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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

RIGHT SERVICE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 31ST, 1869,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNAACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“Mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.”—Isaiah lxx. 9.

THE Lord never chooses any to be his servants permanently but such as prove themselves fit for his service. We have a great deal said in the word of the Lord upon this subject of fitness and unfitness. Hence you read of many called,—called on the ground of the profession they make, called to prove their fitness to serve the Lord; and when they are put to the test, we come to the solemn, I had almost said in one respect awful conclusion, that “many are called, but few are chosen.” Such numbers prove themselves, with all their profession, unfit for the service of the Lord; therefore they do not stand as the chosen, he doesn’t choose them; he suffers their own hearts, the enemy, the world, and various powers to carry them away, and he has no more to do with them. He saith of such,—Let them alone; there they are, they have made a profession of my name, and they have proved themselves unworthy of everlasting life; therefore let them go. Hence the doctrine contained in our text is simply that discriminating doctrine of God’s chosen servants, “Mine elect,” or my servants, “shall inherit it.” You see the same persons that are called elect are called God’s servants. Therefore the first thing we shall have to attend to this morning will be to describe how God’s chosen servants are distinguished from others. Ever remember that there is a time election as well as an eternal election. Some people, that do not know the truth, therefore do not see with us, think we believe in eternal election, and that there we stop; but then in this they make a mistake;—we believe in time election as well as in eternal election; and the man that does not stand manifest as a servant that God chooses in time, that he now chooses to go on in his service,—the man that cannot stand the test of time election has no right to conclude that he is interested in eternal election. Interest therefore in eternal election in the manifestation thereof depends upon our character as answering to eternal election. There is a people in time that the Lord chooses. You well know that none will prove to be the servants of the Lord but those that were chosen before the world was; still there is this time election. Some people think we hold every time we meet with the word “chosen,” or the word “elect,” that it means eternal election. We don’t hold this, at least I do not. I believe there is a time election, a characteristic election, following upon eternal election, and that the time election makes manifest the eternal election; and that that is the man that is brought into this fitness for God’s service; that is the man whose election stands manifest; that is, not only does he now stand a chosen and accepted servant of God, but his so standing is a demonstration that his name is in the book of life, that he is included in eternal election, and therefore blessed with

all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. This then is the first doctrine of our text,—to describe the chosen servants of God.

I shall notice our text in a fourfold form, though I shall occupy the larger part of the time in the first part. First, *what is fitness for the permanent service of the Lord.* Secondly, *the variety of ways in which such persons are to serve the Lord.* Thirdly, *their inheritance*;—“Mine elect shall inherit it.” Fourthly, *their dwelling-place*;—“and my servants shall dwell there.”

First, *what is fitness for the permanent service of the Lord?* the permanent and saving service of the Lord. I at once give in very few words a definition. You cannot serve the Lord acceptably, permanently, without one thing, and that is the full assurance of faith in God's truth. There must be no doubting, no wavering, no halting; there must be a full assurance of faith in God's truth. I shall easily show that without this it is impossible to serve God acceptably. Mind, I am not saying there must be a full assurance of interest;—that is a distinct thing. The apostle Paul saith, “Let us draw nigh in full assurance of faith,” not full assurance of interest; no; here the sovereignty of God appears in withholding from thousands of his people that full assurance of interest in eternal things which from time to time they mourn the absence of, and long after and desire of the God of heaven, and he will grant that in his own time; if he has granted you one assurance, he will grant you the other. First then, there must be the full assurance of faith in God's truth; that is, you must be so convinced of your state as a sinner, and so enlightened by the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures, as to see that nothing but the substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ can meet your necessity. You must feel as sure as you do of your own existence that if his blood doth not cleanse from all sin there is no other remedy. You must feel as sure as you do of your own existence that if his righteousness doth not justify from all things, there is no other righteousness that can help you. You must feel as sure as you do of your own existence that if his truth be not yea and amen, if his truth in Christ Jesus be not sworn, infallible, unalterable truth, standing as firm as God's own eternity, standing indeed in God, for he hath sworn by himself, because he could swear by no greater;—if this be not so, nothing else can help you. You must come into this full assurance. And when you come into this full assurance of the way in which you must be saved, if ever you are saved at all, what will be the result? The result will be, you will serve God acceptably, because you will serve him by faith in the perfection of Christ, in the certainty of his truth. Without this kind of faith, this assurance, you cannot please God; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of such as diligently seek him. No halting between two opinions; no halting as to whether free will or free grace be right; no halting as to whether the superstitions of Roman Catholicism or Puseyism be right; no halting between two gospels, no halting between two opinions. Let that God that answered by fire at Calvary's wondrous cross, when the fire of God's wrath descended, accepted the sacrifice, consumed everything connected with the sacrifice, and all our sins were connected with Christ's sacrifice, and there they were all consumed; the curse of the law was connected with that sacrifice, but there that curse was consumed; death was connected with that sacrifice, but there death was consumed; all our troubles were connected with that sacrifice, for “in all their affliction he was afflicted,” and there they were all consumed;—let that God be your God. Ah, if he be thus your God, if he be thus your choice, and you have this assurance of faith, this assurance of God's truth presently the heavens will be covered with promissory clouds, and will send down upon your soul showers of blessing, and make you so happy you will want to go to heaven that your soul may be expanded, and give vent to the wonders brought into it and

