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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE TWO VOICES AND FOUR BOOKS.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 1ST NOVEMBER, 1863,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.”—Exodus xxxii. 33.

THIS, you will at once perceive, is the voice not of the gospel, but of the law of God. And remember that the word “law,” when taken in the literal or legal sense in contrast to the gospel, means not only the ten commandments, but all the conditional parts of the word of God, and all the threatenings contained therein. Hence, when the apostle quotes from what he calls the law, he does not quote from the ten commandments, but from those parts of God’s word wherein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. He saith, “Do ye not hear what the law saith?” and then goes on to speak of Hagar as an allegorical representation of the law; and then goes on to show that those that are of the law must ultimately be cast out, and cannot be heirs with the free-born sons of Zion. He does not there quote, you see, from the ten commandments. And then, again, in Romans 3rd, “What things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law;” and of course it is equally true on the other side that what things soever the gospel saith, it saith to them who are under the gospel. I need not multiply proofs to show that our text is the voice of the law; and that the word “law,” when taken in the legal sense, includes the old covenant, and all the conditionalities of the Bible; but when we come to a gospel view, these things wear a very different aspect.

Now, before I enter upon the subject, I ought perhaps in justice to say that on returning from the country I felt very pleased to find that the testimony of our good brother and friend, Mr. John Lambourne, was so well received among you. I hope and trust our good brother will not be long unknown to the churches. I am sure if he were but known there would be as many doors open for him as there have been for another brother, now present,* these last twelve months, where the hand of the Lord has appeared. I thought I would make these few remarks, because the sole business of my existence is the extension of Zion’s cords, the extension of Zion’s stakes, the extension of Zion’s welfare, the ingathering of precious souls; therefore I ought not to leave any stone unturned

* Mr. McCure.

if I can at any time, in any place, that shall have the least tendency to make the servants of God known, and extend the knowledge of his glorious kingdom. Let these few remarks go forth in our sermon.

I will now take a threefold view of our text. First, *the two voices of law and gospel*. Secondly, *the several applications of the voice of the law, as contained in our text*; and under this second head I shall work out what I believe to be the meaning and mind of the Lord in our text. Thirdly, *that book of the Lord from which there is no blotting out*.

First, *the two voices of law and gospel*. You see these two voices all through the Bible; and the nearer you get to the end, the more solemn does the contrast appear. You find these two voices even before the fall took place. There was the voice, shall I call it, of the gospel to Adam—the gospel that then suited his condition. “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat;”—then comes the voice of the law—“but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” “The tree of the knowledge of good and evil;” denoting that if you eat of that tree, you shall then be sensible of the good that you have lost. There is something in our very constitution that we have a great tendency to think comparatively lightly of our blessings while we possess them, but when they are taken away then we see their value; then we can understand the greatness of the good that was contained in them. So when Adam ate of this tree, he then entered more deeply into the good that he had lost than he did while he possessed it. This is a lesson for us. The Lord help us to profit by this consideration, and to be thankful for his many mercies. And it was the tree of the knowledge of evil, by bringing him into an evil which none but God could deliver him from. Here, then, were the two voices; Adam got rid of the one, and brought himself under the other. But no sooner had the fall taken place, than the two voices came down from heaven again. “The woman’s seed shall bruise the serpent’s head;” there is the voice of the gospel; and the curse pronounced upon the serpent was the voice of the law. Then we come to the flood—there again we have the voice of the law, declaring the destruction of the world; and the voice of the gospel, warning Noah, and so teaching him as to enable him to act upon that warning, and to escape the flood. Then we come to the cities of the plain; we have the voice of the law in the destruction of those cities, and the voice of the gospel in the escape of Lot. Then, when we come to Egypt, we have these two voices again; the voice of the gospel in the escape of the Israelites, and the voice of the law in the destruction of the Egyptians. Then when we come to the wilderness, especially the circumstance to which our text refers, we have the voice of the gospel to them that believed, and continued to keep in covenant with God; and the voice of the law against those that substituted idols into the place of the name of the blessed God. Also we have the voice of the gospel in the Israelites possessing the land of Canaan; we have the voice of the law in the destruction of the Canaanites. So we might go on all through the Bible. It is essential that we should rightly divide the word of truth, distinguish between the law and the gospel. “By the law,” taking the word “law” in that extended sense I have named, “is the knowledge of sin.” Hence many solemn scriptures, which are full of the law, have been the means of arresting and awakening many a careless and profligate sinner. Those solemn thunders of heaven must still go rolling on until God has awakened up from their sleep of death all those that shall be brought to know something of the majesty of the law, tremble at their condition, and then wait for the voice of the gospel. We have these two voices illustrated sometimes even in circumstances. I am sure you cannot read the book of Esther without being struck with it. There was the voice of the law (mind, I am merely accommodating circumstances to illustrate the two voices), pronouncing

