

THE RIGHT PATH

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning July 26th, 1868

by Mister JAMES WELLS

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 11 Number 507

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Isaiah 11:9

IN continuing this subject, the three doctrines that will come before us this morning are, first, *true humility before God*; secondly, *transition from the earthly to the heavenly life*; and, thirdly, *entire victory over the enemy*.

First, *true humility before God*. “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” Here is the key to this part. You observe you have the wolf, and the leopard, and the lion; all these are wild beasts; and it is a very humbling thought that this is descriptive of what we all are by nature. You know, and you must not be offended at it, for it is God’s word, we are spoken of like this, “Vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass’s colt.” All of us by nature are spiritually wild; we are all aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise, and without Christ, having no hope. And yet you shall not find a man anywhere that knows this, that he has no hope. Every man fancies he has hope; everyone will build up himself in some kind of hope. But God’s testimony as to our real condition is, that we have no hope, and that we are without God in the world. How mighty, then, must be that work that brings this wild, wolfish sort of man down into the meekness of the lamb; how mighty must that work be that brings the leopard down into the tameness and mildness of the lamb; how mighty must that power be that so changes the lion that it shall lose all its ferociousness, and become like a little child. You will observe that these wild beasts undergo such a wonderful change that they pass from their dreadful malignity against God, and their hatred to God’s truth and people, and they are humbled down to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we ourselves are partakers of that spirit of humility, it is because the Lord has begun a work of grace in our hearts; he has taken us out of the forest of this world, out of the state we were in by nature, out of the hands of Satan, of sin, of hell, of the world, of death, and of every enemy, and has taken us into his own gracious and loving hand; shall I say his own almighty hand? He declares that none shall be able to pluck them out of his hand. Here is humility before God, which stands forth among the first laws of the kingdom of Christ. Hence when the question was put, “Who shall be greatest in the kingdom of God?” the Savior took a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, “Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall in noway enter into the kingdom of God.” Let us hear what

David says of his humility and see whether we can really follow it: if so, if we can follow him in what he there says, then we shall follow him into heaven. David, in his 131st Psalm, describes his own feelings, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty:" this is not said in a way of boasting; and lest we should at all misunderstand it, I will bring another testimony of the same thing in substance. You know the Apostle Paul said, "I who am less than the least of all saints." It may seem, perhaps, paradoxical, but it is a truth, that every Christian grows less and less in his own estimation as he goes on, and Jesus Christ, on the other hand, grows, as it were, greater and greater, shines brighter and brighter; the creature goes on till it comes to nothing, and God becomes all and in all. Now David said, "Lord, my heart is not haughty." Let us see if we can get at this, for it is an essentially important matter. In Habakkuk it said that "he whose soul is lifted up is not upright in him;" then the next clause will explain what it is to be humble: "the just shall live by his faith;" and the Apostle says, "It is by faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." How is it with us? Can we truly say that we see ourselves lost? for Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. Now for your heart not to be haughty means that you are not above acknowledging that your only hope is in the perfection of Christ; you are not above acknowledging that you are indebted to the Lord in his sovereignty. If you are one of the Lord's, you are not above acknowledging that it pleased the Lord to make you one of his, and that he loved and chose you because he would; and that Christ has wrought eternal perfection for you, and that he called you by his grace because he would; you are not above this. "My heart is not haughty." Happy the man that sees and feels himself to be thus humbled down to receive the testimony of God, to receive Christ Jesus just as he is; for he receives us just as we are, and we are to receive him just as he is; he receives us in all our sinfulness, and we are to receive him in all the remedial adaptability of his wonderful person and work to our necessities. "My heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty." The carnal man's eyes are lofty; he looks at election, and he says, Away with it; he looks at many of the great testimonies of the Holy Scriptures, and he cannot understand them; he says, Away with them. The Pharisee's eyes were lofty; he looked up to heaven, took his own cause into his own hands, and brought forward his few paltry, little bits of nothings, of doings, and by those doings pleaded his own cause. So, his eyes were lofty; he looked down upon the Publican with sovereign contempt, and thereby looked down upon God's truth with sovereign contempt. But the Publican could not so look up; the Publican's heart was not haughty, nor his eyes lofty; he could not face his Judge. He had nothing of his own to plead, and so he breathed out, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Here is the wolf turned into the lamb; here is the leopard lying down with the kid; here the lion has lost his ferociousness and is humbled down on the knee of prayer. "My heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." Now only just think, if I am speaking this morning to any one so placed that you do exercise yourself in a great matter, or a thing too high for you, what are you going to do? Oh, says one, I do not believe salvation is certain without my help, so I am going to make it certain; I do not believe I shall get to heaven unless I do my part; I believe there is something for the creature to do; I do not believe it is as these high doctrine people say, all of grace from first to last. Well, then, you have taken the responsibility of your own salvation. Yes, say you, I believe that if I do not do my part, and thereby bring myself to heaven, I shall be damned for not doing my part; that I shall be damned to all eternity because I did not cultivate God's grace and do my part. Let me just say, you are trying to do what no man ever did do yet; and you are trying to do what the Gospel does not authorize any man to do; for the work is entire, and the Lord has undertaken entirely every department. So, if you are exercising yourself in the great matter of taking the responsibility of your salvation upon your own shoulders, then you certainly are exercising