revealed to you by the everlasting God by Jesus Christ. These only are the men that can serve God acceptably. Again, no wavering; he that wavereth, let him not think he shall receive anything. Are you wavering as to which is right? Ah, say they, there are so many opinions, who is to know which is right? Why, the poor sinner that's brought to where the Publican was; the poor sinner that's brought to where Saul of Tarsus was, when a light above the brightness of the sun shined round about him. No natural light could have convinced him of what he was within. Natural light might convince him of what he was without; but no natural light could convince him of what he was within; therefore this great and supernatural light darted into his heart and soul, brought him down to the dust as a sinner, and nothing but a sinner; and he became, from his own experience, assured that if he was a saved man, it must be by the grace of God; and he not only became assured of this at the first, but he testified of the same afterwards, for he saith, "He called me by his grace, and by the grace of God I am what I am;" and this full assurance of God's truth fitted him to serve God. No danger of his putting any wild gourd into the pot, no danger of his putting a little free-will or Pharisaiism into the gospel; no danger of his setting forth any remedy for the poor sinner but that by which he himself was healed, quickened, forgiven, sanctified, justified, saved, raised up. Therefore he saith, when speaking of the troubles he met with, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." See, for want of this experience, this assurance of the way in which a sinner must be saved, what numbers in the wilderness proved themselves unfit for the service of God, turned back to Egypt. One says, What do you think of God taking us, and leaving others? What do you think of this discriminating conduct of the Most High? Do not you think we had better have some golden calves? And when they got their golden calves, how they were delighted with them. They were fit to serve them, but they proved their unfitness to serve God; and how did they prove that unfitness? Why, not having a knowledge of what they were as sinners, and therefore never led from necessity to seek God's truth. Read the 15th of Exodus, there is God's testimony, showing how he had brought them out of Egypt, and how he would take them through the wilderness into the promised land. Why, if those Israelites had read that 15th of Exodus, or had heard it, with the full assurance of faith, they would have said one to the other, Why, brother, this is sure, and that is sure; we are sure to be supplied; and when we come to Jordan the adversary will be still as a stone; when we come to Jericho the walls will be thrown down, Rahab will be saved, and we shall gain the victory; and when there are an unusual number of enemies, the sun will stand still in the west, and the moon in the east, and the sun and moon will smile upon each other, while the Lord will smile upon us, and we shall go on conquering till the foe is destroyed; God will give us the victory. Saith Moses, "Ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive, every one of you, unto this day." But they had no confidence in these truths; they had confidence in the golden calves. Am I speaking this morning to any poor fellow-creature that is still in ignorance? You do not know your lost condition, you do not know God's truth; but you have plenty of confidence in your church ceremonies, your Puseyite ceremonies, and the long cloak of your deceived parson, and a parcel of deceptive things that are of the devil, but no confidence in God's truth. You must have, therefore, a full assurance of God's truth in order to enable you to serve God acceptably. Now all those in the wilderness that had this full assurance of the truth, Moses saith concerning them, "Ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive, every one of you, unto this day;"—not you that were worthy, that deserved something, that were

