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# Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

A GOOD DECISION.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 18TH APRIL, 1869,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANDSWORTH STREET.

“And I will yet praise thee more and more.”—Psalm lxxi. 14.

THE whole verse reads thus:—“But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.” David’s continual hope was founded upon that clear revelation which the Lord had made to him of the person and righteousness of Jesus Christ. The word “righteousness” he mentions five times in this Psalm, and sets that righteousness over against every possible necessity; so that no Christian can, if he has a little right-mindedness left, despair. He may despair, as Jeremiah did, for a little while, but it was only a kind of fit, when he said, “My hope and my strength is perished from the Lord.” There are, of course, a great many circumstances without, and a great many doubts and fears, conflicts, sins, and rebellions within; and sometimes these so overwhelm the Christian that he thinks his experience is anything but Christian, and so he is very much discouraged. But then, when he is enabled to look at what Jesus Christ is, he comes to this conclusion, that there is not anything Christ’s atonement is not able to overcome, that his righteousness is not able to exempt us from; there is not anything, however tangled and perplexing to us, that is at all too difficult for the Lord. Ten thousand things may entangle us, and we get sometimes into a kind of maze, and hardly know what to do; but the Lord never was and never will be at a loss what to do. We may, therefore, hope continually, considering that Jesus Christ abideth a priest continually, and that the goodness of our God continueth. David therefore might well say, “I will hope continually.” It is a great mercy to have this right hope. If our hope be rightly founded—namely, upon what Christ has done, and in the order of things to which he belongs, then all such are the poor and the needy, and these are they who in the Lord’s own time shall praise him. So, saith David, “I will yet praise thee more and more.” It does appear here that David had spoken well of the Lord in times past, that he had praised the Lord, had seen the goings of the Lord in his sanctuary, as in one place he prays that he may again see the Lord’s goings in his sanctuary, as he has seen the same in times past.

I shall deal with our subject in a threefold form:—first, *the past*, secondly, *the present*, and thirdly, *the future*. I will this morning try to help the people of God by looking back at the Lord’s past dealings with them; then we shall have very carefully to find out where we are now; and if we can find out where we are now, we shall from that position, if

we are at all in a right position, see clearly where we shall be in the future.

First, *the past*. It is an unspeakable mercy to have a spiritual past to look to; to be able to look back into your personal history, and to see that the Lord met with you, and has done that for you which you see he has not done for thousands of others. Let us take the word of the Lord to guide us in this matter, especially as we have his own command, "Thou shalt remember all the way the Lord thy God hath led thee in the wilderness." We will begin with the Lord's own account, where he saith, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians;" you see how I left them, and suffered them to go on to their own destruction: "and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." Now I say it with reverence, let the Lord have brought the people where he might, he could not have brought them to anything so good, so great, or so suited to them as himself. "I brought you unto myself." That was the best position that it was possible even for infinite power and wisdom to bring them to. Let us then look back into our past history, whether we have this spiritual past. "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself;" so that you were carried above the Egyptian slavery and power, above all opposition, and brought to myself. It is a secondary consideration as to how the work was first begun in your hearts in the manifestation of it; let it have been begun how it may in the manifestation of it, the description there is sure to be correct:—"I brought you unto myself." You first began to think of the Lord; you came to him in thought; you began to think of judgment, and how you should escape it; you began to think of Jesus Christ, and of mercy. Your desire began to be to the Lord, and you began to seek him. Perhaps many of you cannot point to any particular time when you began seriously and prayerfully to think about the Lord; but you did begin, and you went on, and by and by your mind was enlightened, and in that enlightenment you saw what we shall presently have to describe. You saw more and more of your own weakness, sinfulness, helplessness, unworthiness, nothingness, and by degrees that great truth rose higher and higher in your estimation, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom"—if you have had much wilderness work, you will not be above saying—"I am chief." It matters not whether the work began in this gradual way, or whether you were arrested as was Saul of Tarsus, whether you were pierced in heart suddenly, as on the day of Pentecost, or whether your heart was simply opened, so that you attended to the things spoken by Paul, as is said of Lydia; all this is minor matter, as to how you came into the road, as to the manner of your experience, if you are but brought to the throne of grace, and brought to hope in the Lord, brought to him, and nothing has severed you from him from that day to this; and you have known what it is to desire desires; you have known what it is, as some of the old divines have said, to thirst for thirstings, and to hunger for hunger, and to long for longings, and to pray for prayer; that is, for the spirit of prayer; for there is not a living soul anywhere but is thus made to look to the Lord. "Wilt thou not revive us again?" Lord, I am afraid my thoughts are not serious enough, not sincere enough,—whether I can pray with David, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord,"—and then you are afraid, perhaps, to use the other clauses, "my strength and my Redeemer." All this amounts simply to this,—“O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known.” The few years that I am in this wilderness revive thy work in my soul, if indeed it be begun, and make known in the midst of these years as I go along; and in wrath remember mercy. If then, you have a desire for a desire, if you have longings to have stronger longings, a little thirst to have stronger thirst-

