

ARREST OF JUDGMENT

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, May 16th, 1869

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the New Surrey Tabernacle, Wansley Street

Volume 11 Number 549

“And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry in the mist of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.” Joshua 3:17

THERE are in this circumstance two questions that seem to impress themselves upon one's mind at the very beginning. The first is, What has not God done for man? What a way of escape from the wrath to come has he provided; what a ransom has he found; what a Savior has he sent into the world; and how well are his servants employed from time to time in setting before man the way of escape from the wrath to come, the living, holy, righteous, and sure way! and it is by the simple presentation of these truths that the Lord is pleased to save them that believe. And how well are the people of God from time to time employed in seeking the Lord in and by that way which he has revealed. The second question that would seem at the very outset to press itself upon one's mind is, What will not the Lord do for the true Israelites? If he did so much by the Abrahamic covenant for the literal descendants of Abraham, how much more will he do by the new covenant for the spiritual descendants of Abraham, the Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile? What will not the Lord do? We cannot be too large in our expectations; we cannot expect too much. Perhaps from this world it is best to expect as little as possible; and then, if we should have a little more than we expect, we shall not be disappointed. But not so with our God. We are to expect from him great things, because of his great love, his great salvation, and his great promises, and his great ability; for he is able to make all grace abound towards you.

Now that the circumstances of our text have a spiritual meaning, I think there will not be much difficulty in realizing. You will observe here that the river Jordan was not only divided, but that it was arrested. The river kept rolling on and rolling on, but it was arrested, it was stopped, and the waters kept accumulating on the right hand of the priests, and on the right hand of the people, until all were passed over. And the word *Jordan* signifies “the river of judgment,” and as this river was thus arrested, the first doctrine we have in the text is that of *the arrest of judgment*. The second Christian doctrine that we have in it is *the firmness of the Savior*, not excluding, but including in their position his people; the priests stood firm on dry ground. The third doctrine we have is *the order of progression*; they “bare the ark of the covenant.” And fourthly, *the final escape of every one of the people of Israel*; “all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were

passed clean over Jordan.” I do not suppose, the few moments we are together this morning, I shall do more than go through the first of these teachings, that of the arrest of judgment.

First, the arrest of judgment. And before I enter into a definition, you will, I am sure, at once recognize this simple truth, that none but a divine power could arrest Jordan, and stop that river in the way in which it was stopped; that none but divine power could have kept those accumulating waters in that position until Israel had passed over. This, I think, is a self-evident truth that it was entirely the work of God; that man simply had to realize the advantage of it, but that the Lord did all that was essential to their welfare. Now this proposition is as solemn and great a one as I could come before you with, namely, the arrest of judgment. It is true this arrest of judgment would not concern us much were it not for the fact that all of us are by nature under judgment. And you know, in the common law of England, arrest of judgment means the staying of judgment after the verdict is given against the guilty; then in comes a power that stays the execution, that stays the judgment. Now the verdict by the great God himself, by all his apostles and prophets, has been given and brought in against the whole human race; all, therefore, are under judgment; and the Lord will make those he intends to save feel they are under judgment; he will bring a consciousness of that judgment into their souls; and it shall take hold of them, and make them very unhappy. They shall feel, Well, here are my sins, and here is the judgment due to my sins; here is life uncertain, here is death just at hand, and eternity before me; what shall I do? Let us, then, take a fourfold representation, first of the arrest of judgment, carrying with us the thought that as none but the Lord could thus stay the river Jordan, so none but the Lord could stay the judgment against us. Now the apostle says, “As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation;” why, my hearer, a man being condemned to a penal colony for life is a mere jest, a mere trifle, in comparison of the condemnation of our souls under sin. A man condemned to be put to death in whatever ignominious way, I make no hesitation in saying is a mere shadow in comparison of the condemnation that all of us by nature are under. Ah, think of the immortality of the soul; think of eternity, think of the unchangeability of God’s law; think of the fact that it is the wrath of Almighty God; think that the breath of the Lord shall kindle it as a stream of brimstone. Oh, this is what the Savior calls it, and if he called it by that name, I am sure we may conclude it was so; he calls it “a weighty matter” Hence he accused the Jews of passing over “the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.” See how this is met, “even so, by the righteousness of one the free gift” ah, those sweet words, “the free gift,” “came upon all men unto justification of life.” That, of course, will mean all believing men, for “without faith it is impossible to please God;” and the apostle said at the beginning of the 5th of Roman’s we are justified by faith. “Even so by the righteousness of one the free gift.” Ah, my hearer, has our experience taught us that if we have eternal life, it must be a free gift; that if we have release from this judgment or condemnation, if we are delivered from it, it must be by the free gift of God? Jesus Christ was a free gift and so, the Lord brings his people to feel that it is a free gift. Let me linger here a moment, because our life is in the words, our eternal welfare is in the words; and if we receive them wrongly, we do not receive the blessing, but if we receive them rightly we do receive the blessing: “by the righteousness of one;” that is, by Jesus Christ; honor to his dear name, he met all the conditionality, he met all preceptive demands, he met all the penalties; he left nothing standing upon human condition; he himself has made everything yea and amen. “Even so by the righteousness of one;” not by the righteousness of two. And I make no hesitation in saying that if the creature were capable of a little righteousness, doing a little righteousness, that is, in a saving way; the Christian does righteousness in an evidential way, as the result of being saved, but not in a saving way, to help to save him: if