the destruction of the Jews; by and by the Lord raised up Mordecai, and that other voice, as Aaron's rod swallowed up those of the magicians, swallowed up the first voice, and the Jews were delivered, and their hearts filled with gladness. Then, again, when the Lord spoke to Hezekiah, he spoke in the voice of the law, according to Hezekiah's disease, and according to the way in which the Lord might justly deal with him. But when the prophet was sent with another message,—“Thou shalt not die,”—that was the voice of the gospel. So, when the Saviour said to one and to another, “Follow me,” that was the voice of the gospel; but when he pronounced woes upon the Pharisees and their religion, that was the voice of the law. You will find these two voices all through the Scriptures. And there is not a man or woman in this assembly that can say, “What is this to me? I have nothing to do with it.” Ah, my fellow-traveller to eternity, there is no dying *between* the law and the gospel; you are either under the one or the other. If you are not born of the Spirit of God, brought into the kingdom of Christ, and under the gospel, then you are under the law; and there is not a threatening in the Bible that does not hang over your guilty head, that is not pointing to you. You are unconscious of it, tremble not at it, care not for it, perhaps mock and laugh at it; but the time will come when the voice of the law will speak;—when he will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh. We all have to do with these voices; we must be either under the law or under the gospel. All by nature are under the law, and its curse, and under wrath; “children of wrath;” and if we are delivered from that, not unto us, but unto him be the glory who is rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when dead in trespasses and in sins. Let us conclude this part by, on the one hand, the most solemn and tremendous, on the other hand the most glorious manifestation of these two voices that possibly can be. At the last great day, —“Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you;” there is the voice of the gospel. Then the Saviour takes up their practical sympathies with his cause and people, not as conditions of their going into heaven, but as evidences that they are the identical people for whom the kingdom was prepared. Then comes the voice of the law. “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Thus the Saviour declares the absence from them of those practical sympathies towards the people of God by the absence of which they prove that they are not the people of God. They are not sent away because they did not do these things; they are sent away for their sins independently of their non-doing; but their non-doing stood as an evidence that they did not belong to God. We must at the last day be found on the one side or on the other. Thus it is clear that there are two voices in the Holy Scriptures. But ah! without the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, God may speak once—namely, in the law,—yea, twice—namely, in the gospel,—yet man perceiveth it not. But our God takes care that some shall perceive it; and so, while men are in a deep sleep of death, and careless about eternal things, the Lord seals home instruction to the soul, and brings the man into that soul-trouble that causes him to say, as the people did at Sinai, “We cannot endure this voice of the law.” They entreated that this voice might not be spoken to them any more, for they could not endure that which was commanded. So, then, there are two voices in the Bible—the voice of the law and the voice of the gospel; and none can truly say that these things do not concern them. You might as well say that you have nothing to do with death, with judgment, with eternity.

I notice, secondly, *the several applications of the voice of the law as contained in our text*,—“Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.” There are four books I will notice, in three of which the truth of our text is realized. First, the book of federal law, wherein Adam stood the federal or covenant and natural head and representative

of the human race. Now all sinned in him. Are we blotted out of the book of paradise? Are our names blotted out there? Why, friends, it is so self-evident that I need not dwell upon it. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." All the holiness, all the righteousness, all the buoyancy and happiness of soul and spirit that man had before the fall—all is destroyed. Bring the soul of man into its true and proper element, and it is the most buoyant thing in existence. Quicken the soul into life, baptize it into the love of God, let it realize the virtue of Immanuel's blood, let it expatiate in the glorious liberty of the gospel, and it rises like the eagle into the lofty regions of the settlements of the most high God. There it is defended by the munitions of rocks, happy with the bread that endureth unto everlasting life, with the rivers that will never cease to flow. The poet Akenside has well said,—

"The high-born soul
Disdains to rest its heaven-aspiring wing
Beneath its native quarry.
Tired of earth and this diurnal scene,
She springs aloft through fields of air,
And shall through all the ascent enlarge her view,
Till every bound at length shall disappear,
And infinite perfection close the scene.
Call now to mind what high capacious powers
Lie folded up in man."