ings, he will grant it; and if you have a prayer, though it be but a whisper out of the dust, and you can hardly tell whether there is any reality in it or not, that he will give you a spirit of prayer, he will answer it, but as Newton says, not in the way that you may expect. Now let us hear the Lord's account. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness." Some of you that have known the Lord many years, oh, how much wilderness work have you had; what fiery flying serpents, what scorpions, what drought, and what difficulties have you met with! Your soul itself has seemed like a wilderness, and you have been like the voice of one crying in the wilderness; and you think, Can the Lord hear prayer from such a wilderness soul as mine is? Ah, well might the soul long for the north wind to awake and the south wind to blow; well might it long for the streams of Lebanon—that the Lord would fulfil his promise, and make the soul as a watered garden. I have led thee in the wilderness—what for? "To humble thee." Ah, my hearer, I should not be here this morning speaking these blessed truths if I had not undergone this humbling work, nor you to hear them. The free grace truths of the gospel are offensive to us all until the neck of our pride is broken. "I knew," the Lord saith, "that thy brow was brass, and thy neck as an iron sinew." And how hath the Lord humbled us? I know this is one part of my experience. If the gospel was great in my estimation years ago, it is greater now; if God in covenant was glorious in my eyes years ago, he is much more so now. And how is this? Because my experiences humble me; I feel and see from time to time what a poor creature I am. "To humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart." What a mercy that the Lord does in so great a measure keep that to ourselves and to himself,— "to know what was in thine heart." Were I to attempt to describe it, I should fall immeasurably short of what the heart is; but the object of these experiences is that we may know what is in our heart, and thus be humbled in the dust before God. "Whether thou wouldst keep his commandments "or no." His commandments to such are not grievous, but exceedingly pleasant; they are the commandments of faith and love. The commandment is to believe in Jesus Christ; and we pray in sweet accordance with this commandment, "Lord, increase our faith." And if the Lord come to thee and say, Soul, art thou willing to keep my commandment? I command thee to believe in the Lord thy God, to believe in my dear Son, in my truth, in the promises of my word; art thou willing? Oh yes, Lord; there is not a thing thou canst mention that I am more willing to do than I am to continue in the faith, to hear the voice of the good Shepherd, and follow the exalted Lamb wherever I see him go. His commandment also is love; thou shalt love the Lord, and love the brethren. Soul, art thou willing? Oh, Lord, thou knowest that my grief and trouble is that I love thee so little, thy cause and the habitation of thy house so little, that I love the brethren so little, the truth so little, thy service so little. Instead of being like the chariots of Amminadib, I am a great part of my time more like the chariots of Pharaoh than the chariots of Amminadib. I drag heavily, as though the wheels were taken off, and the Lord meant to destroy me. Ah, but he will not, "whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or no." There is not one real Christian here this morning that can look into his soul and say, I would go away from this faith and love of God and of the brethren if I could. You know you have no such feeling; that it is quite the reverse. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." And yet how many thousands among the Israelites would not keep those commandments, but turned aside from them, set up their golden calf, and made captains to go back again to Egypt. And what have I seen in my day? I have seen ministers and professors go away from these yea and amen, self-acting

