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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE UNSPEAKABLE GIFT.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY EVENING, 30TH AUGUST, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."—2 Corinthians ix. 15.

IN the apostles' day, as well as in the present, the people of God that had it in their power had to minister to the cause of God of their temporal possessions, and also to the poor of the Lord's people. And the apostle uses in the preceding and in this same chapter several encouraging arguments to encourage them to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, and then sums up the whole as being embodied in the Saviour, he being a gift that embodies every blessing of God's everlasting love. One of the reasons that he brings forward is the dear Saviour taking our poverty. "Ye know," he says, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Therefore if he gave himself, do not think it hard if the Lord has so ordered it that you are to show your gratitude in the way here described. Then the next reason he gives is that "God loveth a cheerful giver; and God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." This is the way in which he encouraged the people. He well knew that the Lord draws his people; he makes them willing, and he draws them along, that is, attracts them by the manifestations of his various mercies; as it is said he leadeth his own sheep out, and they follow him. Then the apostle goes on again and says, "The Lord hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor; his righteousness remaineth for ever;" and so will the evidential righteousnesses of the people of God remain for ever. The prayers and alms of Cornelius will stand to all eternity in the records of eternity as evidences that Cornelius was a good man. Their sins are taken away, but their good works are retained, such is the order of the Lord's love and mercy. And then the apostle gives these people to understand that the Lord would give them bread for food, and that he would multiply their seed sown, and increase the fruits of their righteousness. And then the apostle goes on to show that the poor saints of God whom these people thus ministered to, prayed, in consequence of the kindness shown them, for these people of God; and therefore the apostle says, "They pray for you, and long after you;" that is, I apprehend, long after your welfare, "for the exceeding grace of God in you."

As though he should say, Take the Lord as your example; see how bountiful, see how kind he has been, and see what he has given; and remember that every good and every perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. And you must forgive me if I do just for a moment make a little reference to yourselves. What shall I say to you as a people upon this score? Why, friends, I can never say perhaps so much as I ought to say. If there is at any time anything needed, it is only just to set it before you so that you can understand it, and the difficulty melts away before your united and Christian kindness. Hence no longer ago than last Lord's day, which was our quarterly collection, our collection in the morning was deficient, very deficient. I knew very well there was something somewhere. Now by just explaining, and saying a word or two to you in the evening, what was the consequence? The consequence was that the collection was not only brought up to what it usually is, but was a few shillings more than any quarterly collection we have had since we have been in the place. So indeed it all seems to arise from the gratitude contained in the language of our text,—“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” I am sure when I look back at our history all through, from first to last, I stand amazed at what you have done. And when men speak lightly of God's truth, and say the truth of God leads to this, and that, and the other, I have nothing to do but refer to the people with whom I have had the honour of being connected so many years, and what they have done, as a standing refutation of all that can be said. Therefore by God's help we hope to go on with the same gospel, with the same Jesus Christ, the same vital religion. Also, before I enter upon the subject I may just say it is very pleasing the thought that the Lord has not, and does not, and we believe he will not leave himself without witnesses. And I hope you are come this evening with this feeling,—Now I am going to hear God's eternal truth; and if I am out of the secret, I wish to be convinced of the same, and pray the Lord to bring me into the secret; if I do not possess vital godliness, then let me pray to the Lord that I may know what it is to possess it. This praying to the Lord is very often the result of self-examination; and you know it is written, “The secret of the Lord,” the counsel of the Lord, what he means to do, “is with the righteous, and he will show them his covenant.” Now the apostle, then, looking at all the kindnesses that those who had it in their power had shown to him, and to the cause of God, and to the poor, leads their attention at once to the gift of gifts,—“Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” Those to whom he has given his dear Son in the manifestation thereof can join in the language of the apostle and say, “This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Of course we need use no arguments to prove that the gift here referred to is the Lord Jesus Christ; and as such the text lies before us in a twofold form. Here is first *the gift*; and secondly, *the gratitude*.

