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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

RESTORATION.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 26TH, 1869,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“For thus saith the Lord of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you; for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”—Zechariah ii. 8.

I THINK we cannot doubt that the Lord is pleased sometimes in setting forth the desolations into which the Israelites of old were brought by their apostacies, and his judgments upon them for those apostacies, to point out our state by nature, and that their temporary and temporal restoration is a shadow of that spiritual, saving restoration, which the Lord will bring all his people to realize. Hence you will perceive a similarity between the language of our text and that of the 69th Psalm, where the Saviour saith, “I restored that which I took not away.” So here, “After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you; for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.” As the Israelites apostatized, and therefore became the spoil of the nations around, they became assimilated to those nations, and so all the people of God in the fall of man became like other people; there was no difference; all are spoiled there. “We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,” shewing that love in sending his Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins.

I will notice a *fourfold glory* that the Saviour came after, and that he was to restore. “I restored that which I took not away.” First, the people. But we cannot appreciate the Saviour as the great restorer, bringing us back to God, unless we know something personally and experimentally about our state, so as to know what we need to be restored from. The prophet Isaiah points this out very clearly, in words which I very much delight in, not in the things the words contain, but I do delight to see that my condition as a sinner, bad as it is, is described in God’s word, that he does not come short, in his descriptions of what we are, of the real truth; for if we felt and found, from our experience, that we were worse than his holy word describes us, each Christian would say, I am so far gone in sinfulness, infidelity, and depravity of heart, that I cannot find a scripture that anywhere describes one so bad as I am; consequently such would sink into despair. But when we find the holy Scriptures so expressive upon this, what a comfort it is to us that, much as the Lord is pleased to discover to us, from time to time, in his dealings with us, what we are, yet we have never realized, and never can, anything

farther in downward experience than what his word describes, nor so far. That Scripture is very valuable where the Lord saith of the heart, that it is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" So that even those who know the most of themselves do not know all the Lord knows, nor that his word describes. Let us look closely into this matter. First it is said that we are "altogether as an unclean thing." How is this found out? When we are put to the test of God's law, or God's word, for what is said of God's law may be said of his word at large, that it is holy, just, and good, that it reacheth to the thoughts of the heart. When put to this test, we find out that the law is spiritual, and we are carnal, sold under sin. There is such a complete contrast between us and God's law that, let us do what we may, it is carnal. If the natural man pray, his prayers become sin, because he has not any saving faith. Let the natural man do what he may, and make himself as admirable before men as an angel, he is still carnal, and the law is spiritual. The apostle saith, "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence." Just as the leper was altogether unclean physically, so spiritually the Lord makes his people feel that they are altogether as an unclean thing. The prophet Isaiah saith, then, "We are altogether as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." He uses the word "righteousness;" that is a strong term, it appears to the natural man to be righteousness, and to others, that do not know any better, to be righteousness too. Happy the man that finds out the truth of the prophet's words, and knows something of it from his own experience. Then comes the weakness of the creature; "We all do fade as a leaf." How true that is, not only as to our mortality, but as to our legal strivings and resolutions. Some of you can recollect the time when you strove hard to make yourselves holy, righteous, and good. It all faded away as a leaf, and you became as helpless in the matter as though you were a mere autumnal leaf. "Our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away," and those iniquities lie between us and God. "And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities." Not consumed us from being; there is no such doctrine in the Bible. Man is formed for eternity; man has an immortal soul. While deceived men are everywhere preaching the doctrine of annihilation, they are preaching and feigning doctrines out of their own hearts and heads. Man is formed for eternity; his soul will never die.

"Life's in earnest,
And the grave is not the goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was never spoken to the soul;"

and never will be. Therefore, when it is said, "Thou hast consumed us," it means that the sentence passed upon us in the first Adam has consumed us in all we there possessed, that was pleasing in the sight of God. "Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire." If we apply these words in a way of accommodation, our state by creation, where we worshipped God, or should have worshipped God, but for the fall, in the beauty of holiness, sin and God's wrath have burned it up; "and all our pleasant things are laid waste;" all the pleasant things we had in the first Adam are laid waste. All our pleasant things will presently be laid waste. Whatever is pleasant to us in temporal matters will by and by be virtually laid waste. The millionaire on his dying bed, what is his million of money to him? He will only require a few boards nailed together, a shroud, and a very small piece of ground; he is laid in the grave the same as others. Ah, all these pleasant things are laid waste. Let the Lord lay these things home to a