commandments, over to the uncertainties of the gospel of men, under the hypocritical pretension of preaching the gospel to every creature; whereas the gospel over to which they are gone is no gospel at all. "Ye are moved to another gospel," saith the apostle, "which is not another; for if an angel from heaven bring any other gospel, let him be accursed." But there were some that did keep the commandments of faith and love. Well, say you, but Moses never preached faith. Oh yes, he did; he preached not only the old covenant, but the new; he preached Jesus Christ: the Saviour says of Moses, "He wrote of me." Did not Moses tell the people that their God was a rock, that his work was perfect, that he was a God of judgment, and that all his ways were truth, that he was without iniquity, though the people imputed sin, or a tendency to sin, to his truth. Moses, to counteract that says, "He is without iniquity; just and right is he." There were some that did thus continue in the commandments, and Moses saith, "Ye are alive every one of you unto this day." Bless the Lord, first, that there is such a faith to continue in, and, secondly, for the hope we have he has brought us into that faith; that there is such a love to be brought into, for it is the love of God; and therefore, like himself, immutable and infallible; and that we have a hope we are brought into that love; for "he that dwelleth in God dwelleth in love;" that is, if he is placed there by the faith of Christ, he is placed in a position where everything in God is endearing, until we are perfect in love. "And he humbled thee." Ah, if Jesus were to come to me this morning and say, Well, soul, have I broken your neck? Yes, Lord. Have I humbled thee and brought thee to nothing? Yes, Lord. Dost thou know now that thou art altogether as an unclean thing, and that all thy righteousnesses are as filthy rags? Yes, Lord. Dost thou know that thou fadest as a leaf, and that thine iniquities, like the wind, have carried thee away? You once, in your Pharisaism, pretended to carry your iniquities away; but instead of your carrying them away, they carried you away; but they could not carry me away; I have carried them away. Canst thou confess this? Yes, Lord. Ah, like the woman in the gospel, "It is not meet to give the children's bread to dogs." Truth, Lord, call me a dog if thou wilt, for it will be a name none too bad for what I am; but I will not leave thee, and if thou dost turn me away, it will be the first poor creature thou ever didst turn away; I will still cleave to thee. The dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Her faith seemed little, but in the Lord's eyes it was great. "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." So "he humbled thee," and you wondered how you were to be fed and supplied; but "he fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not." The disciples did not know how such multitudes could be fed, but Jesus knew what he would do. "He fed thee with manna," the manna meaning Christ Jesus, "which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers," after the flesh, "know," which no man knows after the flesh. You may take a twofold view of this manna, spiritually and providentially. He has supplied you up to the present day; and if you have come a little short sometimes, he didn't let it kill you. "He fed thee with manna"—what for? Why to teach thee that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of the Lord." There are some that have plenty, and they somehow or other hardly ever have any appetite; they can't eat; they hardly eat enough to keep a sparrow alive. How is this? Why, the Lord so orders it that you may know there is another way of living as well as a bodily way—that there is a spiritual way of living; that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of the Lord." And if the Lord gives you a sweet promise that feeds you spiritually, and makes you strong in faith and love and assurance, then you will find out the secret that the Lord hath, as it were, two hands, a providential hand and a spiritual hand; and when he supplies us from

his right hand with blessings, and strengthens us with might in the inner man, it enables us to look at all other matters in a very secondary light. Hence the apostle when he was, as we suppose, in the Mamertine prison at Rome, said, "We are exceeding joyful in all our tribulations." How was that? Because he lived not by bread alone. Ah, if you place all your comfort in eating and drinking, and fine clothes, and fine houses, and worldly appearances, and worldly advantages, you may depend upon it you are placing your hope in broken cisterns. You sit in the chapel and say—

"Cisterns are broken, and creatures all fail."