I notice, then, first, *the gift*. Now the Lord Jesus Christ is the gift of God, first, by the love of God; secondly, by the will of God; and thirdly, by the counsel of God. There are other principles in the gift of Christ, but I think these three will be as many as will be needful to bring forward now, or as many as time will allow me to notice. First, then, the Lord Jesus Christ is the gift of God by his love. And the purpose of this gift of the love of God is to bring us into the love of God, that we may, by being brought into his love, escape his wrath; for all of us by nature are children of wrath. And so he gave his dear Son that we may be brought by faith in him into the love of God, and hereby escape the wrath of God; and not only so, but be fitted for and possess the inheritance for ever of the saints in light. Let me now carefully

describe what it is to know this gift, and what it is to be brought into the love of God. It is the adaptation of the Lord Jesus Christ to our dire, solemn, and I had almost said awful necessities—to bring us into the love of God. Now the apostle saith of Christ in the 5th of Romans that he died for us when we were without strength; that is, we had no strength to stand against the fiery law of God; we had no strength to stand in judgment; we had no strength to stand against death; we had no strength by which we could obey God's law; for the law is spiritual, but we are carnal, and sold under sin. Now Jesus Christ came in, and he stood against sin, bore it and put it away; he stood, shall I say, under the law, obeyed it, and is the end of the law for righteousness; he stood against death, hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, and swallowed up death in victory. He stood against all that stood against us, spoiled principalities and powers, made a show of them openly; he received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell with man upon the earth. This is one step, then, towards coming into the love of God. God so loved the world—a world within a world I apprehend is there meant,—he so loved the world that he sent the greatest good that could be sent, even his dear Son. Is it so with us, that we are convinced we have no strength, and that Jesus thus died for a poor, withered, helpless race? Mr. Hart may well say,—

“Man, vaunt thy native strength no longer;
Vain is the boast, all is lost,
Sin and death are stronger.”

Jesus is the remedy. And so the Lord in the 27th of Isaiah saith to the seeking sinner, “Let him take hold of my strength,” and that strength is Christ, who hath wrought the victory, “that he may make peace with me; and he shall”—by pleading the strength of Immanuel's blood, of Jesus' righteousness, victory, and love—“make peace with me.” Thus are sinners drawn to where there is strength. And then, again, the same verse takes us up as ungodly,—“When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Now you must be convinced that nothing but the blood of Christ can make you godly; that is, you must have faith to receive the atonement of Christ; that nothing else can take away your ungodliness, your ungodly character, and make you a godly man, but faith in the blood of Christ; that nothing can make you a righteous man but faith in the righteousness of Jesus. Hear what David saith, how he connects the strength with the righteousness, Jesus meeting us when we were without strength, and becoming our strength; see how the Psalmist understands this in his 71st Psalm:—“I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only.” Here, then, we are brought in this way into the love of God, here we perceive the love of God; and by receiving these blessed truths by the Holy Spirit's teaching, the love of God becomes shed abroad in our hearts. If we thus know the Saviour, we shall love him; for I am sure Dr. Watts is right when he says,—

“If the whole world did Jesus know,
Sure the whole earth would love him too.”

And then the apostle goes on,—“God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” So he gave us this Saviour in the very face of our present unworthiness; Jesus died for us in the very face of our malice against him, and had to pray concerning some, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” And it is an apprehension of this, an experience and a knowledge of this, that brings us into the love of God, that we may escape the wrath of God. Again, the apostle goes on a little farther, and he shows that while we were thus without strength, ungodly, and sinners, we were also enemies.

“If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of

his Son"—if when we were enemies that atonement so told upon our enmity as to slay it, so told upon our souls as to quicken them into life, awaken their powers, and cause them to lift up their eyes to Calvary's cross, and there read out the eternal love of God to man,—if God loved us then, if he came to us then, if he remembered us in our low estate then, and turned us into friends,—“much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.” So, then, Christ is the gift of God's everlasting love. And the apostle goes on to show that God in this way becomes our rejoicing; that God himself, who is a terror to devils, who is more or less a terror to all natural men—for all men show that they have some degree of slavish fear of the God of all; and that God who indeed will be a terror to the lost, yet becomes the rejoicing of those who are thus brought to know him. The apostle says—“Not only so,”—not only has the dear Saviour met us in all these dire necessities, not only has God given us such a Saviour as this, but he says, “We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement;” we have received the reconciliation—as some have rendered it, we have received the at-one-ment; united to God, to be separated from him no more for ever. Such, then, is the love of God. And you know the Holy Scriptures roundly declare this love to be eternal. “I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore in lovingkindness have I drawn thee. And besides, how even in common sense and common reason can we deny the eternity of this love? Is not the gift eternal? is not Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever? Well, then, he is the expression and the embodiment of God's love; and if he be the same for ever, it is because the love that gave him is the same for ever. So, then, “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” And in the 17th of John the Saviour shows up the wonderfulness of the love of God in embracing the man Christ Jesus and the people in the same love:—“Thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” Ah, my fellow-traveller to eternity, art thou awakened up to some hope in this great Saviour, this suited Saviour, this shining Messiah? for he is the brightness of God's glory, the express image of his person, upholding all things pertaining to our eternal welfare by the word of his power, and who when he had put away our sins sat down for ever on the right hand of God? I say, are we all, then, wending our way towards a hope in God by this atonement of Jesus? If so, then the love of God will be diffused through our souls; and so the apostle saith, “Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” If our knowledge of Christ does not endear him, and draw out our sincere affections to him, then our knowledge is merely intellectual, and merely intellectual knowledge puffeth up; but charity, this spiritual knowledge, buildeth up. If a creature be puffed up, he may very easily be puffed down again; but if he is built upon the Rock of Ages by the power of God, he can then say with David, “My heart is fixed, O my God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise.” And besides, what a pleasant thing it is to have a hope that your Maker loves you! exceedingly pleasant; and whenever that love comes in and rises like a mighty tide over all the hills of your sins and difficulties, you then can say, “How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights.” Thus, then, thanks be unto God for such loving-kindness, for this unspeakable gift expressive of that love; and he will indeed love to-morrow as he loves to-day. I will say just one more word upon this part, and that is this, that you cannot imagine any motive so noble, so dignified, so excellent, as the motive from which Christ was given, the motive from which Christ died, the motive from which the Lord abides by us—it is his love. Look at the excellency of the motive. Now men may do many things out of pity, and charity, and compassion, and from various motives, very good of their kind and in their place; but

