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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE RIGHT TEMPLE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 9TH FEBRUARY, 1868,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“And there was given me a reed like unto a rod; and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.”—REVELATION xi. 1.

THE word “temple” appears to have a threefold meaning in this Book of the Revelation. First, it appears to mean the people of God as that consecrated body and building in which the Lord Himself dwells. Hence the church is again and again spoken of as God’s holy and eternal habitation. Secondly, the word “temple” seems to mean that happy place to which the Saviour refers, when He says, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” So in the 7th chapter of this Book you read, “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple;” in that happy place and state of things where they can neither hunger nor thirst, nor sigh, nor die, nor cry any more. Thirdly, the word “temple” in this Book appears to mean God Himself, for John saith, “I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it;” this accords with Old Testament language—“Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.” And John saith, “He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God.” To have this threefold dwelling—a dwelling in the church of God, in the heaven of God, and in God Himself—is all that the highest angel in heaven could ever possibly desire. You will observe that there is very great force and solemnity in the manner of the language of our text, “There was given me a reed like unto a rod; and the angel stood”—took a firm, defiant sort of position, seemed by his very attitude to give emphasis to the command; “Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.” Is not this angel the Angel of the everlasting Covenant? And was not John, when the Lord thus appeared to him, as we sometimes are—somewhat sleepy, or perhaps more alive to the things that are seen, than to the things that are not seen; so that he needed this command, “Rise.” And when the Lord is pleased thus to speak with power,—“Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light;” those

of you that know something of the blessedness of the mercy, and of the presence of the Lord, know that language cannot describe the pleasure of so contemplating the love wherewith God has loved us, the price with which He has redeemed us, the provision He has made for us; for nothing can equal the blessedness of a spiritual realization and contemplation of these eternal things. You will also further observe that our text is Old Testament language, with a New Testament meaning. "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." Of course this "reed like unto a rod" must be taken, like the other parts of the text, in the spiritual and Christian sense: and the meaning will be that the reed, which is the instrument of measurement, is the word of God; and it is described as "like unto a rod" to denote its power; measurement and power. Now "to the law and to the testimony;" that is, to the law of faith, and to the testimony of Christ; and "if they speak not according to this word"—not "according to *these words*," but "according to *this word*;" so that the law of faith, and the testimony of Christ are one;—"if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." But he who is brought into the law of faith—that is a believer in Christ Jesus, and thus receives the testimony of Christ, his testimony will be in entire accordance with the law of faith, and the testimony of Christ; thereby he will demonstrate that he is brought out of darkness into the light of that sun which shall never go down. Also in the next verse to our text we have an outer court, which was to be left out, and which I must leave out this morning, and make no reference to; but I hope in future to have a sermon upon the second verse, because it belongs properly to the subject contained in the first. The first verse will be as much as my strength and time will enable me to go through this morning.

Now to measure the temple of God means to distinguish it;—take a particular account of the temple of God, so that you may distinguish it from the temple of idols; that you may distinguish the true church of God from false churches. "Rise, and measure the temple of God," do not do so carelessly, but carefully; 'it is a matter of vast and essential importance. Also "measure the altar;" see that it is God's altar, in contrast to idolatrous altars, in contrast to false gospels. And then here is a change of imagery, but the same persons meant; they are called in the last clause, worshippers;—"them that worship therein." First they are called the temple; then comes the altar; and then comes their character as servants of God. Therefore to measure "them that worship therein," meant to test them, to put them to that test by which they are distinguished from all others. These three things I shall, with all the care the Lord shall bless me with, aim at this morning;—first, to distinguish *the temple of God*; secondly, to distinguish *the altar of God*; and thirdly and lastly, *the true worshippers of God*.

First, then, *the temple of God*. "Rise and measure the temple of God." The apostle Paul in the 2nd of Ephesians gives a twofold version of the temple of God. He sums up all that he there saith with those beautiful words, "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." The temple of God, then, will mean that body of people who are there described, and I will concisely set before you the version which the apostle there gives of the people of God. The first feature is that they are quickened together with Christ Jesus. "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love,"—let us give that another reading, which some prefer giving it, and which is in reality no alteration, but brings out an excellency which we are apt to overlook in the words I have just quoted—"God, who is rich in mercy, *on account of* His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved)." Now just look at it,—on account of the great love wherewith He loved you. And that love must