the Christian could do this, or if such a thing were demanded, I am sure the Lord would have stated it. But no, it is “the righteousness of one,” the mediatorial work of one. Christ met the judgment, met the condemnation; and, “by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life;” that is, justified by faith in receiving him as having met and arrested this judgment; and, instead of having judgment, condemnation, and eternal death before us, we have justification, we have life, and everything indeed, God on our side in a peace unto us that passes all understanding. “The free gift came upon all men,” that is, all that believe, according to the testimony of holy Scripture. “Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man,” that stood mystically where the priests in Jordan stood; they stood under the accumulating waters, those accumulating waters being on the right hand; they stood in all the danger till Israel was passed clean over; so Jesus Christ met this judgment, and therefore, “be it known unto you that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” And how does this forgiveness come, how am I to get at it? because the forgiveness of sins is also a blessing that includes every other blessing; how am I to get at it? Well, the apostle does not leave us in the dark; “that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and that by him all that believe are justified” in all things? No, for then they could not be justified in anything, not apart from God’s grace; but they “are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Here then is one sample of the arrest of judgment. Ah, my hearer, if you have confidence in what Christ has done, if you have not yet in your soul realized forgiveness of sins, go on waiting upon God till you do. If your peace be not yet like a river, and if your righteousness be not yet rolled in, blessing after blessing, so as to overwhelm you with the glory of God, then go on waiting upon God, believing in Christ, till you do realize it; for the Savior says, “He that follows me,” believes in me, and thus follows after me, “shall not abide in darkness.” You may be in darkness, but by and by, for the vision is for an appointed time, you will see all you wish to see, know all you wish to know, realize all you wish to realize, possess all you wish to possess, and be as happy as you could wish to be, for the last as well as the first tear shall be wiped away by the most high God from the eyes of everyone that is thus brought to see his need of this wonderful Person to arrest judgment in your behalf, stay execution, bring in royal and eternal favor, and make you happy for ever. But we will follow the apostle on; “As by one man’s disobedience” ah, what a word that is! that word “disobedience” describes just what we are by nature, for the carnal mind is enmity against God; and whether the mind be a learned or an unlearned mind, savage, or civilized, a great mind or a little mind, coarse or refined; let the mind be what it may, if there is not grace in the heart it is a carnal mind. There may be great decrees of difference as to the persons that we respect and admire; but still, with all the good qualities there may be about them, where grace is not, there is the carnal mind. “As by one man’s disobedience so it was that Satan carnalized the minds of Adam and Eve, and took them away from God; and so, our minds are disobedient, carnal, and enmity against God. “And by one man’s disobedience many were made,” the worst thing that they could be made; what were they made? Why, “sinners”, that is the worst thing a man can be. If the devil had made us lame, or blind, afflicted our bodies, or turned us all into maniacs, that would have been a trifle in comparison of the mischief he has done. He has made us sinners, made us enemies to our God, made us deadly enemies to ourselves; and has carried on his deceptions to such a dreadful extent that in olden times thousands that called God their Father, when the Savior came to put them to the test of God’s truth, they proved to be not of God, but of the wicked one, and they were liars against God and murderers of the Son of God. “So, by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” How? Here comes in precious faith again; “unto you that believe;” justified from all things, justified by faith. Oh, my hearer, if we rightly recognize this truth, we shall not be so