there is no motive like that of love. There is something so noble about it. Love never thinks it does too much; love never thinks anything too good, or too great, or too advantageous for its object. And such is the love of our God. He loved the people, and he looked about and said, Now what shall be done to them to make them know, as far as creatures ever can know, the greatness, the intensity, the perpetuity, and the immutability of my love to them? See the motive; there is no motive to equal it. Love asks no reward; it delights to undergo anything for its object. Therefore it is that the Saviour rejoiced as a strong man to run a race, to win the prize and hold it fast; for all the objects of his love he shall bring to himself, and present them at the last great day perfect in love by being perfect in him.

Secondly, Christ is the gift of God also by his will. This of course arises from the other; nevertheless this is a department that we must enlarge a little upon. It was God's good will to give Christ, and that will is represented in a threefold form—good, acceptable, and perfect. Let us see how beautifully the Saviour exemplifies all this. Moses recognised this when he said, "The good-will of him that dwelt in the bush." The dwelling in that bush we take, as you are aware, to represent the Lord Jesus Christ in the likeness of sinful flesh. He took upon him the likeness of sinful flesh. And can anything be so good as this? Ah, sinner, what is the one great good that thou needest? A sin-bearer, a surety, one that shall take thy sins away, one that shall redeem thee from the curse of the law, from hell; one that shall take thy place, and stand before God, and say concerning you, If I bring him not unto thee, the blame be upon me for ever. This is the one great thing needful. Then the bush will also represent the church of the living God in her fiery afflictions, that cannot be consumed, because God dwells there; and if he dwells there, then the fire must lose its power, and they shall all come forth at last without a hair of the head hurt, without the smell of fire upon them, and their coats shall not be changed, and nothing shall be burnt but their badness; all their bonds shall be burnt off, and they shall be free. So that Jesus Christ came by the good will of him that dwelt in the bush. Let us come to the New Testament. When the angels descended, what was their anthem, what was their song? It began with "Glory to God;" and if this be not a glory to God, I know not what is; if this does not redound to his infinite and eternal honour, I know not what will. This great subject will fill the souls of a number that no man can number, whose voices shall roll forth as mighty thundrings, and as many waters in that vast eternity; for my text will go on to all eternity. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." "Glory to God in the highest: peace on earth." Ah, the peace of God; the peace brought about by the dying groans of the Son of God, by the wondrous death of an almighty Saviour. "And good will toward men." God gave Christ by his love to us, that we might be brought into that love; and he has given Christ by his good will, that we may be brought into that good will, and have a good will towards him, as he has a good will towards us. You know how clear the Bible is upon this matter. "Blessed is he that hath a good will toward me;" "Blessed is he that is not offended in me." And if thou hast a good will towards him, if the Lord has given you the will, but has not yet given you power, as we said this morning, to call him yours, but if he has made you willing, that is one step, and in his own time he will so bring thee into his good will that thy will towards him shall strictly accord with his good will towards you. "Good will toward men." You know how essential good will is in all the relations of life. If I had not a good will to you, what a hypocrite I should be to come and speak to you from time to time as I do! If you had not a good will towards God's truth, what would your profession be? There would be no reality in it. And

