

RESPONSIBILITY

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“But the word of God grew and multiplied.” Acts 12:24

LAST Lord’s-day morning I noticed from these words the progression of the word of God in the saving conversion of the soul to God; and then, secondly, the increased relative value of the word of God; that it will be of more value at the last in its relation to us than at the first, according to the Lord’s own testimony, “I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings.” Oh, there is everything that can be imagined to increase our love to God, our zeal for God, our devotion to God, and our delight in God. Ezekiel’s river rises higher and higher, runs broader and broader, and becomes fuller, as it were, and fuller, a river that cannot be passed over. What a strange thing it is that even the best among Christians should feel so little interest in the growing blessedness of the glorious gospel of the blessed God! Every other thing falls away, one thing after another, like one leaf after another falling from the tree, till there is not a leaf left. What is there, then, to make our existence tolerable even, and much less to make our existence really pleasant, but true godliness? Tell me that the natural man is really a happy man? He has his qualms and his fears, and there is scarcely an ungodly man that has not moments when he thinks, “I wish I was a Christian;” but, then, like Balaam, he has no heart to live the life of the righteous, or to seek God; therefore being dead in sin he continues what and where he was. So that the apostle may well ask the question, “Who makes you to differ?”

Now in our text there are two more parts I wish to notice. First, *how the word of God grows or progresses*; secondly, *the threefold sense in which it multiplies*.

First, *how the word of God grows*. And this I take not in the mere abstract; I take it to mean not only that the word of God grows into entire fulfilment, grows on by little and little until every promise shall be in perfection fulfilled, but it takes the people with it. So that in reality we shall in the first part of our discourse have to show how by the word of the Lord the people of God grow. They do so, first, by the Christ of God; secondly, by the power of God; and thirdly, by the Spirit of God.

First, by the Christ of God. But when we speak of progress, it is right we should have in view the end; because if we have not a right view of the end, we shall not think much of the progress towards the object. Hence you will observe that the Savior always held the end in view; he had a definite

view and understanding of the end, and also a definite understanding of the means by which he was to reach that end. He never lost sight of the end; therefore it is said, that “for the joy set before him;” and that means, of course, that infinite and eternal joy that he has in three things: in his own personal possession, in glorifying God, and in the eternal welfare of the people. Take away any one of those three things, and you would take the Savior’s joy away. Take the church away, take his bride away, you would in proportion take his joy away. Then again, if he were not risen and enthroned, then you would take his joy away; and if God be not glorified, then again Christ could not be satisfied. Hence it is that by him our God is infinitely and eternally glorified. Let us see, then, how we grow by him. The growth we have to speak of is by faith, and the end we have to gain is an increased acquaintance with eternal things, until we come into perfect possession of the same. Let us take the definition given in the 92nd Psalm: “The righteous,” meaning, of course, Christ Jesus, “shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” Remember that while the Savior is a substitute for the people, he is also the pattern by which the Lord will deal with them. The Savior, then, grew up into perfection; he prospered in everything that he did. What is said of the people? “Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.” Whether we take the house of the Lord there to mean the Christ of God or the church of God, it will in reality make no difference; because to be planted in the house of God is to be planted in the faith of the gospel, and to be planted in this faith is to be planted in the likeness of Christ’s death; and if we are thus planted, “Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.” If then we are to be planted in the house of the Lord in oneness with Christ, in the likeness of Christ’s death, then it is by his prosperity that we are to succeed. His atonement is brought in, and by that we prosper. The Lord will take good care that we shall grow and prosper by nothing else. The workings of fallen nature are such that if we get on today in speaking and hearing, if we get on in divine things, it must simply be by faith in the atonement of Christ; because that atonement keeps pace with our sins, nay, it outruns our sins; that atonement keeps pace with our guilt, nay, it outruns our guilt; that atonement speaks infinitely louder for us than it is possible for all our sins to speak against us; and that atonement speaks for us with a power that our sins cannot speak against us. It is one of the greatest infirmities that the Christian has to set his sins up above the atonement of Christ; and it is one of the greatest pieces of folly of which we are the subjects, and I most readily confess myself the subject of that folly, to suppose that God will reject us because we are, as the poet says, so hard-hearted, ungrateful, vile, and wretched, and poor, and miserable, and unhappy; it is one of the greatest follies almost that we can commit with our judgment to suppose that the Lord will on this ground reject us; when at the same time the Lord receives none others; for it is not the whole, but the sick, that need the physician. And if I am planted thus in the death of Christ, my soul will go on in life, light, liberty, confidence, and strength by that atonement. And there is nothing will make you grow so fast in spiritual things, because nothing else will bring out so much love to God. Just in proportion as you are favored to live in the assurance that God never has had, and does not mean to have, a single thing against you as you stand in Christ, so will you love him. As you stand in the first Adam, and as you are in yourself apart from his grace, he has not a single word to say in your favor; he declares that not one of you is righteous; there is none that does good, no, not one. But by faith in Christ Jesus, this testimony is completely reversed: that there is none unrighteous, no, not one; there is none that does evil, no, not one. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.” They receive the truth, and abide by it; and in receiving the truth, they receive Christ Jesus and his atonement, which puts all their evil away from God’s presence. “You have brought up my soul again from the pit of corruption; you have cast all my sins behind your back.” Such persons will be judged

