you are sure you love the Most High, if you can't say you are sure he has loved you with an everlasting love, do you like God's salvation? Oh yes, I do. And love it? Yes. And long for it? Yes. And you can say with David, at least sometimes, "I am poor and needy, let your salvation, O God, set me up on high." And when you are unhappy, and the Lord seems to hide his face, you can say again with David, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." "Let them that love your salvation." So, then, if this salvation be near to us, it means that it lies near our hearts, that we love it. Bless the Lord, I have been in love with this salvation a great many years, and I am not the least afraid of ever getting weary of it; I like it more and more. The Lord has said it shall go forth as a lamp that burns, and so it seems, for it shines to me brighter and brighter, it tastes to me sweeter and sweeter; and it wraps me up and makes me warmer and warmer; for "he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, and covered me with the robe of righteousness." Here it is that we can sow little and bring in much; here it is that we can eat and have plenty; here it is we are clothed and are warm; here it is we can earn wages and put them into a bag where there are no holes; here it is, by God's salvation, that we lay up treasures in heaven that thieves cannot steal, and that moths cannot corrupt, so that when we get home we shall find all the promises in good keeping, all the testimonies, all the mercies, all the blessings. "Let them that love your salvation say continually, Let the Lord be magnified;" that is, let God, as a God of salvation, be magnified. So, then, for his salvation to be near to them means that they love it; and such never were lost and never will be. The saved soul can truly say,

"Salvation, O, the joyful sound!

Tis pleasure to our ears.”

There is a poor, trembling old man, his eyes dim, perhaps his ears a little deaf; just physical power enough to take the Savior in his arms; and this salvation is so dear to him that by it with great pleasure he can face the valley of the shadow of death: “Let your servant depart in peace, my eyes have seen your salvation.” Well, Jacob, you are dying, what is the position you are in? “I have waited for your salvation.” You have not waited till you were better, then? Oh no! you have not waited until you were a little more holy and a little more righteous, a little worthier, till you had something of your own you could plead? No. “I have waited for your salvation.” You have not waited for anything in yourself? No, for I have never found anything good there; but this salvation redeems me from all evil, and the God of this salvation has fed me all my life long unto this day. The Lord would not leave him to board himself one day, “the God which fed me all my life long.” Secondly, this salvation being near to us means that we understand it. We are brought to understand how God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes; how Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him; we are brought to understand that by grace are we saved, through faith; and that faith not of ourselves even, it is the gift of God. Thirdly, this salvation being near unto us also means that it is near enough to us to defend us, it is our defense. The Lord defends you, not by any worth or worthiness in you; he defends you as a believer, by the blood of his dear Son. How were the Israelites defended in Egypt? Not by the strength of the houses in which they were; not by the best mechanical sort of locks and doors; not by the strongest bolts; not by the good appearance of the houses. That is a very nice house; I must spare that house because it is so superior to other houses, not a sentence about it. It is “When I see the blood I will pass by.” So, the Lord defends his people by the blood and righteousness of his dear Son; and that blood and righteousness take away every reason why he should not defend them; and make it a matter as much of justice as of mercy that he should defend them. Have you any doubt about it? If you have I will bring a broom and sweep the doubt away. Here it is: “In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah, We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks;” and “You wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you.” The walls of Jericho fell down, but the walls of Zion shall never fall down; no; John saw them stand in vision to eternity, the jasper walls, the pearly gates

“Her walls of salvation the foe shall never scale
Nor Satan’s dark legions against her prevail.”

Fourthly, it means that God is near to them. “Behold, God is my salvation.” He is always near to his people. What a sweet privilege is it to feel this! Sometimes when in private you think over this and over that, and get into a tremendous fever, and almost ready to cut that man’s ear off, and that woman’s head off, and I don’t know what you wouldn’t do. But when you are enabled to listen, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” Leave the matter with the Lord, stand still and see the salvation of God. What people has God so close to them as our God in all things we call upon him for? Oh, how calming it is to remember that the Lord is near. I shall not have time to notice the last clause this morning; it is such a beautiful one that I must have a whole sermon upon it, so we must have another remark or two upon this salvation being near. It is near us essentially and circumstantially, and I might have said finally. It is near us essentially. I am speaking, perhaps, to some this morning that have sought the Lord but never found him yet; he has never made you feel that you were a saved man; he has never made you feel yet sure that Jesus Christ died for you.

Well, it is not far off; still seek, still tarry. Hear what the Lord said in the last verse of the 46th of Isaiah: "I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory." Remember, friends, whenever your humble servant is enabled to speak pretty clearly, and I hope sometimes with some degree of divine power of these things, that he never can set forth anything the Lord does, which he does not do cheerfully, willingly, with pleasure and delight. Did he not give his dear Son with delight and pleasure? Did not Jesus delight to do the Father's will? Did he not rejoice as a strong man to run the mighty race and obtain the prize? which prize he holds for himself and for all his brethren. Did not the Lord gladly receive you from the dead? Did he not find you out as the lost piece of silver, the lost sheep, and receive you as the prodigal was received? What the Lord does he does with intense delight. And therefore, to the seeker we say, this salvation is for an appointed time; wait for it, and it will speak, and you will indeed then bless God that ever you saw your need of it, and were led to seek him and wait for him. But there is another sense in which this salvation is near, and what we should do without this I do not know, namely, that this salvation is near, to be a reason which we can plead for all other deliverances; because if the Lord be your salvation, whatever you have to endure, if it try you very much, the Lord will not suffer you to be tried above what you are able to bear. I really feel a great desire that the Lord would increase me and you too in lowliness of mind, meekness, and forbearing one another in love, long suffering for the truth's sake, and go steadily on minding our own business. If we have something apparently unbearable, the Lord can make it bearable. Ah! he can bring the manna from a quarter we never expected: he can bring the water out of the flinty rock, a source we never thought of; he can work circumstantial deliverances by means we should never have expected. We shall never in this life arrive at such a state as for everything that we are connected with to harmonize and be pleasing; there will be always more or less some thorn in our side, some trial or another; nevertheless the Lord works deliverance after deliverance. "You shall compass them about with songs of deliverance." Oh, it is a great thing to feel that we are in his hands, that he watches over us, and is interested in all our little as well as our great affairs. Therefore, Peter might well say, "Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you." May the Lord increase our care for ourselves in this sense, and for the honor and glory of his dear and blessed name. It is because your time is gone, not because our subject is ended, that I must say no more.