slavishly afraid of God. The Lord bring you to feel what you are as a sinner, and to see you cannot be a worse thing than a sinner; I defy an archangel to point out anything better that you can be than a saint, or, the same thing, righteous. See the contrast between the two; what you are by the fall of Adam, as a sinner, and what you are by faith in the everlasting righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a righteous person.

Then we will go a little further. 'When we sum up and settle our sinner-ship apart from divine teaching, we generally do it pretty easily, and we say, Well, some of my neighbors are worse than I am; and if I do not go to heaven, what will become of them? And we reckon up our good qualities, and we reckon up some at least of our bad ones; and we put the good ones into one scale and the bad ones into the other, in our way, and we are sure to make it weigh in our favor. Hence some of us that are called upon sometimes to visit in a dying hour those that know not the Lord, what do the poor things say? And we cannot open their eyes; we can speak the truth to them, but God alone can open their eyes either in a dying or a living hour. What do the poor things say? Ah, I have sometimes felt as though I could weep tears of blood over them. I think to myself, Here is an immortal soul just going into the presence of the great Judge of all, and it is as blind and dark as night itself. What do they say? Well, I have never done any particular wrong to anyone, and those that have wronged me I forgive, and so I think in that hope I may die. Ah, look at the cruelty of Satan! See then, when we sum up the matter by ourselves apart from God, how we deceive ourselves. But hear the apostle's words; God help us to understand them and ask ourselves the question whether we know anything of them in our own experience; I do not mean to the same degree that the apostle himself knew, but we must know enough of it to make way for the coming in of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound." And when the law entered into Saul's conscience, and into his heart and soul, Saul, what have you got here? Got? why, a good heart. Well, says the law, I cannot find it then. A great many good resolutions: I cannot find them. A great deal of holiness; I cannot find it. A great deal of righteousness; I cannot find it. What have you got here, Saul? Well, surely something good. No, the law said, I can find nothing but all manner of concupiscence; every imaginable, every unnamable, as well as every nameable evil you have in your heart. Why, a viler wretch does not exist out of hell than you are; and ere long, Saul, you will sum it up in this way, "O wretched man that I am." Now sin abounds, and overflows all the banks of his holiness, self-righteousness, creature confidence, creature goodness. "Sin revived, and I died." Ah now, what in to be done? I had no idea I was such a sinner; I had no idea I was such a wretch; I had no idea of this grief, this sore, this plague in my heart. And I feel persuaded that if professors at large knew a little more of this downward experience, they would not be content with such flimsy, yea and nay, miserable, superficial, artificial gospels as they are contented with. It is not the whole but the sick that needs the physician. And when the law thus enters man's heart, and brings to light what he is, why, he says, All I can say is, in the language of God's holy word, that there is no part sound; the whole head is sick, the whole heart faint, I am full of wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores; here I am, a wretch undone. Now what is to be done? "Where sin abounded," the creature became so diligent, he was determined to counteract it, to be better for the future, to atone for some of it, and mend matters as well as he could? Why, say you, not a syllable about it; certainly not. Not an Israelite lifted a finger, a hand, or anything else, to push the Jordan back; it was done before the Israelite got there. So, Jesus Christ has done it before we came to him; and now, where sin is found to abound, Christ comes in, and by him grace does much more abound; that is, grace shall surpass your depravity, your infidelity, your atheism, your impenitence, your sin; grace shall surpass the whole, as much as the person of

Christ surpasses the person of the creature. Ah, my hearer, it is the grace of Emmanuel; “grace did much more abound.” When that grace comes in with all its glorious train, and fills the soul with the love of God; if that hymn happens to be given out, I am sure you will join with it in your very soul,

“Oh. to grace how great a debtor
Daily I’m constrained to be;
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to thee.”