discriminately by their faith in Christ and practical love to him; but as to their faults, they are gone, gone, gone forever. The more you are brought into the sunlight of God's presence, the more you will grow in grace and in the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal. Then again, take Christ's righteousness. I am afraid we are a little bit deficient in heavenly skill in this matter of making a proper use of Christ's righteousness. You know when the angel came to Daniel, to teach him something more concerning the great truth that Christ should bring in everlasting righteousness, he said, "I am come to give you skill and understanding." And when Satan, conscience, or the world come in sometimes and remind us of our unrighteousness, oh, it is then a good piece of generalship, a good piece of heavenly skill, if you can lay hold of Christ's righteousness, and see that you stand free, complete, without condemnation there.

"I'll plead your perfect righteousness,
And mention none but yours."

"Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." You will be brought thus to know something of the freedom and liberty of the gospel. But take away Jesus Christ, how can you grow then? how can you take root downward? how can you succeed in obtaining any promise? how can you succeed in obtaining any dew from heaven to rest upon your branch? In what way can you ask the Lord for heavenly showers but by Christ Jesus? "Ask you of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so, the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field." "They shall be fat and flourishing; they shall bring forth fruit in old age." Why, the older they are, that is, if they are of the right sort, the more fruit they will bring forth. I do not expect an old Christian, that has been knocked about and tossed about, and has found out the end of all fleshly perfection, and that God's commandment is exceeding broad, and who is now standing in oneness with Christ in the bond of the everlasting covenant, I do not expect that man to be like the Pharisee; I expect that man to speak like a sinner saved by grace; I expect that man to bear a heartfelt, glorious, and decisive testimony of the boundless grace and mercy of the blessed God. And how is it they do this? How is it they continue to old age, and speak well of God; and even when a man grows old to be fat and flourishing in soul; as said the apostle, "the outward man decays, but the inward man is renewed day by day." And what does this demonstrate? Oh, said one, this demonstrates how good the creature has been to persevere; this demonstrates what nice, faithful creatures we are. Well, I dare to say that would be the conclusion of the flesh; but the word of God says, "to show that the Lord is upright." Upright to what? Why, upright to his word. "The Lord," said one, "shall perfect that which concerns me, for his mercy endures forever." And where his mercy stops, there he will stop; and that is nowhere. "He will not forsake the work of his own hands." And "he which has begun a good work in you", to show you what you are, and to plant you in the faith that is in Christ, "will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." Again, he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So that we may boldly say, "the Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me." "To show that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." "There is no unrighteousness in him." Let us have the apostle's explanation of this. "God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labor of love, which you have showed toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Now if God has promised to bless those who are enabled to come into this practical decision for him, then it would be unrighteous on God's

part, according to the apostle's testimony, to forget their work and labor of love. The language is strong, language of course that no uninspired man must ever have used; but then the Lord has inspired bold language concerning himself. Therefore, "to show that the Lord is upright; there is no unrighteousness in him." "Did not I tell you, if you would believe?" Mark that, "if you *would* believe." He does not say, "Did not I tell you if you *do* believe." but "if you *would*." Come then, if you have the will; you wish to believe Christ died for you, but can't yet; you wish to believe God loves you, and wish to believe the promise will be fulfilled, but can't believe that it belongs to you. Well, if you have the will, God has given that will; he will be faithful to that grain of faith that is in your heart, and you shall see the glory of God, as Martha did, and so shall every one that has this will. "To show that the Lord is upright; there is no unrighteousness in him." "He is," said David, "my rock." Here is stability. So then if you would get on, it must be by faith in Christ Jesus the Lord. Thus, the word of God grows in the people of God, and they grow on by that word. "He is my rock," in his love to me, in his choice of me, in my salvation, in his providence, and in his grace, all through the wilderness. He is as immovable as the rock. Ten thousand things might tear me away from him for aught I could do; it is not my hold of him that constitutes my safety, but it is his hold of me. There is no doubt but Peter clung hold of the Lord when the Lord took hold of him and carried him through the waves, but Peter's safety, when the Lord was walking on the sea, did not lie in Peter's hold of the Lord, but in the Lord's hold of Peter. Peter was not carried into the ship by his firm hold of the Lord, but by the Lord's firm hold of him. I have no doubt Peter would take hold of the Lord's arm or something, which was very natural; and so the people of God now have a hold of the Lord; but I make no hesitation in saying, if you are ever so angry with me for it, that we should not hold the Lord five minutes longer if he did not hold us. If he were to give us up, and let go of us, what would be the result? Why, our unbelief would turn us into infidels, our hardness of heart would turn us into reprobates; and the vile secret enmity in our nature against God would be so worked upon by Satan that he would turn us into very devils, and glad to do so; therefore, if we are still believers, still lovers of God, still seeking after him, not unto us, not unto us, but unto his name be all the glory.