man's heart, why, the man says, Here am I formed for eternity; heaven is a holy place, I am unholy; God is righteous, I am unrighteous; God is a God that heareth prayer, and I have never prayed to him. I have never sought his face; God hath consumed me in the first Adam, how do I know I have an interest in the last Adam? He has consumed me because of mine iniquity; everything is desolate, dark, and dull. But by and by comes the blessed Redeemer to restore us. Now, let us look at Jesus Christ, then, first as coming after the people; for they are God's glory to him, the first essential part of his glory that I shall mention. I do not say they stand first in that respect, but still they are his glory. The holy Scriptures are clear upon this. If you take all the items, how beautifully does the Saviour answer to them. "We are all as an unclean thing;" the blood of Jesus Christ, this child born—his precious blood cleanseth from all sin, and makes us as holy and spotless, and as pleasing to God, as Christ himself;—by faith in his precious blood. Let me refer to the paschal lamb to illustrate this,—namely, that his blood cleanseth us from all sin by faith in him. I speak not of the legal relative cleansing that was wrought at the Cross, but of the manifestive cleansing, as the apostle saith, "Purifying our hearts by faith." The Israelite, in order to shew that he had faith, received the lamb, the lamb was slain, he fed upon the lamb, and the blood was sprinkled on the lintels and the side-posts; thereby owning that he was indebted to the blood of the lamb for escape. Just so now,—if you receive the testimony of Jesus Christ into your soul, and are not ashamed to own that you are indebted to his precious blood for being cleansed from your sin, if this be your faith, just so sure as the Israelite escaped, so you shall also escape. Only do not let us make a plaything of it, do not let us make a sham of it; do not let us make a mere formality of it. When the sword of death was about to go through the land of Egypt it was no plaything then. Here is life in danger. The man would be in earnest; he would look upon the lamb as essential to preserve his life. It was no sham with him; it was no mere formality that he went through; he was anxious about it; his life was there. And if it was not a mere form, sham, or plaything with the Israelite literally, much less can it be a mere sham, a semblance, and a make-believe with us. Ours is an escape of infinitely greater importance than was the escape of the Israelite from death. "After the glory hath he sent me;" so he brings us by his precious blood, cleansing us from all sin. As the priest atoned for the people, took away their uncleanness, their unrighteousness, typically so, and went into the holy of holies and presented them by that sacrifice, just so it is now; so that we receive Jesus Christ earnestly, understandingly, as the one thing needful to our eternal welfare. He came, then, after the glory, after God's people, for they are God's glory in his new covenant; he has there constituted them his glory, and whatever he has there constituted them they shall become actually, as the holy Scriptures clearly shew. His blood cleanseth from all sin, even his blood who hath delivered us from the wrath to come. And are all our righteousnesses as filthy rags? The dear Redeemer brings in a righteousness;—how sweet the thought!—"Now to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." If we are not clear upon this one point, that we have these blessed testimonies in their endearing power, let us pray to the Lord to enable us to receive all the parts of his truth in the love thereof. While the great testimony that his blood cleanseth from all sin endears the Lord to us, does the next testimony do so,—that Jesus Christ, as Daniel beautifully expresses it, hath brought in everlasting righteousness? And it is "to him that worketh not;" to the poor helpless sinner that believes in Christ's righteousness, believes in his obedience, for it is by the obedience of one that many are made righteous, this righteousness imputed unto all them