The arrest of judgment; oh, what a great and wonderful work it is; what a wonderful Savior; and what a wonderful secret to know on the one hand the judgment we are under, and on the other what we need for the arresting of that judgment.

But again, for there is something here that is almost endless; the Scriptures are so full of this subject, the arresting of judgment on behalf of poor sinners, on behalf of those that are made sensible of their need of such an interposer; “that as sin has reigned unto death, there is judgment again, only unto death. That little time only? That’s all, only unto death. What a short reign! “Even so might grace reign through righteousness;” you may, for the sake of getting a thought, substitute the word “right” for the word “righteousness;” “Even so might grace reign through right;” that is, grace by the sovereign pleasure of God has a right to reign; grace by the mediatorial work of Christ has a right to reign; grace by the promise of God has a right to reign; and you cannot invalidate the right of grace to reign; Before sin can invalidate the right of grace to reign, it must invalidate the right of Christ to reign; and can his right to reign be invalidated? My hearer, his is a salvation reign, his is a reign that breaks in pieces the oppressor, that redeems poor sinners from deceit and violence, and precious is their blood in his sight. He has saved the lives of millions, but never destroyed the life of one. The gospel does not come to destroy men’s lives; sin has done that, and sin is doing it, and sin will do it. Christ came to save men's lives. “Even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life.” So then, if we are asked, which we are asked. How shall you do in the swellings of Jordan? Why, receive Jesus Christ; abide by the Great High Priest of my profession, that has rolled the Jordan back; he shall stand between me and danger, and under the shadow of his wings I shall pass over the Jordan of death, pass over safe, and triumphant too.

Perhaps I had better just quote a scripture now from the 94th Psalm; my mind is full of scriptures; bless the Lord for such a subject; and then we will come back to this point of arresting judgment. David approaches this matter of arresting judgment very beautifully; as though he should say, those of you that read this 94th Psalm, understand the solemn importance of an interest in this arresting of judgment. He therefore approaches this subject in a very careful and beautiful way. He sees the blessedness of the subject itself; judgment being arrested; he sees the blessedness of being made acquainted with it; he sees the blessedness of an interest in it, therefore he says, “Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O Lord, and teach him out of your law; that you may give him rest;” just notice that: “that you may give him rest.” Ah, then, it is a kind of teaching that makes him weary. What is that divine teaching that makes a man weary? I will tell you what it is; because to give him rest implies that the man is weary. “Pay what you owe.” The poor sinner goes to work and works hard. “Prepare to meet your God.” The poor sinner goes to work with prayers, and alms, and reformations, and resolutions. Now, are you prepared? Not yet, sir, not yet. “He that

offends in one point is guilty of the whole.” Then it is no use for me to try any more. Oh, I don’t know, though, I will have another try too. “By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified in his sight.” Not in his sight, but you will in the sight of men; and they will applaud you. Dear, they will say our friend so and so, what a nice, pious man he is, always at his duties, always at his doings, always in his place. Poor fellow, he has not reached his place yet. By and by he gets weary of all this. Ah, he says, my doings are no use; halfway gospels are no use; they tell me to come to God, and take the promise, and do this, that, and the other; they might just as well tell me to create a new world. I am worn out and weary; I will not try anymore; I am a lost man; I can see no hope for such a wretch as I am. But presently the Lord gives him rest. “Come unto me, you that are weary;” trying to make yourselves holy, and righteous, and fit for heaven. Are you not worn out? Yes, Lord, I am. Well, then, come to me, and I will be your holiness, I will be your righteousness and sanctification; I will be your life and your light.