better in your nature than others, that were good-tempered, and this, that, and the other; they had their faults and crooks as well as others, and they knew their need of him that could forgive them; so they could not leave him; and they were accepted. Those that did thus cleave to the Lord proved their fitness to serve God, because they understood the way in which he could be served acceptably, prayed to acceptably, praised acceptably, loved acceptably, spoken of acceptably. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." Come to the New Testament, and the apostle Paul mentions a large number of people, and he says, "These all died in faith." How is that, Paul? They were God's chosen servants; they were fitted by his grace to serve him; he had fitted them and formed them. Saith the Saviour, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Well, but, say you, the ploughman may look back to see how straight or how crooked he has come. Very true, but that is not the meaning; the meaning is, he is looking back and watching an opportunity to turn back. They went back in their hearts to Egypt. Some people's conversion is no better than the poor girl's;—when the fair time was come, the girl went crying to her mother in the morning;—Why, Mary, whatever are you crying about? Oh, mother, to think that I was converted before the fair. I cannot go to the fair to-day; I wish I had not been converted till after the fair. Now this is a very simple matter, but it is about the essence of the conversion of thousands;—they come out of the world with their bodies, and make a kind of profession, and secretly wish they had not been converted before this, and that, and the other. These are they that went back, and were not fit for the kingdom of God. Now come to the 11th of Hebrews, "These all died in faith." How came that about? They were servants that God chose,—how came it about? Just tell us about them, Paul; we should like to know what they were in their lives, and then we shall see how it was they came to such a happy death, for "blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." Well, he says, "they saw the promises afar off," in prediction, they had not yet received them in actual fulfilment, but they saw them, "and were persuaded of them, and embraced them." Here was the fitness to serve God;—their faith, their hope, their confidence, was in the promise, their eyes were upon the promise, their hearts and their expectations were upon the promise; they felt an assurance that the promise could never fall to the ground. "And they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Well, but did not they go back? They had plenty of opportunity, but they were too well fitted for God and for his service to go back; "they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city." But did they get there? Go back, and hear what he saith,—"these all died in faith;" and if they all died in faith, they all got to the city; and John saw them in the city, a number that no man could number. These are they that are fitted to serve the Lord. I would not have a deacon that was not sound in the truth if I knew it, his days would be few, and another must take his office. I would not have a member that was not sound in the truth if I knew it. Why, in some of our churches the deacons are rotten Arminians; they are compromising, hypocritical fellows, more fit for the devil's service than for the service of the blessed God, and never frown so much upon the minister as when he is decided for God's solemn and eternal truth. Oh, my hearer, whatever you trifle with, never trifle with your soul, never trifle with Christ's blood, never trifle with your salvation, never trifle with God's truth. Remember, oh remember, that nothing but truth in the inward parts can save us, that God is a God of truth; therefore it is he reveals to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel; hereby they show themselves fitted for God's service.

Perhaps I had better in this part just run for a few moments a contrast. Here is a number of persons professing to be servants of God. The Lord says to one, Here is some money for you; here are five talents for you, five talents of money; and to another, I don't think you are quite so sharp in business, so I will give you two talents; and then to another, You profess to serve me. Oh yes, I am wonderful. Well, as you are so exceedingly good, I will give you only one talent, as I have not much opinion of you. Now if these talents represent God's truth (and God's truth answereth all things), this is the capital they had to trade with. So the man with the five talents went trading on, and when the Lord came—Well, how do you get on? Why, Lord, I have gained by thy truth twice as much as I had before. Do you mean to say you like my truth twice as well as you did? Yes, Lord, I do. Then the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof is more than fine gold and rubies; all things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto it—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The next is poor little two talents. Well, how do you get on? I have got on as well as I could, Lord; I certainly do love thy truth more than ever; thy two talents have gained me two more; I have not got on like my brother—he has got ten; he has got on faster than I have. That is because I gave him more grace; he has not got on so well from anything of his own;—there is a difference of distribution of gifts; and the Holy Spirit giveth to every man severally as he will. So unto this one he saith, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant;" you are as good and faithful as the other; if you have not gained so much, you had not so much to trade with; but you love my truth; "enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Now, one talent, what do you say? Well, I have told the people to do their duty, and that Jesus Christ is an austere man; and as to that money that was given to me, I didn't think it was a kind of coin that would not do for this world, for the world didn't like it; they say it is bad coin. If I take election, they chink it, and say it is bad money; and so of predestination, and mediatorial perfection, and a covenant ordered in all things and sure;—they say it is bad money, and call me Antinomian, and that I belong to the smashers, and I don't know what will become of me if I trade with it; besides, the Pope has had a great many put to death for trading with free-grace money. Well, but the others found that this money was current coin in this world for the good of souls, and that it was good coin with God in the upper world, for that is the capital we shall trade with in the upper world. Ah, but I didn't think it was respectable, and the learned did not approve of it, and so I hid it. What have you traded with, then? Anything I could get—duties, and doings, and prayers, and so on; I consider I have done very well, much better than if I had circulated such coin as that; everybody said it was bad money, and I thought it was. Oh, very well, then, take it from him, and give it to him that hath the ten talents, for he that hath shall still have, and that more abundantly. The more we love the Lord, the more he will manifest his love to us; the more he gives, the more he will give; bless the Lord, there is no limit to the store she has at command. "Cast him into outer darkness; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." You see that man proved himself unfit to serve God; he knew better in his own eyes in what way God ought to be served, or prayed to, and stood out for, than God himself. But again;—Well, you want to be religious. Yes, I want some religious work to do. Very well, go into the vineyard. You want some religious work to do. Yes. Very well, go into the vineyard. You want something to do. Yes. Very well, go into the vineyard. By and by the Master comes round, and he begins at the last, and gives to them a penny. Why, say the others, that's as much as we had; we have been better than they. We have not been transgressors, not like that prodigal, not