besides, if you get a man's will, you get the man. Therefore the Lord saith he will make his people willing in the day of his power. But time would fail me to point out the greatness of the good will of God in all its aspects. Jesus Christ is the expression of that good will. What an infinite good he is! what an eternal good he is! Is there a relation he bears in which he is not the very perfection of goodness? Is he a shepherd? Oh, what a good Shepherd! Is he the Elder Brother? Oh, what a good Brother! Was there ever one like him? No, never. Is he a Surety? Oh what a good and safe Surety! Is he a Saviour? is he a husband?—yea, we may trace out every character he bears, and in them all he is good. But, again, this will of God is said to be an acceptable will. The apostle says, "That ye may know what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." "Acceptable." Now if this will be acceptable to us, then I think I ought to trace out some of the happy consequences of this will being acceptable to us. But how are we to know this? Well, Jesus Christ is the expression of God's good will, and God's will is that Jesus Christ should be acceptable unto his brethren; and if, therefore, he be acceptable unto us,—we will have a scripture first from the New Testament, and then we will go to the Old, and see what happy consequences will follow. Let us first take upon this question the apostle's words, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." There was nothing else to save, for all were sinners; "there is none righteous, no, not one." Can I join with the apostle, and say that I feel nothing is so worthy of a place in my heart, and soul, and best affections as the testimony that Christ came into the world to save sinners? If so, then we will trace out some of the consequences, or rather point out where some of the consequences are traced out. 33rd of Deuteronomy:—"Let Asher"—"Asher" means "happiness," and that is that at which the Saviour has now arrived; "for the joy set before him he endureth the cross," and he has reached that joy;—"Let Asher be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil." Now the anointing of the feet there, as pointing to Christ, means Christ's consecrated walk with God. No persons' feet were ever so anointed to walk with God as were the feet of Christ. You read in mathematics that it is utterly impossible for any man to make a perfectly straight line, or to make a perfect measure, or to make a perfect weight. You can do this for all the practical purposes of life, but it is utterly out of any man's power to make, mathematically speaking, a straight line. Euclid would find a great many crooks in what you call a straight line. Or you have your yard measure; Euclid would be sure to find it either a little too long or a little too short. It may be perhaps imperceptible to the naked eye; but Euclid would find it out. Just so in weight; there is always something adhering to the scales; you never can get weight perfect. Now the Lord Jesus Christ walked a perfectly straight path. There was none ever so anointed to walk with God as God's Christ did; he never stepped one atom aside. And while no man can make a perfect measure, literally so, yet the Lord Jesus Christ went just as far as it was divinely measured for him, and no farther. And as no man can make a perfect weight—I mean not mechanically, but mathematically, yet the Lord Jesus Christ did. He himself rendered a perfect weight to the demands of justice; he was weighed in the balance by divine justice, and he was a perfect weight. So that his dipping his foot in oil means that he was anointed to walk with God a straight path, to walk with God till the work was finished, until he had outweighed all our sins to perfection. And then, "Let Asher be acceptable to his brethren;" so that his straight walk covers my crooked walk; his completeness covers my destitution, and his full weight covers my lightness; for "to be weighed in the balance we are all lighter than vanity;" but let the dear Saviour be in the