Our present condition is an abnormal or unnatural condition; we are under sin, death, and Satan, and under ten thousand oppressions. How came this to pass? Because we have all sinned in the first Adam, and we are out of God's books. I am not saying this lightly upon a subject so solemn, but I was going to say we had better be out of any one's books than out of the Lord's books; for to be out of his books is to be out of everything that can do us good. Therefore as all have sinned, so their names are all blotted out. Can any man say that he has a portion in the first paradise? Can any man say that he has a right to the first paradise, that he still has a memorial in the first paradise? No; through the fall of man we have no portion, no right, no memorial in the ancient paradise. But God was beforehand with all our woe; blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ before the world was, before the fall took place. Truly, truly, none can be beforehand with him. Here, then, our text is realized in the condition of the whole human race.

The second application is to the old covenant. The people that came out from Egypt did not understand the meaning of the paschal lamb; they did not understand the meaning of their deliverance from Egypt; they did not understand the meaning of the water from the rock; they did not understand the meaning of the manna, and therefore they set up a golden calf, and said, "These are thy gods." Just the same as men now, not from personal experience, but by outward circumstance, are brought into an acknowledgment of the truths of the gospel, but they do not understand Christ's salvation; they profess to be saved by it, but do not understand it; and not understanding the value of the salvation of Christ, of the bread of everlasting life, and of the water that springeth up unto everlasting life—not understanding this, of course anything else suits them better. But the Lord saith, "This people have I formed for myself." If the Lord fit the man for the gospel, then the gospel fits him; and that mutual fitness of things will increase. Now the violaters of this covenant were to be blotted out of God's book. You must remember that where the voice of the law does not express a condition, it very frequently implies one. The Saviour said to the Pharisees, "Ye shall die in your sins; and whither I go ye cannot come." Does that mean that the doom of the persons to whom he was speaking was sealed, and that there was no hope? There is a condition implied in that, a condition, I am fully aware, which none but the Lord could carry into effect. A little further on the Saviour saith, "I say unto you, If ye believe not in me, ye shall die in your sins." There it is, you see. And so these idolaters, or any other—it may be a Manassch, a thief on the cross; let him be what

he may,—while this is the voice of the law, that the man is blotted out of God's book, yet if grace set in, and Saul of Tarsus become a believer in Jesus, then he shall not die in his sins, he shall not be blotted out, but shall be brought to see a book wherein there is no blotting out. The second book, then, is the old covenant. I am aware the immediate penalty of that covenant was either natural death, or else banishment to a foreign country. The death of that covenant generally means banishment to a foreign country, so that they should become dead to everything God had given them; but it also means literal death, as in this case. We find in this chapter that those who had abode by the Lord were commanded to take their swords and go through the camp (for that was a carnal temporal dispensation), and slay every one that advocated this golden calf. These golden calves were playthings, the same as instruments of music in places of worship, as though the great God would listen to our trumpery inventions. These golden calves were playthings; and so the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play; and so the Lord came in and played with them—ministered his judgments to them, and two thousand were cut off in that day. I must make one remark here upon the final blotting out from that old covenant. In the 26th of Isaiah there is a scripture upon this subject of being blotted out from the old covenant most solemn. When we take it in its mere historic sense, and then apply it to future circumstances, see what solemnity it acquired. The Lord said, "The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." Now during the Old Testament age the carnal part of the Jewish nation went on slaying child after child of God, prophet after prophet. Elijah said, "They have forsaken thy covenant, digged down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword, and now I only am left." Never mind his little mistake respecting the seven thousand left; that does not alter the fact of what these men had done. The earth covered her slain, and did not disclose her blood; so that the Jews did not by any of these things go into final captivity. But Isaiah in his 26th chapter looks forward to the coming of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ. "Thy dead men shall live,"—there is the note of time;—"together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs." Now at that time "the earth shall no more cover her slain." Have you slain Jesus? Yes. Will the earth retain him as it did the prophets? We hope so; we have rolled a great stone to the mouth of the sepulchre; we intend the earth to cover this slain one; we do not intend he should appear again; we have done all we could to prevent it. Ah, here is the note of time to which that scripture refers:—"The earth shall no more cover her slain." In a few days the sorrowing disciples shall recognise his presence again; and in a few days after that he shall ascend to his eternal throne; the Holy Spirit shall descend, and you Jews shall stand amazed at these few illiterate men understanding instantaneously sixteen different languages at once. How is it that they speak to us in our own language of the wondrous works of God? And this glorious gospel shall go triumphantly on; and that testimony borne by Him that you have slain, whom you think the earth will retain and cover—that testimony that he has borne against your nation will soon come to pass; the Roman eagles shall recognise the ecclesiastically dead carcass of the Jewish nation, shall come and prey upon it, and scatter the members thereof that are not destroyed to earth's remotest bounds, as bones at the grave's mouth. "The earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." You cannot hide the murder of Jesus Christ; God will not put up with that; his patience now is at an end; his longsuffering is at an end; he will bathe his sword in blood. Ah, my hearer, there is a greater day coming yet, when the 300 Popes, or if we should have 300 more, or 3,000, and all idolatrous kings,—the thousand times ten thousand that have