Yes, but you don't like the experience of it though; none of us do; I would not be so dishonest as to say I do:—

"But the word he hath spoken shall surely prevail."

Therefore he knows how to dry up the nether springs, or to make them yield very little, in order to increase our thirst for the upper springs. Why, saith the enemy, I would not bear this,—the Son of God to be left to starve like this for forty days; for six weeks you have had nothing to eat or drink, and you one of the elect,—you the Son of God. I would not stand this. Set to at once and provide for yourself; command these stones that they be made bread. No, saith the Saviour, "it is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of the Lord." Ah, the heavenly meat sustained him. Said Jesus to the disciples, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." What, has any man brought him aught to eat? Why, he saith, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Come then, look back at the way in which the Lord has led you; how he has brought you to himself, and how he has humbled you, proved you, and suffered you to hunger, but not in vain; for blessed are they that hunger and thirst for the bread of eternal life, for they shall be filled; and he hath sustained you and kept you to this day; here we are this morning monuments of his mercy, and we can look back and sing with the poet,—

"His love in times past forbids me to think  
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink."

I now come, secondly, to *the present*. As the Lord has brought us to himself, humbled us, tried us, and proved us, and brought to light in our souls the fact that we are willing still, let the consequences after the flesh or in the world be what they may, let us now look at the present. The enemy is ever eager to get us to sleep if possible, he is ever eager to deaden us to everything that belongs to us spiritually. Oh, how much I experience of this! I like the words of the poet,—

"More the treacherous calm I dread,  
Than tempests bursting o'er my head."

What is to be done with the present, then? That depends upon how circumstances are. Some are in one state, and some are in another. In the 10th of Numbers we have an account of two silver trumpets, pointing, I suppose, first to the Old and New Testament, and secondly, to the Old and New Testament witnesses, called the two olive trees, the two witnesses, and the two candlesticks. I will name four circumstances under which those trumpets were to be sounded, and I think that will find us out in a measure. First, they were to be sounded for the assembling of the people, and when they were to be sounded for that purpose, they were not to sound an alarm. The tones then were to be sympathetic and pleasing—nothing alarming, but in every way inviting; as though the people should hear the trumpet saying, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come

ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price;—eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness;—and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” Perhaps this is just the position of some of you at present. Your language is, “Draw me, and we will run after thee.” You want to feel more attraction to the gospel; you want to be drawn more by the Saviour; you want more of that described in Hosea, where the Lord saith, “I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love,” ultimately pointing to Christ; “and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.” Now some of you do not need to be alarmed,—I mean you do not need rebuke or reproof; you need attraction, you need something soothing, you need the sweet, inviting tones of the gospel; you need to hear the Lord saying, “Come, let us reason together.” Ah, but my sins, Lord. Well, then, if they be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Ah, but still my sins, Lord. Well, if they are red as crimson they shall be as wool. Come, let us reason together; if ye be willing and obedient:—yes, Lord, I am willing and obedient, and do bless thee for such sweet invitations. So that there was no alarm to be sounded when the people were to be gathered together. I do trust this is just the state some of you are in this morning, just where you are at present;—you want the Lord to send out his light and his truth into your soul, and to draw you to himself, that you may go up into his blest embraces, and feel that love has taken you up, that his sovereign choice has taken you up, that mediation has taken you up, that the Spirit of God has taken you up; that the truth has taken you up; and you want what John had in the Isle of Patmos when he saith, “Behold, a door was opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard was as the voice of a trumpet talking with me, saying, Come up hither; and immediately I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” This, I dare to say, is just where some of you are at present. And if my poor little sermon should not attract you at all this morning, why then it will be very unpleasant. You will go away and say, Well, I did hope there would be something to draw out my feelings, thoughts, and affections, but I am going away as dead, and empty, and powerless, and wretched, as I was when I came. Well, do not run away on that account, because our times are in the Lord’s hands, and we cannot alter those times. He appointed the times in the Old Testament age when the feasts were to be, and so he hath spiritually appointed our times. The Bridegroom shall be taken away from you, not as to relation or interest, but as to fellowship, and then ye shall fast. And remember that it is written, “Blessed are they that mourn.” Therefore, be not discouraged or swallowed up of over much fear, lest Satan gain an advantage, and persuade you to stay away from the means which the Lord has blessed and will still bless.