that believe. Can we say that this part of the gospel is dear to us, that we love the Lord in and by this everlasting righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? If we can, then we have not the mere letter, but the love of the truth; and if so, then we have the love of God, for God's love never was out of the truth, and never will be. Therefore the man that is out of the truth, and yet professes to be in God's love, is to me a kind of article I cannot understand at all; because God's love is in his truth, and his truth is in Christ; and that is where his love is; therefore the man that is brought into his love is brought into it by his truth. Then also, "we fade as a leaf;"—see how the Saviour takes this away. There is no fading in him. We being planted together in the likeness of Christ's death, our root, our leaf, our hope shall not wither, nor shall we cease from yielding fruit. "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing, shewing that the Lord is upright." Ah, saith David, "he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." Not a promise can fade; not a Christian can fade; they are born of an incorruptible seed, that liveth and abideth for ever. And "our iniquities like the wind have carried us away;" but Christ hath carried our iniquities away, and now we can no more be carried away. Some of us have been united to God by his dear Son, by the atonement, righteousness, immortality, and certainty of Christ, and by the eternal and immutable love of our God for many years, and our iniquities have never carried us away from him yet, and never will. There is no separation; the unity is by faith; we are kept by the power of God through faith, and Jesus Christ himself is the author and finisher of that faith. Thus he brings us to himself by his cleansing blood, his justifying righteousness, his unfading truth, and that immortality of which the soul is born. Again, "Zion is a wilderness"—no, no more a wilderness; the soul shall be as a "watered garden, whose waters fail not"—"and Jerusalem a desolation;"—no, that shall never take place again, that can never be again. "Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up;"—no; now we have a house that can never be burned up; let Jesus Christ be our holy and beautiful house, where God meets us and we meet him, where we praise and worship him. "All our pleasant things are laid waste;"—not one of our pleasant things that we have in Christ can be laid waste. Is there any blessing of the new covenant that can be laid waste? Is there any promise that can be laid waste? Ah, not a single thing is lost. The blessings given to Christ before the world was, were as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore in multitude, as well as wonderful in magnitude. What a wonderful person Jesus Christ must be! He was God, he is God, and ever will be God, to comprehend all the blessings. He kept them safe through all the thousands of years of the Old Testament, and he has them safe now. When the Israelites returned from Babylon there were certain persons entrusted with the gold and silver vessels belonging to the temple; and when they had arrived at Jerusalem those vessels were numbered and weighed to see if they had the same at the end that were originally committed to them. By and by, at the end of time, all the blessings will, as it were, be numbered that were given to Christ before the world was; and neither hell, nor sin, nor the devil, nor error, nor anything else, will have been able to take one blessing from him. He travelled through this world undefiled, uncorrupted, unconquered; he conquered everything, but nothing could conquer him.

*"'Tis finished," said his dying breath,
And shook the gates of hell.*

Shall he come after the people, and go back without them? No.
"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed

his people." "After the glory hath he sent me." Ah, then, by his precious blood, precious righteousness, immortality, and this constituted order of things, he is the meeting-place;—"God in Christ, reconciling us to himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us;" and there is the promise the Lord gave,—that Zion should be no more a wilderness, nor Jerusalem a desolation. The Lord bring us more and more into that spirit, where it is said, "For Zion's sake," these citizens, these people, "I will not hold my peace." We have but comparatively few ministers in our day that advocate, at least with any success, the cause of Zion. We live in a day when men are so anxious to maintain their party. Do you belong to such a party? Do you belong to such a magazine? Do you approve of so and so? This is not of God. What is Zion? Here it is:—"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." Here is the stability of Zion itself, and of the people. That is the great subject to advocate, by which truth sinners are converted, and the saints built up. Think of it, ye children of Zion; think of what the Lord has done for you in bringing you into such a standing as this, to trust in him by faith in his dear Son after the saving order of things, that you shall be as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. "We receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved," saith one, hereby it is that "we have grace that we should go on to serve God." That is what Paul says concerning Zion. What does he say about himself? Why, he says, I have suffered, and do suffer, and I shall suffer, no doubt, all sorts of afflictions; "but none of these things move me,"—Zion cannot be moved. I cannot be moved;—"neither count I my life dear unto me, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry that I have received of the Lord." Here, then, the dear Saviour comes after the glory, and brings us gloriously to God, and there we are safe in his blessed hands. The worst of it is that many of you cannot very often, perhaps some of you never at all, read out as you could wish your interest therein. Well, you had better be in that state of suspicion and godly jealousy than in a Pharisaic or presumptuous or careless state. Indeed, it is a great thing if we have only a few bitter herbs; that will keep us awake; and if we have a few fiery trials,—that will keep us awake;—it doesn't matter what it is, something or other, anything better than carelessness about these eternal, glorious, and wonderful things. This is our state, then,—unclean, unrighteous, prayerless, consumed, separated from God, no way of worshipping him, all pleasant things laid waste, and gone; but Jesus Christ brings about an entirely new scene of things,—cleanseth from all sin, brings in righteousness, immortality, stability, the service of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, and by which the Lord saith, "I will hide my face no more from them."