been drunken with the blood of the saints—the same saints whose souls are sending forth the solemn request, “How long, O Lord, dost thou not avenge our blood at their hands?”—these martyrs shall rise, come into court, and be witnesses face to face against their adversaries that were drunken with their blood; then shall the old harlot of Rome and all her members have wrath without mercy, vengeance without pity, damnation without the slightest sign of salvation. “The earth shall no more cover her slain.” We shall rise at the last day to be witnesses against every one of our foes; the Saviour will bring his witnesses into court, and they shall all speak as with a voice of thunder, and all their enemies shall be found liars unto them. Ah, said the Saviour, now that you have shed my blood, now that you have filled up the measure of your iniquity—all the blood shed from the blood of righteous Abel down to the last you slew, all shall come upon this generation. So shall vengeance be ministered to his foes. Thus, then, our names are all blotted out in a broken covenant; for we have all sinned, and though we were not under that temporal covenant, yet we have all been as much partakers of the sins of the Jews as we are of the sins of Adam.

But we have one more book to mention, which I enter upon with trembling. There is a book of life out of which the names of how many God above knows are to be blotted;—the book of professional life. Do I profess to be a living soul in the new Jerusalem, a living believer in Christ, among the spiritually and eternally living? Ah, what if at last I should find I am among not the wise, but the foolish virgins, not the men of five and two talents, but of one talent—the letter of the word! What if at last I should be found a fruitless branch! Every branch that beareth not fruit he taketh away from the vine. The fruitless branch grows out of the vine as well as the fruitful branch. Science, perhaps, could assign the reason; for myself I cannot understand the reason of the one branch bearing fruit and the other bearing none. I should imagine (and you will take it as only imagination)—that the fruit-bearing branch has a hold of the vine in some respects different from and more powerful than the fruitless one. The fruitless branch has a hold upon the vine, but not that kind of hold that enables it to bring forth fruit; but it has that kind of hold that overshadows the fruitful branches, and would hinder their fruitfulness if those that had the care of the vine did not prune it, and take those hindrances away. Now the natural man has a faith in Christ; his religion arises from Christ; he has a natural belief in him, and professes to have no other hope; and yet he does not bring forth fruit. You read of some ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth; they have a hatred to the truth; they cannot keep exactly away from it, and they cannot understand and embrace it; and so “it is a people of no understanding;” though they profess to understand, they do not understand the way of salvation, therefore cannot bring forth fruit. But it is a peculiar and distinctive mark of God’s people that they are brought to understand the truth. That is the first fruit I will mention. The next fruit that they bring forth is, I will not say faith,—the next fruit is love. You cannot understand God’s truth by divine teaching without loving it; you cannot know the value of the Saviour, his adaptability to all your needs, without loving him; you cannot understand the way in which God hath embraced and eternally saved you without loving him. This love includes everything; it leads to every good word and work.

“ ‘Tis love that makes our cheerful feet
In swift obedience move.”

So you read, “That all might be damned that received not the love of the truth.” Well, then, if the love of the truth, and nothing else would do, it would be a libel upon the Holy Ghost to suppose a man can live

and die in demoniacal error, and in enmity to God's truth, and yet love Christ. It is the truth of Christ, and the truth is God's own representation of Christ; and if I hate that that represents him, then I hate him. "From him that hath not shall be taken away that which he seemeth to have." Well might one say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked," or erroneous "way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." I am perhaps saying things that may distress some of you. I had better distress you than deceive you; I had better send you home in sadness of heart than in a fool's paradise; I had better send you home cast down and almost wishing you had not been here than send you home deluded. Here, then, "whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." Ah, would you believe it? if your profession be false, your profession will be one of the worst of your sins. I am sure Saul of Tarsus would look back upon his past profession as being the worst part of his sin, because his false profession set him in active enmity against the truth of God. And who in all ages have been, I will not say exclusively, but generally, the greatest persecutors? Those who professed to love God and Christ, but who hated his truth. Now, then, these shall be blotted out of the book of life; that is to say, their names were in the book of life professionally, but by and by shall be blotted out; instead of, "Come, ye blessed," shall be, "Depart, ye cursed." The Saviour said to the Sardian church, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life." Then it is said, "If any man shall add to these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