yourself in great matters, in things too high for you. You do something towards your own salvation! Why, I do not know anything more absurd. What can you do? Can you make yourself any holier? No, you cannot do that. The leopard cannot change his spots; the leopard is humbled down with the lamb, but he cannot change his spots; and the black wolf is black still; it is humbled down with the lamb, but it is black still; the Ethiopian is an Ethiopian still. And therefore, those who are truly humbled down do not exercise themselves in the great matter of securing their own salvation; they look to the Lord alone and fall in with the testimony that salvation is of the Lord. For my part, I know I dare not undertake anything in this way, I am obliged to leave the whole of it. I feel myself, both as a Christian and a minister, entirely in the Lord's hands. I feel the truth of the words of James when he said, "Do not err, my beloved brethren." He is very emphatic upon this matter; he knew how many were deceived with the notion that they could do something; and he saw that many professors were not humbled down under a sight and sense of their real condition, so as to receive the truth in the love of it; he saw that they were trying to do the Lord's work, instead of looking to the Lord, and receiving the testimony of what he had done; therefore, in order to enlighten and undeceive them, James presents them with the sovereignty and immutability of the blessed God, "Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights." There is the sovereignty of God; the first good and perfect gift that God gave was Christ; he is the good gift. Ah, say you, that he is, a good gift and a perfect gift; and every good and perfect gift in the way of blessing comes by Jesus Christ, "from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures." So, then David says, "My heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty;" neither do I exercise myself in matters which Christ alone can manage, which the Holy Ghost alone can manage, which God alone can manage. As though he should say, There are plenty of people who tell me to take Christ, to take the promise, and to come to God; but I have found out that I can take the promise only as the Lord gives me the promise; that I can take Christ only as Christ reveals himself and gives himself to me; and that I can come to God only as God comes to me. Now, says David, "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother." I do like that expression, because there is a promise in this line of things to those that are thus brought, "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem," meaning of course, the new Jerusalem. Yes, he says, "My soul is even as a weaned child." His meaning is, that he was brought simply down to the footstool of God's mercy as a little child, glad to receive what the Lord had provided, glad to receive the testimonies of the blessed God concerning his mercy, his loving-kindness, and his great salvation. So, then, every one that is taught of God is thus humbled down, brought to nothing in his own eyes. Every one of the Lord's people becomes thus a little one. The minister would not be any use to the people if he were not a little one. He is not to come in a pompous manner, dressed up by the inventions of men, and trying to impose his importance upon the people; no, he is but a poor little piece of clay. The minister must view himself as a poor piece of clay, steeped in sin, satanized, worthless, and helpless, and therefore, having nothing of his own that he can commend to the people. He must come into the same spirit as the apostle and those with him when he said, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Christ's sake." "We have this treasure," of eternal truth, "in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man." See, then, how peacefully these little ones meet at the feet of Jesus; and oh, how peacefully shall they meet around their Father's table above; there will be realized in perfection what is written, "as olive plants round about his table." How peacefully will they meet when the last enemy, death itself, is forever

vanquished. How peacefully will they meet and sit down in their white robes, with palms in their hands, to enjoy that peace that passes all understanding, and that for ever and ever.