"For Zion's sake." It was for Zion's sake Christ came into the world; for Zion's sake the Holy Spirit does what he does; for Zion's sake the glorious gospel is to be preached, to gather in the children of Zion. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness." When I read that clause this cold morning, I could not help blessing the Lord with all my heart and soul. I said, Lord, I am a Gentile, a Gentile sinner; but I see thy righteousness as clear as day,—the substituted righteousness of Christ.

"He with gladness took my blame,
And gave his righteousness."

"And all kings thy glory." If I can see his glory then I am a king, for none but royal persons can see this spiritual glory. "Whom he justified," there is the righteousness; "Them he also glorified," there is the glory. So I told the Lord when I saw it. He likes to hear his little

ones prattle, and if they make some mistakes, and do not pronounce their words right, still he likes to hear them prattle. The dear Saviour saith even to us little ones, "When ye pray, say, Our Father;" and if you cannot say it unstammeringly, say it as well as you can. "I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord." How so? What a trophy you are of his grace, are you not? Is not the whole of your salvation from first to last to his glory? These are the persons then that are his glory,—he delights in them. "And a royal diadem in the hand of thy God." How do we live? We do not live like that; we live as though we were poor, wretched, miserable, sinful creatures in the hand of the Lord, and if he does not forsake us to-day, we think he certainly will to-morrow; and if not to-morrow, he certainly will next week; and if not next week, he certainly will next month; and if not next month, he certainly will next year. But see how differently the Lord views us;—"Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God." And then, as to the future,—"Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken: neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah, and thy land Beulah; for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." And so it goes on, closing with the beautiful words, "They shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord; and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken." First they are called, then sought out. God calls a poor sinner, and for the first time in his life he is at a loss to know where he is. He says, I cannot think where I am; and I shall soon be lost, I shall soon be in hell. Oh that I could hear a minister that could find me out. And the first time he hears a minister who comes right down to where he is, and describes his workings of mind, his discouragements,—trying to believe, and cannot believe; trying to get the promise, and cannot; trying to come to Christ, and cannot; trying to get into liberty, to enter into rest, to be happy, to call God his Father, and cannot; trying to be a saint, a Christian, a king, and cannot; trying to be comfortable, and cannot be comfortable; wandering about in a solitary way, finding no city to dwell in;—the poor man's heart jumps for joy. Ah, he says, if that is the way the Lord deals with his people, then he has got hold of me. That minister seeks him out, brings him to the banqueting-house, takes him to the apple-tree in the midst of the wood; there he sits, and finds the fruit sweet to his taste, the leaves healing to his wounds, and wonders how in the world that man knows so much about it. Ah, he says, bless the Lord for such a gospel, for such a minister, for such a testimony. "They shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord; and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken;" the very name of the city from that day shall be "The Lord is there."

Thus then the people are one part of the glory that Christ was sent to restore; he died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. What say you to this? Can you say you know something of this your ruined condition? I must speak to you all as though I did not know one of you;—I must not know my own children, I was going to say,—my own spiritual children, my own brethren;—I am not to know anything but Christ, and him crucified. Let me speak, then, as though I did not know you, just for a moment, and say,—Do we ourselves know something experimentally and personally of this our ruin; and is it revealed to us that all the remedies we need are in Christ Jesus? and is it also revealed to us that the Lord will never forsake, will never leave, them that are his?

"Once in him, in him for ever;
Thus the eternal covenant stands."

These are God's glory. God the Father glories in such a family; he is the husbandman, as it were, that hath his quiver full of these children,

and he glories in them; Jesus Christ glories in these brethren;—the Holy Spirit glories in them; they are God's delight; he delights in their persons, and Jesus Christ will constitute their persons just such as he can delight in; they are to be conformed to his wondrous image. John saith, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Secondly, another part of the glory that Christ came after was that of the law of God. This is a theme I am also very much interested in. There is something so pleasing to see that Jesus Christ hath established all the demands of the law, and in so doing he hath established every precept of the gospel; and in so doing, magnifying the law, he has blotted out every threatening and writing that stood against us. How many thousands are there in heaven now that never obeyed any precept in one sense,—infants, in the first place;—they never obeyed the precept; yet the Holy Spirit secretly unites the soul of the dying infant with Christ; and by virtue of that secret unity to Christ, it goes to heaven. I know there are some that perhaps don't see with me exactly in this infant salvation; but I can't find any infants among them that are lost at last; and if they are not among them that are lost, they must be among them that are saved. I can find some infants in the word of God among them that are saved, but I cannot find one at the last day in the word of God among them that are lost. Job wished he had died when he was an infant; and David's child, (and you know the circumstances under which it came, too,) went to heaven;—"It shall not return to me, but I shall go to it." Do you think David meant the grave? I think not; I think he meant something more than that. And also I read when the Saviour was born, there was a little company of infants must go to heaven then, as a kind of holy sacrifice connected with his birth. And therefore, "Cease the voice of thy weeping,"—Rachel, weeping for thy children;—"for they shall come again from the land of the enemy." Ah, if Wesleyanism were true, not an infant could be saved; and if anything were required of the creature, not an infant could be saved; but its being of grace made the good old Scotch divine sing,—