“Lo, glad I come, and you, blest Lamb,
take me to you as I am;
Nothing but sin I you can give,
Nothing but love shall I receive.”

Now the soul begins to believe, and begins to be released, takes the Savior's yoke, which is a yoke of faith, finds the yoke easy; and thus, we that believe do enter into rest. Oh, to rest in what he has done, and to rest in the sure promises of our God! My hearer, ten thousand things may assail you, and seem to threaten the non-fulfilment of the promise in your case; but as sure as you have a grain of faith in Christ, and are thus taught, and know your need of him, so sure shall the promise be fulfilled in you, he shall give you rest. “Until the pit be dug for the wicked.” Ah, blessed God, have you thus made me weary? Have you caused your chastening hand to rest upon me? Have I been thus tried, in order that my soul may not be gathered with sinners, but with saints, that I may not be numbered with the wicked, but with the righteous? Ah then, Lord, however heavy your rod, however mysterious your dealings, do, Lord, go on; and whatever chastening is needful, I care not what it is, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. See how the Psalmist approaches the subject: “For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.” Well but, David, how is all this, why is it thus? “Judgment shall return unto righteousness; and all the upright in heart shall follow it.” Let me give an illustration which bears some analogy, not of course entire analogy, but will help us out with this point of judgment returning unto righteousness. There is the judgment that the Jews on such a day are to be destroyed; the judgment is on its way, the poor Jews are trembling and fearing, seeing no hope. By and by comes the exaltation of Mordecai. Now, says Mordecai to the judgment, Stop, stop, come to me; let us see what I can do with you. So, the judgment had to come back to Mordecai, and when it came to Mordecai, he altered it altogether. Oh, he says, it is Haman that is to be hanged, not Mordecai; it is the enemy that is to be slain, not the Jews. So, the Jews had light and gladness; judgment returned unto righteousness. Mordecai had his rights, and the Jews had their rights. Now of course the infinite difference between this and the judgment of God is that this judgment of Haman against the Jews was unrighteous, but the judgment of God is righteous; still I thought the illustration might help us out a little here. “Judgment shall return unto righteousness;” the Lord Jesus Christ brings in his wonderful work and changes the scene altogether. “And all the upright in heart shall follow it,” shall follow this arrest of judgment. Ah, my hearer, the verdict is given against us; the Judge of all has passed the sentence that all are under condemnation; but that is not

all the Judge of heaven has done; here is a Savior, here is an arrest of judgment, here is a way of escape on the one hand, and on the other a way of possessing all I can need for the life that now is, and that also which is to come. But there, what shall I say? It is an endless subject.