But it says of these wild creatures that are thus converted to God, that “a little child shall lead them.” How true that is. And when the Lord means to make a minister, and means to make him useful, he brings him down to where the apostle was, less than the least of all saints; and that minister becomes as firm as a rock in God’s eternal truth; no shifting, no shuffling, no scheming, no planning, no compromising, no turning, no twisting; you cannot move him; there he is like a rock. The apostle spoke from experience, for he had been shut up in prison, and had endured stripes, and suffered hunger, and been tried in every possible way; his sufferings were, I was going to say, innumerable; but he said, “None of these things move me.” And so, the people of God say, Ah, that is the minister for us; he is a poor little thing in himself; he is a poor, helpless worm, and he just comes down to where we are; his simple, plain, and clear testimony rolls into our souls, and exactly describes what and where we are, and he sets forth those remedies which he has realized in his own soul. Thus, this little child, this man who is a very little child in the things of God in his own eyes, how true it is that the soul converted to God is glad to be led by him, not by him as a creature, but by him as a minister; that is to say, by the testimonies of God; for we are not to follow any minister any further than we can see that he himself follows the Lord. Now is there anything inexplicable in this? Here we are, if we are taught of God, humbled down, so that each shall be a little child in his own eyes. If, then, we are not where the Pharisee was, but where the Publican was, if we are not where Ishmael was, that mocked, but where Isaac was, who received as a child of promise in all simplicity that yea and amen promise, if we are not where Esau was, whose eyes were shut, and who despised the eternal priesthood of Christ; but where Jacob was, who prized that priesthood, and was glad even to get hold of the typical priesthood, if then we are with Abel, and not with Cain; then, as they are now in the kingdom of God, the Lord never forsook them, and will not forsake us. So “they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.” Depend upon it, there is no real prayer, no real hunger or thirst, there is no real delight in the ways of the Lord, there is no real separation from the world and unity to eternal things without this humility. And this humility does not consist in turning to the east, and curtseying, and bowing, I don't know in how many shapes, and forms, and ways; no, it is a humility of spirit. The man sees, and feels, and knows what he is, and is bowed down, glad of the least crumb of mercy. The woman had the very essence of this spirit when the Savior said, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it to dogs;” instead of being offended at the description, she corroborates it, Lord, I know it; as a sinner there is no name too bad for me, or too degrading for me; yet I will not go away; for you have come to save poor Gentile dogs, poor sinners; and therefore “the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” Her faith was great because her humility was great. The humbler a man lies, the greater will be his faith in eternal things. A proud professor is one of the most repulsive things that can be walking into the chapel as though he were the master of the deacons, and of the minister, and of the clerk, and the master of the place, the master of everything. Why, my hearer, all that is as unchristian as Satan himself is unchristian. We are to esteem others better than ourselves. If I possess the spirit of true humility, I shall look at all that is bad in myself, and lose sight of that which is good; and I shall look at that which is good in my brothers and sisters, and lose sight of the bad; I shall judge myself by the bad, and say, “O wretched man that I am,” and judge my brother by the good, and love my brother for the good that is in him, and hate myself for the evil that is in me. That is true humility; that is what the prophets and apostles did, and what every Christian does when in his right mind. Let my brother say what he likes against

himself; but do not let me say anything against him until I have nothing to say against myself. And I am quite sure if none of us said anything against another until we had nothing to say against ourselves, there would never be another bit of backbiting or slander as long as the world lasted. I can solemnly say, without a figure of speech, or without pretending to more humility than another, that I can see more evil in myself than in all the people of God put together. I feel daily in my own heart evils I never have expressed and trust I never shall; and look forward for the happy moment when, as Goodwin says, these crooking toads shall all fall off, and the soul shall enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