"The babe that's thither caught,
From womb and breast,
Claims a right to sing above the rest;
Because it's found the happy shore,
It never saw nor sought before."

Therefore grace will be the theme of the infant, as well as of the adult. Then again, how many thousands have been called by grace at the eleventh hour, on their dying bed,—the last illness; these have gone to heaven. How have they gone? They have gone the same as you and I must go—as trophies of his grace. So then, Jesus Christ hath so obeyed the law, so established the law, so fulfilled every precept, and so confirmed every promise, that there is not anything legal left that can hold the soul back that God designs for eternal glory; whether it be the infant, the adult, or the dying sinner. See the dying thief;—he goes to heaven in the same triumph as the prophets and apostles, and as the people of God ever shall. Why was the law given then? To make men better? No. The world can't get over that at all. The apostle's reason why the law was given, makes Pharisaism itself stammer very much. What was it for? Why, that sin might abound. It was sent into the apostle's soul that the sin in his heart might abound, and he might feel as full of the devil, and blasphemy, and hell, and everything wretched, as ever he could exist. Before the law came, I was a very

pious man. The law was given;—what was it given for? Why, it was given to show our need of a Mediator; it was given to put a negative upon everything we are. So the apostle saith, this is the purpose of the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God;—his own while here, their mouths shall be stopped, brought into the dust, and Christ endeared as the end of the law. “Do we then make void the law through faith?” It is the only way of establishing the law, Christ, then, came to restore God’s law to its place, and he hath done so; and he has done with the law, because he has done all that the law had for him to do; and I have done with it, and it has done with me, and I walk off and live as far from it as I possibly can;—I live up at the top of Mount Zion; I live above the law. The law was in the ark, but the cherubims rested on the ark; and the law is in the ark of the covenant, but I rest on the covenant. The cherubims rested upon the mercy-seat, that mercy-seat resting upon the ark; and so the mercy of our God rests upon the basis of an everlasting covenant. The law is quiet, it is quiet there for ever; it is magnified, and God is glorified.

Christ also came to restore the gospel, for men had got rid of it;—and so now, I do not want to say anything unkind, but I must be truthful. It is wonderful the thousands of ways in which men are trying to get rid of the gospel. What is Catholicism? A tremendously successful effort to get rid of the gospel. What is Puseyism? The same. And what are some other isms, but attempts to get rid of the gospel? What is the whole business of Satan? To get rid of the gospel, to hide from us the gospel. Satan does not care what we bring forward, if it is not the gospel. Therefore, I hope, whatever you get rid of here, when I am gone, you will not get rid of the gospel. I think every man should be himself; never attempt to be another, but speak out of your own soul’s experience; as those of you did that came before the church lately;—not one of you appeared in the experience of another,—I could tell that; you each stated your own experience. “Drink waters out of thine own cistern;” let them be thine own, and not another’s. If I am nothing else, I will be an original. So then we must look, as Pope says, on another subject,—

“Tis not the lip or eye we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.”

So it is not an isolated sermon, or a word dropped here and there, but the general result. If the general result be good, amidst all the faults that are found, there must be something good somewhere. So then Jesus Christ restored the people, restored the law, restored the gospel. Another part of the glory which he restored, and that is what we share in beautifully, was the service of God. How he put aside human traditions and inventions. “Woman,” he said, “believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain,”—you are a Jew, and you are prejudiced,—“nor yet at Jerusalem;”—ah, it is a Jew that is speaking to me, and asking for water, and yet he says Jerusalem is not to be the place; what new doctrine is this? “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” He hath restored them the service of God, the freedom of that service. See the liberty you enjoy; every one of you can choose your own minister;—if you do not like one, you can go to another; you that come here do not come as a duty, but because you like to come.