be judged of by what it has done in the gift of such a Saviour, and in the endless blessings which come with unerring and infallible certainty to poor sinners by this wondrous gift of His dear Son. Therefore the mercy was simply on account of the great love wherewith he loved you. Those of you that are convinced of your state by nature as there described by the apostle will not, I am sure, ascribe your salvation to anything but the free, eternal, sovereign, and immutable love of the blessed God. Now let us come down to feeling. The religion of our God is a personal, feeling; experimental religion. It here saith that He has raised us up together with Christ. The meaning is that those who are quickened into spiritual life are made so sensible of what they are as actually to feel before God that nothing but what the Saviour has done can raise them up, that nothing but his precious blood can redeem them from sin, from the curse of the law, from death and hell, can deliver them from the wrath to come, and bring them up with acceptance before God. They are brought to see and feel this, and the consequence is that their confidence is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Where there is not this inward conviction which Saul of Tarsus did not possess until the Lord wrought that conviction, then we are contented with a moral exaltation, with a good character, exaltation before men, like the Pharisees of old, who loved the praise of men more than the praise of God; and if they could maintain a good appearance and a good name before men, they were contented. Such was the state of Saul of Tarsus. But when this conviction came in, and he was brought down under a sight and sense of his sinfulness; when he found out that he was infinitely and eternally loathsome to God, and that nothing but the precious blood of Christ could raise him up, then that became his confidence; and that nothing but the bringing in of Christ's everlasting righteousness could justify him, that became his confidence. This is the way that God hews out materials from their state by nature, and forms them to be His temple, His dwelling-place. What do we say to this? You know how close the Saviour comes to this experience when he saith, "Blessed is he that is not offended in me." Oh, it is a sweet thing, when everything is going wrong, to have such a confidence in Christ as to do what David did, as we have been reading this morning,—“I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” Then mark these words, “And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Here you observe that things are called places. We are made to sit together with Christ in the love of God, for there it is we love Him because He first loved us; and in the choice of God, for there it is He chose us, and has caused us hereby to chuse that good part that shall not be taken from us, And such shall sit together in the Saviour's victory. His victory is complete; we take our stand there. And you know what is said concerning Him in His priesthood—that having offered one offering he for ever sat down. As Goodwin and other divines have well observed, you never read of a Levitical priest sitting down. The apostle Paul lays emphasis upon this. He says, “they were always standing and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which could never take away sin;” therefore there was no sitting down; “but this man, when he had offered one sacrifice for sin, for ever sat down.” The victory is wrought; God is at rest; the soul is happy. What a heavenly place it is when we can put the foot of faith upon this vantage ground of the victory Christ has wrought, and hear the eternal God saying to your soul, “He will never suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will neither slumber nor sleep; he shall preserve thee,” as thou standest there, “from all evil,” for every evil shall be turned into a good; “he shall preserve thy soul. Again, the apostle saith, “By grace ye are saved.” You begin to say, It was grace that began the work.

* 'Twas grace that quickened me when dead,
 'Twas grace my soul to Jesus led."

But then now that I am raised up I feel so many evils in my nature that I am afraid that I shall go down again; I am afraid the Lord will have done with me; I am afraid that my religion is not real. Now the apostle, to comfort such, saith, "By grace ye are saved." You are saved from being what you were before,—that, I think, is the meaning there; saved from being enemies to God's truth.

And now the purpose:—"That in the ages to come, He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." The words "everlasting kindness," as I have often said, are in the scripture wherein the Lord first manifested himself to me. Ten thousand times twice told since then I have thought the Lord anything but kind, I have thought Him anything but good, I have thought Him anything but merciful, anything but loving, anything but pitiful and compassionate. But then I have found out afterwards that that was my infirmity. And by and by when fresh light shall gild these dark clouds, then the soul begins to sing, amidst the most crooked and trying things,—

"I know in all that me befell,
My Jesus hath done all things well."