Secondly, we grow also, not only by faith in Christ, but by the power of God. that reveals the things of the gospel. Let me take the apostle as my guide here. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes;" there it is. Oh, what a blessing that it rests upon that! Do you not readily see how many things might have been put into the place of believing that would have shut us entirely out? "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone." that ought to be saved, to everyone that does his part, to everyone that does not remain too long in a state of nature, and is too late, to everyone that has not gone too far, to everyone that is not too black, to everyone that is this, and that, and the other. We see in what a variety of ways poor sinners might be shut out. But wonder, O heaven, and be astonished, O earth, there is nothing so offensive to those who alone can be saved in this way as the way in which the Lord saves them. They will bring in all sorts of human traditions and conditions, and shut their own souls out if possible; and if God had not undertaken to bring the soul in, not a soul could he saved. "Now to him that believes" believes what? Why, what is there stated that God's word shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that which he pleases, and prosper in that whereunto he sent it, "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first," to the crucifier of Christ first, to the greatest enemy first, to the most malicious enemy first, to those first who had been called a generation of vipers: "O generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" And yet some in whose ears those awful

words were sounded were brought to believe in the Lord Jesus. A generation of vipers is expressive of what we all are; all are the children of wrath by nature; all are under the god of this world by nature. So that "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile." "The power of God." Now we cannot put any limits to the power of God, we cannot put any limits to the power of that Eternal Spirit that takes up the isles as a very little thing, we cannot put any limits to the power of that omnipotent arm that at Calvary wrought such a wondrous and eternal victory. Let us see what the contents of this gospel are, "salvation unto every one that believes." What do we say? Do we really believe that Jesus Christ came into the world to save persons who really are nothing but helpless sinners, lost sinners; and that if we are saved it must be as independent of any power or good of our own, I was going to say, as though we did not exist? It is the power of God, and not the wisdom or the power of men. Now, "to everyone that believes." Let us simplify the matter in this way. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Faith that does not draw me to Christ is no faith at all; faith that does not sever me from the world, and make me one with the people of God, and with the God of the people, is no faith at all. The margin in this 1st of the Romans, from which I am quoting, refers us to the 40th Psalm, with very great propriety, upon what the gospel is. Look at the 10th verse of the 40th Psalm; and there you have the gospel almost analyzed, and some very solemn hints thrown out. "I have not hidden your righteousness within my heart." When Christ's righteousness is brought in, every other righteousness must go out. The righteousness of God there I take to mean the whole of the humiliation work of Christ; and hide from us his atonement, his righteousness, then you hide everything from us. Nothing can be seen that can do us good without him. "I have declared your faithfulness," there is another item of the gospel, God's faithfulness to his dear Son, and God's faithfulness to the people that believe in Christ, "I have declared your faithfulness and your salvation." You see there is a great deal in that, "*your* salvation." You know the Pope's salvation, and the Puseyite's salvation, and a great many other salvations, they are not God's salvation. And if you ask what God's salvation is, it is in a great many places defined, but we may take this one to suffice; "By grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Again, "I have not," says that same verse, "concealed your loving-kindness and your truth from the great congregation;" the great congregation there of course meaning ultimately the whole church of God. "I have not concealed your loving-kindness." Why, if the dear Savior were on earth now, we should be ready to jump up and dance round him as David did before the ark; we should be ready to say, "Blessed Lord, we cannot find words sufficient to express the truth of your testimony that you have not concealed God's loving-kindness for you are such a revelation of it, such a manifestation of it, such an expression of it, such an embodiment of it, such a representation of it, you are the very substance of it;" for you will go on to all eternity carrying out God's eternal love to wretched, dying men, or those who were wretched, dying men. "I have not concealed your loving-kindness and your truth." The truth is to tell us what kind of righteousness it is by which we are saved; the truth is to inform us of God's infallible faithfulness; the truth is to inform us of the kind of salvation by which we are saved; and the truth is to inform us of what kind of loving-kindness the loving-kindness of the blessed God is.