like that publican; we have been very good. Then you don't like my service? No. Well, but is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? There is that doctrine of sovereignty; I won't have that; I will not come and hear this man again. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" Oh no, Lord, I must not do that; it is quite an insult to the taste of the public; and brings one into collision with the opinion of the public. "And is thine eye evil because I am good?" These were sent away. But those who were contented to work, they got their penny, came again, and went on, and they were the chosen servants. So then if you murmur at his sovereignty, at his goodness, you will thereby prove yourself unfit for his service. Again, there are two classes going to meet the Bridegroom. Now you know the proposition we started with,—there must be a full assurance of faith in God's truth; that is, a full assurance that his truth is his truth, and never can fail. There were two classes of people, and the wise ones took the truth with them. Ah, saith the wise one, this is the blessed promise that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets took; and the Lord, when he sent his disciples out to the ends of the earth, said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." They took that truth with them, and that was the oil; and if we take this with us, our lamps will never go out; God's truth will always bring us light, will always keep our lamps burning. We may be under water, or in the water—let us be where we may, it will always keep our lamps burning. But the others said, Well, it does not matter about particular doctrines; so they did not take the truth with them; the consequence was, their lamps went out. Now you know that words are in the word of God compared to oil. I will mention two Scriptures in order to help out this matter about the oil that the one did take and the other did not. Ah, say you, I thought the oil was grace. What do you mean by grace. Grace means the favour of God; and you cannot have the favour of God contrary to the truth of God; the truth of God is declarative of the favour of God. Grace means favour. I believe a great many people use the word "grace" with no definite idea in their own minds as to what they mean,—something mystic about it. Let us be plain in this solemn and all important matter. Now words are in the word of God compared sometimes to oil. Hence the flatterer, yet an enemy in his heart,—“His words are smoother than oil;” and again, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil.” Here words are compared to oil. And may we not also say, if the question be asked, what is the mystical and spiritual meaning of the good Samaritan pouring in oil and wine?—does not the truth come to us sometimes with healing power? Does not the truth come to us sometimes like wine to cheer our hearts? Yea, all three of those similes used in the 104th Psalm,—“Oil to make man's face to shine;” and does not the word of the Lord sometimes make our countenance as it were glisten with gladness and pleasure? And you read of “bread which strengtheneth man's heart.” Does not the word of the Lord strengthen our heart? And you read of “wine that maketh glad the heart of man;” and “heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop; but a good word maketh it glad.” God's truth, then, is the oil which the wise took and the foolish did not, take, therefore, the lamps of the one went on burning, and the lamps of the others went out. How can you extinguish God's truth? Take that with you, and then you have the lamp; as saith David, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Here, then, in order to have fitness to serve God, there must be an assurance of God's truth.

Now if what I have said on this matter be true, what a solemn thing it is. What multitudes are professedly serving God, and at the same time unacquainted with their need of his truth, and so they set that truth aside. Hence it is written, “In vain do they worship

me;"—they do venerate me, they do revere my name, and they do pay some respect to my ways, but it is all in vain, because "their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men." Only think of me fearing God by the Pope! I should not like to do that. I don't like second-hand work. If a Roman Catholic priest were to say to me,—Now you had better come into the fear of God by the Pope; I should say, No, I don't like second-hand things; I shall go to head-quarters at once. Who is that, he would say? Why, I should say, the devil; I will go to the devil at once; I will have no second-hand work; for that such fear does come from the devil I have no more doubt than I have that I am standing in the pulpit this morning: it is one thing to fear God by human traditions, human ceremonies, human authority, and another thing to fear him from your own personal experience of the great fact that your salvation lies with God, and with God only: from him only cometh your salvation. Thus then this full assurance of what God's truth is will enable you to serve him acceptably.