It has all been done in kindness; and even what He has suffered to be done, He has suffered it in kindness. And then the manner of it—"through Christ Jesus, for by grace are ye saved," as though the apostle anticipated another feeling in the Christian here—namely, will the Lord never cease to be kind to me, all the time I live, and will he show the riches of his grace in this form of kindness when I come to die, and when I rise from the dead, and for ever, even world without end? How can it be? Why, "by grace are ye saved;" that is how it is done. It is a building, you see, of mercy; the top stone is brought home with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it. By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." I do not apprehend that the apostle's meaning there is that salvation is not of works lest any man should boast; but I wish you to know it is not of works, because if any of you once believes it is of works, you will begin to boast directly. I wish you to know it is not of works, so that you may renounce the whole—the bad and the good—and let God be your all in all. Then the apostle gives another beautiful representation. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." The good works in which the Christian is to walk are the good works of the great God. God has loved your soul with an eternal love, and that is one of the good works you are to walk in—walk in love. God has chosen you to eternal salvation. He has inscribed your name in His eternal book; and whatever that work may be in the eyes of the world and professors, in your eyes, if you know your state as a sinner, it is a good work, and you will walk in it. "Him that I have chosen I will cause to draw near unto me." He has determined you to eternal life, and in that decree you will walk, and you will apprehend that for which you are apprehended of Christ Jesus the Lord. Jesus Christ hath wrought out and brought in an everlasting righteousness, and we challenge all hell whether this be not a good work; we challenge all heaven whether this be not a good work; we are to walk by faith in his righteousness. "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." His atoning death is a good work, a wondrous work, and in that we are to walk. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." Our new creation, created in Christ Jesus—"This people have I formed for myself,"—is a good work; and are we to walk now in faith or unbelief? are we to walk now in knowledge or ignorance? are we to walk now in reconciliation or hostility? are we to walk now at a distance from God, and care nought about Him, or are we like Enoch and Noah, to walk

with God by virtue of this new creation? Why, the soul is born of God, and being born of God it is born for God, it is born to God, it is to be with God, and God shall be its exceeding joy. These are the good works you are to walk in. I am sure if you walk in God's love, you will be quite content to die there; if you walk in His choice, you will be quite content to die there; if you walk in His Christ, you will be quite content to die there; if you walk in faith, in love, in reconciliation, which the apostle calls walking after the Spirit—that is, after the teaching of the eternal Spirit—you will be quite content to die there; for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, that thus walk after this new creation. A life of good works will follow walking in these heavenly works, but it is in those good works of the Most High that the people shall walk for ever and ever. What do you say to this? In the 7th of Jeremiah there were men that did not think that the God of Israel had made provision altogether sufficient; therefore they went after other gods as well. Also those same men did not think that other gods ought to be disrespectfully treated; and therefore, while they professed to belong to the God of the Hebrews, they nevertheless thought other gods would be a help. We must use the means, they said—we must respect the means. What was the language of the people? “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.” See how Satan has succeeded in persuading millions of people that devil-sent men are men of God; that temple or that body of people into which all sorts of error are admitted, patronized, and contended for, are in the eyes of the world the temple of the Lord. But those who were spiritually taught knew better. They knew that their God disdained all other gods. “Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god; their drink offerings of blood will I not offer nor take up their names into my lips.” Thus then the Lord's people are brought to understand the purpose:—“that in ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace. What saith the apostle Peter, “Be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Why, some of you, and perhaps I myself (for I cannot tell yet what state of mind I may be brought into before I die)—some of you will approach death just as the prodigal approached his father's house—shoeless, robeless, ringless, penniless, foodless, destitute. But how was he met? See the provision there was in store for him; and he was happily received, and as happy when he was received, as though he had received those things a long time before, “that He might show the exceeding riches of His grace.” Now you and I shall be poor creatures all our days; but there is the provision running before us, and the Lord always before us. There is not an affliction, nor a loss, nor a bereavement that shall befall you but He will be there first to arrange it for you. Then the apostle adds, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” None but the man born of God can appreciate the new covenant works of a Covenant God; and none but the man that is born of God can walk in them. It needs the creating hand of God to bring us to walk in these good works. What did Saul of Tarsus walk in before he was born of God? You know what he walked in. Read the 3rd of Philippians: that will tell you how he walked. He walked in his own righteousness. But when he found he had no righteousness of his own, he was glad to step out of self and to step into the faith, to walk in the good works of the blessed God, and to realize the fulfilment of the prediction in the 145th Psalm,—“Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness.” Now, ye who are thus brought to walk in these good works, you are no more strangers and foreigners, you are brought to walk already the golden streets, you are brought to the