Thus, then, the word of God grows, or the saints of God grow in grace by Christ Jesus, and by the power of God. The apostle Paul, when taking up this subject of the progress of the church under the figure of a temple, says, "Now, therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building,

fitly framed together, grows” there is the progress, “unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” So then, in the first case, the end we gain is our God in his stability our rock; in the second case, the end we gain is the gospel of our salvation, bringing salvation; and in the third case, we gain everything: “for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” I do not know that we want anything in this church and congregation but what is thus embodied; for us to be built up in Christ Jesus, and then for God to dwell with us by the Holy Spirit. The result will be that the word of God will here yet grow and multiply.

I hasten now to *the threefold sense in which the word of God multiplies*. First, it multiplies blessings, not abstractedly, but relatively. You know that earthly inheritances wear out, and a great many become less and less productive. Some of you perhaps in your business can look back at the time when your business produced a great deal more than it does now; there is a falling off. Well, let us hope it will revive again. But there is no falling off in the revenue of the gospel. The revenue or the income of blessings by the gospel will never fall off, it will increase. These blessings are compared to the incoming of the waves of the sea: “Your righteousness shall be as the waves of the sea;” that is, the blessings by the righteousness of Christ are to be as the waves of the sea; and the further you go on, the more you will see that the mercies of the Lord are as the sands of the sea shore, and as the stars of the sky, that cannot be numbered. Do not you, any of you, dream that you have seen all the blessings, all the mercies, and all the favors that are in store for you. The word of the Lord will bring to light thousands of blessings yet, thousands of beauties yet, thousands of mercies, and thousands of wonders. Remember, the word of the Lord brings us to where there is no limit. Our God in the gospel is deeper than hell, and is indeed higher than heaven, broader than the sea, and longer than the earth. So, the word of the Lord will go on multiplying.

These things increasingly unfold themselves to my view. Oh, the wonders of his love, his mediation, his covenant, his testimony, the stability of his kingdom, the mysterious and wonderful provision he has made, have brought me into such a state, that the religions of the day appear to me to be such paltry, cobweb, rubbishy things, that I do not know twenty ministers hardly in London that I would go over the threshold of the door to hear. If I cannot hear the deep mysteries of eternity opened up, I would rather hear nothing. When you come here, what do you want? Why, you want to be carried out of this world into another, in your minds, and thoughts, and feelings; to be carried out of self into the perfection of Christ, to be clothed in the garments of salvation, for your feet to be washed afresh, and for you once more to be reminded that God has nothing against you, does not mean to do anything against you; he knows the thoughts he thinks towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil. When you come here, what do you want? You want your souls to be like the chariots of Ammi-nadib; to leave everything that is seen, enter into the unseen, and realize that privilege realized by Moses, when it is said, “he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” In this sense also the word of God shall multiply. Whatever cisterns may be broken, this will never be broken; whatever creatures may fail, the Creator will not fail; whatever other fountains may run dry, the fountain of living waters will never run dry.

Secondly, the word of the Lord multiplies Christians. I myself cannot receive that man as a Christian that is not made a Christian by the word of the Lord. How does the word of the Lord do it? Just as we have said; the power of God. The word of the Lord is a two-edged sword; piercing the man with conviction, dividing asunder soul and spirit; his spirit is a spirit of unbelief, enmity, and everything that is bad; and the soul is under the dominion of this unclean spirit. But when the

piercing sword of truth enters, it severs the soul from this spirit, and henceforth the soul and spirit become severed. You still have in you the spirit of unbelief and everything that is bad; but then the soul is quickened by the word of the Lord. "And dividing asunder joints and marrow;" and thus bringing you to feel that all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. So, then we find Christians multiplied by the word of the Lord in its life-giving power. "Born again of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever." Nothing short of this will do. You will not be a Christian at the last if you are not made one in this way. You know what is said; "This people have I formed;" and that does not mean any earthly organization, but it means divine regeneration; it does not mean by a set of any human laws, but it means by the Lord putting his laws into their minds, and writing them in their hearts, and engaging to remember their sins and their iniquities no more; not a frown, not a cloud, all is clear.