balance, then all our sins are outweighed. Now the man to whom this Saviour is acceptable, to him the Lord gives promise after promise, and I don't wonder at it, for if you are brought to Christ, you are brought to where all the promises are; and therefore no wonder you should get some of them, no wonder you should see some of them, and understand some of them; for none of us shall understand them all while we are in the body; but the Lord goes on with promise after promise. Then it goes on to say, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass," so that "thou shalt tread upon the adder and upon the lion, the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet," by precious faith in the mighty one of Israel; "and as thy days, so shall thy strength be." Our physical powers must presently cease, and we must give up the desire of our eyes, and everything else; but here, in this spiritual sense, while the outward man decays, the inward man is renewed day by day. And when you come to Jordan's banks, to have strength in your soul to be willing to depart, what mighty strength is that—to give up wife, children, or, as the case may be, husband, houses, lands, and everything human, to return no more, the place that has known you shall know you no more; and yet how many thousands of the people of God have been enabled in that solemn hour to bear testimony of their happiness and willingness to depart into that better, that glorious and wondrous world, and leave all with Him who has said, "Leave thy fatherless children with me," and "I will be a husband to the widow"! Then comes in the Lord after this as an invisible helper. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun." All these promises are made to the man to whom Christ is acceptable. "Let Asher be acceptable to his brethren;" so that his being acceptable is a proof of belonging to him, being a part of his brethren. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven;"—there is the sky, as it were, between, and we cannot see him;—"in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky"—invisible; but he can see you. Like Joseph, he looks upon you, but you cannot see him as your helper. He can see you, and you shall often see his kind hand when you cannot see him; you shall often see him as clearly as though the Lord himself came down and said, "It is I." Oh, how he manifested himself to the Old Testament saints, and what wonderful displays the apostles experienced of this, and the early Christians! and so shall we. Then it is added, "The eternal God is thy refuge;" your refuge can never break up; it is invulnerable; "the eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them." Let us take the enemy to mean our sins, including Satan, and death, and everything that is an enemy to us; he shall thrust them out. May I not ask this assembly, has not the Lord done so? Has not Jesus thrust out our sins? has he not thrust out Satan? has he not thrust out death? has he not thrust out virtually all our tribulations? and will not the consequence of that be that he shall wipe all tears from off all faces that are thus brought to know him? May I not stop here, then, and again quote our text, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift"? But Moses does not stop yet;—no, "Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee? Who indeed? Not the highest archangel in heaven is like unto thee; not the mightiest monarch that ever reigned is like unto thee; not the most celebrated philosopher or warrior that ever appeared is like unto thee. "Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency? and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places." Here is the final victory. But the will of God is also called perfect. Let us have one word of the dear Saviour, repeated on three different occasions upon this subject of the perfect will of God; that is, the will was perfect objectively; it willed perfection for the people, and then

willed the people to that perfection. Hear what the Saviour saith in the 4th of John;—"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work;" mark the language, "*his work*." It is not work contrived by man, but it is work contrived by my Father. "To finish his work." Jesus could not be happy to stop short of finishing the work. Hear him again in the 17th of John;—"I have finished the work," that is, as far as he had gone, "which thou gavest me to do." And then hear him in the 19th of John in his dying hour;—"He said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."

But I must hasten to have one word upon the counsel of God. He is the gift also of the counsel of God. Here I should like to have had an hour; for, as some rhetorician somewhere saith, the lamp of meditation stood upon the table of heaven from all eternity. His meaning is that our God was from all eternity busy contriving and arranging (I now speak after the manner of men, of course,—indeed, we must do so in order to get at these things) our eternal welfare. Does not Watts somewhere say, "His busy thoughts" P What will make your thoughts so active and busy as love P When you love an object intensely, you must think of it; you cannot help yourself; you are sure to think of it. "His goings forth were from of old, even from everlasting." Ere Adam was formed, ere the dust of the earth existed, ere the mountains were made, God's delights were, in purpose, arrangement, and settlement, with the sons of men. And then if you look at the great number of predictions put upon record in relation to the coming of Christ, the birth of Christ, the death of Christ, and all the circumstances attending that death; the ingathering of the people, and all the circumstances of their ingathering, and their preservation, and the time, and place, and means by which each is to die, and their resurrection, and then in what way they shall be filled with a fulness of joy, and possess pleasures for ever—see what a vast amount of thought all this requires. None but an infinite God, a God of infinite understanding, could grasp such a theme. Delighted I should be to dwell largely upon this glorious and beautiful subject. Have you not sometimes stood amazed at God's thoughts when they have been manifested P How many instances have we in the Old Testament of the peculiar thoughtfulness of the Most High! Take that of Haman and Mordecai. Little did Haman think what he himself was coming to; little did he think what he was subserviently bringing Mordecai to. Now God knew all that; God was beforehand; he is never taken by surprise, always beforehand, and that being the case, his counsel must stand, and he will do all his pleasure.

But I must, secondly, notice *the gratitude*. What little I have said, does it not form a good foundation for gratitude P especially if you remember that in connection with this is the promise of this life as well; for "he that spared not his own Son, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things P" Oh, do look to him as a God of providence; look for him to guide you in your business, and to be with you; he will not say you nay. Do not think I am speaking in vain. You may depend upon it, the poor widow of Sarepta trembled and was troubled to see the last handful of meal and the last little oil going—gathering a few sticks just to close the scene. But then she was one that seemed to have some feeling towards the God of the Hebrews. No doubt a secret prayer went up to the Lord of mercy, "Lord, save me and my poor child from the death of starvation that seems just at the door." Ah, just at the time the prophet comes, the Lord appears, she is supplied, her life spared, and God glorified. So the counsel of the Lord shall stand. Don't, therefore, be above looking to him; be not afraid to cast all your care upon the Lord. You must not talk about this to ungodly men unless they wish to listen to you, because you will not do much good by it.