heavenly city, to drink of the river of God's pleasure; you are brought already at times under the shadow of the tree of life, and find the fruit thereof sweet to your taste, the leaves healing to your wounds. You are now fellow citizens with the saints, the best people that ever existed, made so by the grace of God. What a city is that of which you are citizens! it hath indeed "foundations; whose builder and maker is God." "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles,"—that is, the testimonies which they bore,—“and prophets,”—that is, the testimonies which the prophets have borne. How true this is. Some of you that call in question your interest in these things, I do not think that anything could persuade you out of this—namely, that your hope certainly is in the testimonies borne in the New Testament, and that your hope certainly is in the gospel testimonies borne by the prophets in the Old Testament, and you get encouragement from them. “Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” Why are the apostles put first? I suppose because the people were first made acquainted with the apostles through their preaching, and then through their testimonies were made acquainted with the testimonies of the prophets. And just see, something we very much love come out in the summing up of the account of this temple. It comes out as a matter, as it were, of course. “For through Him,”—that is, Christ Jesus,—“we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” There is the Holy, Holy, Holy Trinity, in which our souls delight. We glory in the distinct personalities and unity of our Covenant God; we glory in the personal divinity of the dear Saviour: we glory in the personal divinity and co-equality of the Eternal Spirit; we glory in our unchanging God. “In whom all the building fitly framed;”—now then, do these great and blessed truths fit you? What think you of the love of God, the choice of God, the purpose of God, the salvation of God, the redeeming power of God, the grace of God, the good works of God? Do they fit you? Ah, saith the Christian, they just fit me. So then all the building is fitly framed together. I am sure in this illness I was never more at home in my life with the things of God than I have been. I do bless the Lord for a personal religion; they just fit me, just suit me; not as men present them generally, but they do fit me as those present them that know their own hearts, their own grief, their own sore, and that have no confidence anywhere but in the Lord himself. “Fitly framed together.” It is that that has kept us together so long, and it is that that will keep the Church of God together to all eternity. Christ is the Centre of unity; here are the brethren that dwell together in unity, here is the unity of the Spirit, here is the unity of the faith. “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple”—in itself? no;—“in the Lord.” In the Lord have I holiness, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength; in the Lord have I completeness; in Him I have all I need. When we have done very soon with everything else, and leave the body, and everything that belongs to it, God shall be all and in all.

“Measure the temple;” test it, try it; see what kind of a temple God's temple is; and you will see it is a free grace temple, well founded, fitly built, compact together:—

*“Stands like a palace built for God,
To show his milder face.”*

“In whom”—here is the holy Trinity again—“in whom”—that is, in Christ Jesus—ye also “are builded together for an habitation of God, through the Spirit:”—Christ, God, the Holy Spirit. I hope and trust that when I am gone, the glorious doctrine of the Holy Trinity will be one of the rays of the gospel that will shine within these walls. The Lord keep us in his pure, holy, and blessed truth. Minor points that I have in by gone years controverted upon—I should not have time to do so now;—no; keep to the great essentials of the everlasting gospel, and

our souls shall prosper. Thus, then, to measure the temple of God means to distinguish it, and it is distinguished by those marks we have described this morning. And as to the purpose—"for an habitation of God." See this exemplified. "He passed by the nature of angels, and took upon him the seed of Abraham." Here is God tabernacling in our nature. "The Word was made flesh," by incarnation, "and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." "He hath ascended up on high, having received gifts for the rebellious." The Lord knew how many rebellions I should be the subject of, and so Christ has received a gift for every one of them; he has received pardon for every one of his brethren—for every one of them. There is so and so will rebel in such a way; Father, I shall want some mercy for him. There is that fretful Jonah, and innumerable others; so, Father, I shall want innumerable mercies. So the Lord saith in the 89th Psalm concerning Christ, "My mercy shall be with him;" and then in the 2nd of the Hebrews the Saviour is called "a merciful and a faithful High Priest;" because all the gifts of mercy and pardon his brethren shall need he hath received. We do not half know our God, nor our Christ, nor our gospel, nor our privileges. People could not bear to know too much; they would go mad with delight if they did. Why, in Solomon's Song, where it is said, "Drink abundantly," the margin reads it, and that would be the literal interpretation, "Be drunken with loves." It would drive the soul into ecstasies surpassing its powers of endurance while in this world. "Ere I was aware my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." Thus, then, "measure the temple of God."