But secondly, I notice *the transition from the earthly to the heavenly life*. “The cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” Now this is strongly figurative language, but no stronger than is used to this day in the East. We do not speak in language so strongly figurative, for several reasons; first, because we are not so quick, hot, and fervent in our imagination as are the Orientals; and secondly, because we are more a matter of fact sort of people. The English are especially a utilitarian people; there is not much poetry about us; indeed, it is a wonderful thing to me that England has produced a good poet at all. As Dr. Johnson says, Dr. Watts did that better which no one ever did well. But in the East their characters are different; they are accustomed to use these similes, which appear to us somewhat farfetched. “The cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” Now the word “straw” there means all kinds of good provender; you must not confine it to straw merely. It means the lion passing from the carnivorous into the graminivorous. Now, suppose you were to take this literally, as those of our Christian friends that are millenarians do, it amounts to nothing; but if you take it figuratively and spiritually, then it conveys a very great deal. “The lion shall eat straw like the ox;” shall pass over from the carnivorous into the graminivorous, or the herbivorous, whichever term you like to use. Now let us see if we can find a scripture to explain it. There was a time when creature things were our all, when the things of the flesh with us were everything; but the Lord was pleased to make us feel that we had souls, that they were immortal, that they should live forever, either in rapture or in woe; and we began to feel the force of the Savior’s reasoning, “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Now this subject is treated very nicely in the 30th of Isaiah, where you have the plenteousness of the gospel brought in, and where you have again irrational creatures made use of to represent our state by nature, and the goodness of the Lord in bringing us out of our degraded condition. “Then shall he give the rain of your seed, that you shall sow the ground withal, and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous; in that day shall your cattle feed in large pastures.” So, the people of God do feed in large pastures. What great promises the Lord has given them; what great love, mercy, and grace he has shown, and what a great salvation he has wrought, and what great glory is still to be possessed. “The oxen, like-wise, and the young asses that eat the ground shall eat clean provender;” the margin says, “savory provender;” some of you know what this means very well indeed, “which has been winnowed with the shovel and with the fan.” What is this clean provender but God’s truth? Well, say you, has that been winnowed? Yes, of course it has. Have not men mixed up a great deal of chaff with it? When John the Baptist came, he found a great deal of chaff mixed up with God’s word; Jesus Christ found a great deal of chaff mixed up with his truth; and men palmed this chaff off for wheat. See the Savior’s fan in his hand to fan this chaff away. “The prophet that has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? says the Lord.” “They shall eat clean

provender” meaning the pure yea and amen truths of the everlasting gospel. Now these people that are thus brought, it cannot be said of them, as it was said of the national Israel, “The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not consider;” that is, the old covenant people. But the new covenant people do know their owner. “My sheep know my voice, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” “And the ass his master’s crib.” Now I can tell you that, stupid as I am, yet I know my master’s crib. If you put in a little Popish or Puseyite straw, I smell it at once. Ah, I say, that is not my master’s crib; if you put in some freewill or duty faith hay, ah, that is not my master’s crib. But let me have the living, savory promises of the gospel, ah, that is my master’s crib; there I can stand, and nibble, and eat, and chew the cud, and lie down by the side of the crib, and have a little sleep, and wake up, and have some more. So that they know their master’s crib; they know the difference between the pure, wholesome truths of the everlasting gospel and the abominations that men would put us off with. Now the Lord is pleased to drop the simile, and to remind us of the blessedness of these people. So that here is something for them to eat, and then something to drink, and then comes a light in which they are to see, and then comes the termination of every trouble. “And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter,” when Christ shall slay the dragon, Satan, and death itself; when Christ shall slay virtually every foe, “when the towers fall.” The towers of hell fell when Christ died, he trod the territories of Satan under his feet, having spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing even over them in it; and if he triumphed over them in it, how much more shall he and his people triumph over them afterwards, when it is done? Something to drink, “Whoso drinks the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” But then the people want some light. Very well, the Lord says, you shall not be in the dark, for “the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun;” that is figurative language, denoting the progress of light unto perfection; “and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days,” denoting completeness; “in the day that the Lord binds up the breach of his people, and heals the stroke of their wound.” Oh, what shall I say to such a gospel as this? He binds up the breach of his people and heals the stroke of their wound; not a particle of leprosy left, not one disease left; he heals all their diseases. He does not do as our fellow-creatures, medical men, are obliged to do. They say, I have done all I can for you; I have patched you up for a bit; you are better than you were; some of your bad symptoms have subsided; you have some few bad symptoms left, but they are better than they were I have patched you up. Now I am not saying this disrespectfully; we are glad to be patched up sometimes when we cannot be built up. But not so with God; “he heals all their diseases;” so that they shall live in perfect health to all eternity.