If I go again, to the 3rd chapter of the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, you have the same subject; there is the ministration of death met by the ministration of life. Death swallowed up the life we had in the first Adam, but death cannot swallow up the life we have in the Last Adam, for the life we have in the Last Adam swallows up the death we have in the first Adam. There is the ministration of condemnation, in the terrible majesty of God, met by the ministration of Christ's righteousness. There is the ceremonial law, which was to pass away, met by that salvation that shall never be abolished, that righteousness that is forever. There is the ceremonial law in its inferiority met, and as it were, something else infinitely superior to it in one sense put into its place; therefore, that ceremonial law had no glory, by reason of the glory which excels. So that by this arrest of judgment, "we all, with open face," no occasion to come as though you were guilty, and had no business in the Lord's house, and I don't know what all; no, "when you pray, say, Our Father." Why if any man had written such a book as Solomon's Song, "if that book had never been written by divine inspiration, and any man had written such a book as that, he would have been reviled and reproached to the last degree; and yet it would have been scriptural. But I bless God that such a book is written by divine inspiration. Look at the familiarity there; Christ with the people, and the people with Christ; look at the interchange of gratulation, admiration, satisfaction, and love all founded on this glorious subject. "We all, with open face;" we can look the Lord in the face on two grounds; first, on the ground of what he has done, and secondly, on the ground of a conscious, unfeigned belief in him, and a conscious, unfeigned love to him! Ah, we do love him in sincerity. Some of us, that have known him so many years, do we love him less? Our feelings, it is true, are like the barometer; they rise and fall; but our sentiments are always the same; and I am sure the longer we live, and the more we know of him, the more we shall love and adore him. "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord," and what glory would you wish to find that can surpass this I am setting forth this morning? "are changed into the same image." You must forgive my plainness, and even my great simplicity; you must not think I am insulting your understanding when I say that the image there of course does not mean a literal image at all; "changed into the same image" does not mean a literal image at all. You may substitute another word, and that will give you the meaning; mind, not finding fault, no, it would be blasphemy to do so, with the imagery the Holy and Eternal Spirit has used for our instruction; but we may sometimes substitute another word for the sake of explanation; and so here we may substitute another word for the sake of explanation: "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same mind;" there it is; it means the image of mind, the order of mind; the mind is brought into the same order. Has he loved you with an everlasting love? You feel a oneness of mind with him in that. And has he chosen you? which I shall not reach this morning, nor many other things I meant to touch upon. Very well, your mind falls in with that. And so, the Savior dying for you, your mind falls in with that. And so, a covenant ordered in all things and sure, and God forming himself into a covenant God. for he said, "Before me there was no God formed." Now God abstractedly never was formed, he is self-existent: but covenantly he was formed, he came into a covenant form; and there was no God came into a covenant form before him, though a great many did afterwards, Baal, and Ashtaroth, and Dagon, and all the trumpety heathen gods came into a covenant form with the people, and pretended to a great deal, as the Pope and his minions do; but you know what it all was and is. "Before me there was no God formed." The Lord

came into covenant form, and that covenant form is demonstrated and opened up by the Savior. Changed into the same mind, from one degree of assimilation of mind to another. Oh, it is a nice thing to be one with God's mind. I could give you a great many illustrations of this and will just give you one or two in conclusion, of coming into oneness of mind with him. We will suppose that Noah had been a very benevolent man, that was good; a very loving man, that was good; and an excellent character, and everybody admired him, that was good; but by and by it comes out, that is, supposing such a thing, that with all his excellency he is not of one mind with the Lord in building the ark; that there he failed; supposing that, why, the world would say, Not Noah be saved? not Noah escape the flood? why, they would rake up whole wagon-loads of good works, and bring them, and throw them into the scale to make it weigh, so that he should be saved. And yet with all his excellences, if he had not that one of sameness of mind with the blessed God, he could not be saved. No, Lord, it is very well to escape, but then an ark with only one door, and only one window, and that window a skylight! That would not be at all respectable. Dear me, only one light, and that a skylight! What will people say? Ah my hearer, the gospel is a skylight; it is only one light, and it comes down from above. It is a skylight; it is reckoned too high by the world, but it is none too high for us, it comes right from heaven. But Noah was of one mind with the Lord; as though he should say, Well, Lord, the window is very high, but the door is nice and low, so that the poorest, weakest, may creep in; and the breadth will do, and the length will do, and the height will do, and it will all do together. Very well, Noah; if you're of one mind with me, let us go to work together; you don't want to go to work without me? No, Lord, I could not work without you; the world would soon come and drive me away. Very well, I will not work without you, Noah, and you will not work without me. So, Noah worked together with the Lord, not without him, but with him; and the Lord and Noah completed the ark without one fall out, without anything being the matter. And the Lord said, I will go in first, and see if it will do. So, the Lord stood in the door, and said, "Come you, and all your house into the ark; for you have I seen righteous before me in this generation." But how shall I know when all the creatures are in, Lord? Well, you will not know, but I shall; so, don't go shutting the door, but let it be. And so, the door stopped open day after day; and there you see the different creatures, lions, and tigers, and bears, and elephants, and I dare say some geese, I am sure if there had not been a goose or two, I should not have had much chance, one after the other came in, one after the other; all manner of four-footed beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. And the Lord said, When they are all in, Noah, I will shut the door. So, the Lord shut him in. But your time is gone, and I must say no more.