Secondly, we come to *the altar*. I must say but little upon that. Now some have said that Jesus Christ offered sacrifice upon the altar of his divinity. Do not you say that again. I am sure if you look you will see that is a very improper way to speak of the Deity of Christ. We ought not to compare the Deity of Christ to anything. "To whom will you liken God?" I must therefore deny that his Deity was the altar, and contend that the sacrificial achievement of Christ was by his complex person. When his human arm was nailed to the cross, what arm was that that compassed our sins and crushed them, turned them into the chaff of the summer threshing floor? What arm was that that compassed the whole curse of the law, and in his person endured the same? What arm was that that while Moses took the serpent by the tail, and was afraid of it then—what arm was that, that took the old serpent, leviathan, by the head, and crushed him for ever? What arm was that that destroyed death in victory? It was the omnipotent arm of our Immanuel; that was the arm; and saith the Saviour, "On mine arm shall they trust." There is an arm of Omnipotence to crush the mightiest foe, to bear up the weakest friend, to carry out the purposes of his love; and thus to sit in the heavens, and laugh at the attempts of his foes to shake his throne, destroy his people, stop his truth, or hinder for one moment the progress of that eternal Spirit that taketh up the isles as a very little thing. Now there are four things in relation to the altar that necessarily strike the mind. First, the sacrifice in the Old Testament dispensation must be offered on the altar that stood before the Lord. Why must it be that altar, and that altar only? To convey to us this one truth—that the sacrifice was to be to God, and to God only. Therefore when they erected other altars and offered sacrifice to other gods, they then betrayed the apostasy of their hearts, showed their rebellion against God. Christ's offering was to God alone. He, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot unto God, and to God only. Did Satan tempt him? It was in vain. Did they aim to make him king? It was in vain. He would not suffer any but his heavenly Father to have—may I use the expression?—one hair of his head. He was given up to God, and to God

only. Hence that beautiful scripture in Isaiah,—“Who is blind, but my servant?” He would not see anything but that which God commanded. “Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent?” He would not listen to any but to God. “He will magnify the law, and make it honourable.” The sacrifice was to be to God, and God only. And what for? Why, that our hope may be in God, and God only. The second thing meant by the altar is that the altar was four-square. That you know the spiritual meaning of, but it is worthy of your remark. Isaiah came to Ahaz, and said, “Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God.” There is a league between thee and the king of Assyria:—“Ask thee a sign of the Lord; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.” But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord;”—pious man! Why, the hypocrite, he had been to Damascus, and had seen such a beautiful altar. Ah, he said, look at this altar; it has got a great many beautiful ornaments that ours has not. So he sent off a plan directly to Jerusalem, and commanded the priest to down with that old-fashioned four-square altar, and up with this new one. This will attract the people; it will be all right now. You get this in the 16th chapter of Second Kings. Let us be more charitable, and not stand out in that solitary way that some people have done; let us have the many on our side. Ah, fool! thou dost not see what a vain thing it is to have the many on thy side if God be against thee. On the other hand, if God be for thee, it matters not who may be against thee. This he did not see. That was the downfall of Ahaz. But when Hezekiah came to the throne, away went this altar of Ahaz; the whole of these idolatrous altars were swept away. Oh, that Hezekiah is an awful character; he has thrown down all these beautiful altars; why, I can scarcely walk anywhere without stumbling against one of the fragments. Hezekiah swept the whole away, stood by the four-square altar, and was faithful to his God. So when Sennacherib came, he came too late, Hezekiah now had made things square. His prayer to God brings down a blast upon Sennacherib and his hundred and eighty-five thousand men. “The daughter of Zion hath shaken her head at thee; she hath despised thee, and hath laughed thee to scorn.” Ah, what will not the prayer of precious faith do? What a sweet thing to be decided for God’s altar. Whether it be lovely in the eyes of the world or not, God’s altar is his altar. Had Sennacherib come against Ahaz, he would have succeeded, and swept the whole away; but Hezekiah had got the four-square altar. How sweet the thought, that while sin has put everything out of square, Jesus Christ has made everything right with God. The breastplate was square, to denote that his intercession was founded upon that sacrifice which perfectly atoned for sin; the altar was square, to denote that he had made everything square; the city lieth four-square, and never, never can get out of square. I am such a poor crooked thing that I am glad to have something square. The Saviour saith, “These things have I spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” The next reason why it must be God’s altar only was that the people might walk in unity. “Oh send out” (said one) “thy light and thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of Elohim,”—the sworn one, my covenant God, in his trinity of persons and unity of essence;—“unto God my exceeding joy.” “Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.” “Jerusalem is a city compact together.” Here is the unity among the people. Now, saith Peter, “There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus.” Take account of the altar, then; let it be an altar of sacrifice to God, an altar four-square, an altar of unity. We want no other centre of unity but Christ Jesus the Lord. Lastly, by this altar the people obtained everything they needed.