Lastly, I notice *that book of the Lord from which there is no blotting out*. Out of the three books I have mentioned—the book of federal law, the book of national covenant, and the book of mere profession—the names of millions will be blotted out. But there is no blotting out of this last book—namely, the Lamb's book of life. What is the Lamb's book of life? If I say the gospel is the Lamb's book of life, I shall be right, no question about it, because the gospel is the word of life; but I prefer, this morning, taking another word, for the sake of bringing out the five reasons why there is no blotting out of this book. First, then, is not the covenant of grace the Lamb's book of life? Is not the covenant of grace God's testamentary will? Now how is it that there is no blotting out of the Lamb's book of life? Taking it for granted that that book is the covenant of grace; for in Malachi you find this covenant called the covenant of life and peace; how is it that no one is blotted out of that book? For this simple reason, that all the parts of that covenant lie exclusively with God; that there is nothing conditional in it. If there were anything in it pertaining to the creature, then the creature would fail, and out of that book there must then be a blotting. But David sums it up thus, "a covenant ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation and all my desire." Whatever conditions the new covenant contained devolved upon the Saviour. "I delight, O God, to do thy will." Christ carried out the testamentary will of God. I like those words of the poet upon this very subject,—

"It is the Lord, my covenant God,
Thrice blessed be his name;
His gracious promise, sealed with blood,
Must ever be the same."

No blotting out, no failure there; it is God's own covenant; he has taken the whole into his hands. Secondly, no blotting out here because of the completeness of the Saviour's work. If I am arrayed in his right-

teousness, I am righteous for ever, reconciled for ever; by that reconciliation I have peace for ever; by the peace which he is to me I have victory for ever. He could never be conquered. If he were not conquered in the progress of his work, we cannot be conquered; the victory is won, the warfare accomplished, iniquity pardoned. The third reason is because all these new covenant people shall be assimilated to the mind of the Lord, to his likeness, in a way that they cannot be deformed as they were before, a likeness of him that cannot be defaced, ruined, or brought to nought. Who can lay anything to my charge, accepted thus in Christ Jesus? Therefore, saith the apostle upon this matter, "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone"—that would be cold and hard, legal and miserable,—“but in fleshy tables of the heart,” assimilating you by faith to this covenant, to this mediator. “And such trust have we through Christ to Godward; not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves”—reminding us of the sovereignty of the Holy Ghost,—“but our sufficiency is of God.” How is our sufficiency of God? “Who also hath made us able ministers,” or “servants,” as the original word will bear rendering, “able servants of the new testament,” or covenant, “not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” Thus the soul is sweetly assimilated to the blessed God in the new covenant. Another reason why their names cannot be blotted out is because all their sins are blotted out. I will name seven scriptures upon this subject,—5th of Numbers, “The priest shall blot out the curses with bitter water.” Oh, the bitter agonies of the dear Redeemer, by which he blotted out the curses of the law, and everything that stood against us! He is the antitypical priest; by his own bitter agony he has blotted out the curse, and it is written upon the forefront of his eternal throne, “There shall be no more curse.” “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Then, if their transgressions be blotted out, their name is not blotted out. Then in the 9th verse of the same 51st Psalm, “Hide thy face from my sins,” do not look at them, Lord, for they are so criminal, so aggravated; cast them behind thy back; thy dear Son has taken them away. “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.” 43rd of Isaiah, “Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices;” what comes next? “Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins.” If Christ had not served with our sins upon him, he could not have served at all; “thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.” What weariness did he undergo when he bare our iniquities! And now mark, “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” 44th chapter, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.” 3rd of the Acts, “Repent, and be converted.” That was not said to carnal people, but to a people made concerned for their eternal welfare; this same chapter shows that they were the children of the new covenant, “Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,” manifestively, “when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” 2nd of Colossians, “Having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” Then the last reason why there is no blotting out of the Lamb’s book of life you will find in the latter part of the 6th chapter of Hebrews, where the apostle speaks of God as “willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel.” Amen and Amen.