Then, secondly, when the camps were to move they were to sound an alarm. And so it is now sometimes. Ministers must be a little sharp, a little severe, to move the people forward; and if, in sounding an alarm and moving the people forward in the cause of God, in prayer, in the work of God, the minister should give a little offence, he must not be moved for this;—no, he must still sound the alarm. “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.” “What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, and call upon thy God.” “Why criest thou unto me? Speak to the people, that they go forward!” And the rod was over the sea, the sea parted hither and thither, and the people went forward. As to running away,—well, if you do when the alarm is sounded, you will not be the first;—I will speak as comfortably as I can. Now Elisha knew he could have pleased Naaman, and have got a great deal by it. If I tell Naaman what the Lord has told me, how he is to be cleansed, he will be very highly offended; but if I practise a little Puseyite mummery, stretch

out my hands a little, and dance about a bit, he will go away and think he is healed; but it will not be long before he finds out he is still a leper. He will go away saying, Why, that Elisha is such a gentlemanly man, so courteous and kind, it is worth going any distance to see him; I would give him any amount of money whatever. Well, but your leprosy is not healed, is it? Dear me, no more it is. He would find it out afterwards. Now Elisha simply told him to go and wash in Jordan seven times. Away went Naaman in a rage. What a pity you offended the gentleman! Never mind; leave it to the Lord. So by and by Naaman comes round, goes to Jordan, is baptized seven times;—some of you won't be baptized once, he was baptized seven times;—came out of Jordan without his leprosy. Ah, that rough prophet is right after all;—he was very offensive to me, but I am glad I listened to him now. And one of old, when he was awakened up a little alarmed, and told, "Go and work in my vineyard," replied, "I will not;" I will leave the place first. Very well,—can't help it. But afterwards the better nature got the mastery, and he repented and went. Now these are good examples for us to follow;—I do not mean the rebellion, but the other part. But if we partake of the rebellious part, if we come to our right minds, we shall give in at last. You know Jonah did not like what he was commanded to do; so off he started, paid his fare;—how a parson got money enough to pay for his voyage I do not know, but he was such a character that nobody would trust him.—Oh, that high doctrine man, we are not going to take him in the ship; they are a bad lot. He got the money somehow or another to pay his fare; whether he borrowed it or what, I don't know. Poor Jonah ran away, and you know what he got into, and how he was delivered, and what he was obliged to do at last, how he was obliged to accomplish his mission. And the poor disciples also forsook the Saviour and fled, but were they happy? No, anything but that. Oh, they mourned over what they had done, they were very unhappy. Whatever will he say to us if we are not deceived, and he should rise from the dead? What will he say? Why, he will say something in entire accordance with what he has said before, namely, that the flesh is weak, but the spirit is willing. Do you think he will come and twit you with your faults? Do you think he will come to you, he who is meek and lowly in heart, and understands both your weakness and the forces of your foes,—think you he will come to you and twit you with your faults? No; he will come to you and breathe peace into your souls: "Peace be unto you;" and he will be with you forty days, showing the same love, the same patience, the same grace, the same kindness, that he ever did, and you shall see him ascend on high, and realise the sweet assurance that that same Jesus shall fulfil his blessed word, come and receive you unto himself, that where he is there you shall be also. Now you should never say anything nor do anything, any of you, that love a minister, that would in any way gag or fetter him. Always let a minister have his rightful latitude, and let him say just what he likes. Let him bring out his treasures, and if there are some toys among those treasures, that is, he thinks them treasures, then use your better judgment, lay the toys aside, and take the treasures. But never let the minister be crippled, because if he preach with some degree of fear lest he should offend Mr. A., or Mr. B., or Mr. C., he will then become a hypocrite, he will become a man pleaser; he will study, not God's truth and your souls, but that which will please you and tickle your ears. No; let him go right on, rough and ready; let him go straight on with God's blessed truth. If we have sometimes a little something unwelcome, let us give it a second thought, and ask, Who is in the wrong,—I that am half offended, or the man that is advocating, with all his might and main and power, the glorious cause of God, that surpasses in value and worth every other interest as much as the great Creator surpasses the creature?