But lastly, the word of the Lord multiplying, also means our responsibilities. Are there two talents of truth committed to me, or is the truth committed to me in that humble proportion? I am responsible to God for the use I make of that truth, for the profession I make of his name. And some of you that the Lord has dealt more bountifully with, and has given you five talents, a large possession of his truth, you are responsible to him for the use you make of that truth, of those testimonies he has revealed to you. When the Jews left Babylon there was a certain number to whom the vessels of the sanctuary were committed, and those vessels were numbered and weighed. And when they arrived at Jerusalem, the question was: Where are the vessels of the sanctuary, we committed to you? Here they are. And are they the same weight? You haven't been Jewing them, have you, clipping them a bit? No; the same weight, the same number. So, the Lord was satisfied and glorified. Just so, if you part with any one truth, part with election. What have you done with that talent? I hid it. Oh, very well. You part with particular redemption, or any other truth. What have you done with that? Well, I could not get on so well with that as I could with universal redemption. Very well. I committed to you providentially (for there is a wonderful difference between the word of God being committed to us providentially, and being committed to us graciously or savingly; as said David, "Grant me your law graciously;" I committed to you providentially the doctrine of divine sovereignty. Well, yes, Lord, you did; but unless I preached free will, and gave a chance for all, my congregation would have fallen off; but as soon as ever I put this sovereignty aside, and began to be more charitable, I got more people. Oh, did you? Then you knew better what ought to be preached than I did? Yes, very well; then the matter is settled. Take him, and just serve him as he would have served my children: "bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness." But to the others, well, what do you say? Well, Lord, every blessed truth you have revealed to my soul I have been enabled to hold fast. Have they done you any good? Yes, Lord; I never got any good in any other way; your truth has been more precious to me than thousands of gold and silver, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. "Well done, you good and faithful servant; enter you into the joy of your Lord." It multiplies our responsibilities, then. There is no final penalty connected with the responsibility of the real child of God; but there are present disadvantages and advantages. When I see persons who in time past have run well, prefer to go about the world for recreation on the Lord's day, instead of appearing in his service; and when I see, if their business happen to lie in something connected with some of the lowest theatres, that they themselves can unnecessarily go there, and almost or quite mix up with it for the sake of a little worldly gain, ah! there must be a rod in pickle for this. Such persons are not carrying out their responsibilities; they are forsaking the ways of the Lord; and they make us stagger, and say with the apostle, "I stand in doubt of you." I am sure, friends, you will recognize the solemnity of this

part of our subject. “We must everyone give an account of himself to God;” “we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.” And there is another branch of responsibility, too, and that is what our treatment has been towards the cause and people of God. “Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favor my righteous cause; yes, let them say continually, Let the Lord be magnified, which has pleasure in the prosperity of his servant;” that servant being Jesus Christ. I believe our congregation includes as many real Christians as any one congregation with the same proportionate number upon the surface of the globe; and yet I wonder how many among them the Lord will say to bye and by, “I was hungry, and you gave me no meat; thirsty, and you gave me no drink,” caring nothing for God’s cause. Why, there are some now that come to this place, they do take a sitting, but they pay for it grudgingly, and would not even do that if they could help it; and most terribly afraid that the minister’s mind should be too free, and the cause too much prosper. I must be faithful. We are in a great measure responsible for the prosperity of the cause of God; that is to say, we are his servants; and if we shrink from his service, run away from it, grudge a little for it, and think light of it, what if at the last we should prove to be unfaithful servants; that we would not buy the truth because it cost so much, and that we would not carry it practically out towards his cause; and the Lord should say at the last, “Depart from me, I know you not.” God grant there may not be one among us so dealt with at last; though I am very, very much afraid there are some few among us. I hope I shall always have to say of you as a people what I can say now; you have done nearly all; as soon as ever that little breach in the wall is made up, you will then have done all that I could wish you to do. It is impossible for me to speak more highly of you than I have hitherto been favored and enabled to do. There are others who have stood aloof, that I have a feeling for, and therefore for them tremble. To see how, when the summer comes, for instance, they can go into the country, and take good lodgings, and enjoy their bottles of wine, and go about in their broughams¹, and live as lords and ladies of the land; but when they come to the collection plate, if they happen when they leave home to make a mistake and bring a fourpenny-piece instead of a three-penny, they are quite troubled about it. The cause would be better without such than with them; the tree would grow all the better if these dead branches were gone.

¹ i.e., a horse-drawn carriage with a roof, four wheels, and an open driver's seat in front.