But lastly, I notice *the entire victory over the enemy*. I now come to a rather difficult part. “The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den.” I suppose Mr. Huntington was making playful remarks, for there was a vein sometimes of a little bit of sarcasm about him; I do not suppose he intended his remarks upon this text to be regarded as an explanation, because it would not do at all. He says the hole of the asp is the mouth of the false preacher, and that the sucking child shall put his hand on that mouth and stop it; and that the cockatrice’ den is the heart of the false preacher, where the devil is. I suppose those were mere playful remarks; I suppose some parson had offended him just at the time, and like the rest of us, he had a little bit of retaliation, which we ourselves are sometimes tempted to have. I accept these remarks as a little bit ingenious, but by no means as the meaning. The meaning is, perhaps, somewhat difficult to get at, but I will throw out, in conclusion, two or three hints. In

the first place, if the asp and the cockatrice, or the adder, as the margin reads it, be taken to represent sinners, especially the worst of sinners, such as atheists and deists, they are the worst of sinners; Satan himself is not an atheist; he feels too much of the burning presence of the great Creator for that; and Satan is not a deist, that is, one that believes in the being of a God, but denies the Bible to be a revelation from God; for Satan well knows that the threatening's of the Bible have been and will be yet fulfilled in his everlasting punishment; if the asp and the adder represent infidels that are so degraded, and yet converted to God, their poison fangs are extracted, so that the sucking child may now play, as it were, upon the hole of the asp, and the weaned child may put his hand upon the cockatrice's den. I do not myself think that is the meaning; it would bear that in a way of accommodation; but I think the meaning is this, that the asp and the adder here represent one and the same thing, namely, Satan; and that the hole of the asp is this world, and that the adder's den is this world, and that Satan claims every inch of ground in this world. And therefore, when the child of God is happy, Satan is annoyed. Well, says one, I am in the world where Satan's seat is, where this asp, this adder is; and though I am in the world, and so far upon the ground where he is, yet will I rejoice; that shall not make me sorrowful, because it is God's promise, "He shall tread Satan down under your feet shortly." Time is too far gone to enlarge, but I am strongly inclined to think that this is the mind of the Holy Spirit in this passage, that it means victory over the adversary; that the world is Satan's den; and as to the hole, that is a figure of speech to represent the secrecy of Satan. The Lord comes forth and says, "I am the Lord;" but you will never find the devil come forth and say, "I am Satan;" you never find him confess his own name. He is always in some hole or other; always keeps himself out of sight; never comes forward and says, "I am the devil;" because we should know what to do if he did; but he never does that. Now the Savior confessed who he was; God comes forward and says, "I am the Lord;" "Thus says the Lord." And yet the sucking child, that is, the soul born of God, receiving the consolation of the gospel, shall rejoice over all the power of the enemy. I think the 91st Psalm and the Savior's words in the 10th of Luke refer to this point, and with that I close. "You shall tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shall you trample under foot." And the Savior said, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

Thus, then, I have set before you, in my usually poor and feeble way, three doctrines this morning first, true humility before God; secondly, transition from the earthly to the heavenly life; thirdly and lastly, that which we shall always prize, entire victory over the enemy even by these little ones; for

"The weakest saint shall win the day,
Though earth and hell obstruct the way."