There are many senses in which we have to war, which I must not touch upon now. And then the fourth circumstance under which they were to sound the trumpets was on the day of glad and solemn feasts, the beginning of the months. That was the day of gladness, and the day of burnt offerings, and the day of peace offerings. Ah, if you should go away and say, There was a time when our minister sounded out the excellency of the great burnt offering, and the peace offering; there was a time when he stood as a kind of memorial of the Lord our God; but now, alas, alas! the days of gladness, the days of solemn feasts, the days of heavenly peace, are gone, the days of rejoicing are gone,—may this never be your lamentation! God grant that the silver trumpets of eternal truth may never cease while I live, or when I am gone, to sound out the burnt offering, the peace offering; for thereby our God is unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; thereby our God is unto us good, and his mercy endureth for ever. That is the present, then. Some of you need drawing, some need alarming, both for going forward and for war; and some of you need much more acquaintance with the substitutional work of Christ and with Christ as the peace offering. I have not found you out so minutely as I might have done;—one may be in a dungeon, another in a pit;—some in one condition, some in another, and get out you cannot; you must remain until the Lord shall come and bring you out of prison.

But a word upon *the future*. “I will yet praise thee.” First, the certainty of this. You that are thus brought to the Lord, and are willing to keep the commandments to which I have referred, there is no uncertainty about the increase of your love to God, there is no uncertainty about your increase of praise to God. “I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God.” Just look at the certainty. “I will make a covenant with the house of Judah,” the praisers of the Lord, “and with the house of Israel,” meaning those that have power with God and man, and must prevail; we have power with God by faith in Christ; and the Lord saith concerning such, “I will forgive their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” Now, saith the Lord, “If the ordinances of heaven and earth depart, then shall Israel cease to be a nation.” “Thus saith the Lord, If heaven above can be measured,” and you know that is infinite, “and the foundations of the earth” infinite too,—“can be searched out, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done.” Here is the certainty. Let you lose what you may, or let what may fail, God shall not fail, your faith shall not fatally fail, and you will go on to praise him yet more and more. And as to the causes of your future praise, whilst your necessities, your infirmities, and faults will abound, for you will be a poor, sinful creature all your days, his goodness will abound. Well, say you, but suppose death shall come. Very well,—to die is gain, and I shall praise him more and more. But suppose the resurrection shall come. Very well,—then I shall rise to immortality, and shall praise him more and more. But suppose judgment shall come. Very well,—then he will present us before the presence of his glory faultless with exceeding joy, and I will praise him more and more. But suppose the gates lift up their heads and the doors of eternity are thrown open, and you enter into eternity, then it is an eternity of joy and pleasure for evermore. “I will yet praise thee more and more;”—meaning also that he had confidence that he should yet more and more be devoted to the service of the Lord; and with that one thought I close. Now, as far as my own feelings are concerned, I hope that my last days will be my best days. I do love and fear the Lord, and respect the Lord. God is my witness, that I am entirely at home with him and in his service; and I do and can say it is the most sincere of all the desires of my soul to serve the Lord with increasing understanding, increasing love, increasing devotion.