Now just apply the definition I have given—full assurance of God's truth—to the dear Saviour, as the great essential qualification in him. Oh, how this shone in him. Hear what he saith about it himself in prophecy. "Therefore have I set my face like a flint." That's it;—so should you. You are in your avocations in the world, and you are among enemies; never mind, you must set your face for God like a flint; fear no man, or woman either, or devils either. Set your face like a flint, and ask yourself whether you have in your soul that sentiment expressed by Joshua, which our translation rather obscures;—"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." If our translators had kindly given us the original word translated Lord there, it would have been more emphatic; because Joshua intends a contrast between the true God and false gods; therefore if you read it this way, it does to my mind read with greater emphasis and force:—"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah." You serve Chemosh, Baal, Dagon, and Ashtaroth if you like; as for me and these I reckon my house, we will serve Jehovah. And so you will find that all those men that proved themselves fitted for God's service set their faces like a flint. Hence saith the Lord to Jeremiah, "Be not afraid of their faces, lest I confound thee before them." Be as an iron pillar, a brazen wall, a defenced city; set your face like a flint; be determined for Christ, for truth, for God, really decided, and you will get on fast enough; God will be with you;—Them that honour me I will honour." And this applies to ministers. It is right a minister should listen to the counsel of his deacons upon many things, and there are some things upon which he must not consult any one deacon, or anybody else. If he feels there is a service for him to do, he must set his face like a flint, on he must rush, and must not be moved one way or the other by a few individual opinions; he must look at the general result; and if the general result be good, he feels that the Lord is with him. "Onward" must ever be his watchword. "Why criest thou unto me? speak to the people, that they go forward." But, Lord, here is a mighty ocean before us. Never mind; stretch out thy rod over the sea, it shall divide, I will be with thee, and thou shalt stand upon the opposite shore triumphant, and shalt sing the blessed truth, "The Lord hath triumphed gloriously." I am a thorough Baptist, and in these things just what I wish all you to be, namely, independents. I wish every one of you to judge for yourselves. Now Jesus Christ, then, set his face like a flint;—"and I know that I shall not be ashamed." Let me ask this assembly, in all the happiness and strength of my soul, were not those words of the Saviour realized? Was he ashamed, can he be ashamed? No, never, never. All his adversaries must be ashamed, but he never. He did indeed despise the shame, survive the shame; he entered into eternal glory, sees the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. But if you could have taken away from the Saviour his assurance of God's

truth, as to which way he was to go; he might have hesitated here and there, and would not have known which way to go, what to do, nor anything else. But did the Saviour ever hesitate, waver, stagger, or halt between two opinions? Was he not always of the same mind? did he not go right on with his wonderful work until he said, "It is finished?" Here then are God's chosen servants; Christ was God's chosen servant, and the people are brought to know their need of him, and the truth of God by him; these are they that are chosen, God chooses them now to be his servants, and employs them in his service.

Secondly, just a word or two upon *the variety of ways in which such persons are to serve the Lord.* Now the people of God must serve the Lord in one and every way according to their gifts and their circumstances. Those of you whose lot it is to be very poor, and who therefore cannot serve the Lord by ministering any help to his cause or to his poor, you yourselves being among the poor, I will tell you how you are to serve the Lord. First, by earnest prayer, and by abiding by the truth, and living the truth among the people where you are placed. Well, that man is poor, but they will say,—he is a godly man; that man is poor, but he fears God; that man is poor, but he seems very cheerful; that man is poor, and tried, but there is something about him very extraordinary. That Lazarus at the rich man's gate is full of sores, but he doesn't seem to mind the sores or his poverty. Ah, in this way you will be a practical and living witness of God's truth; in this way you will bring honour to his name. Therefore if he has chosen you to serve him in this way, be thankful he has chosen you to serve him at all. It is a great thing to exemplify sustaining grace. I have often admired the question put by Alexander the Great to Abdolonomous, a poor man in Gaza. Alexander had conquered Gaza, and wanted some man to be king, to put it under his dominion. This man was very poor; and he was called before Alexander, who said to him, "Abdalonomous, with what patience didst thou bear thy poverty?" "Would to the gods," he replied, "I might wear that crown with as much patience as I have borne my poverty." Ah, said Alexander, you're the man I've been looking for; you're fit for my service. My hearer, if thy poverty cannot move thee from God's truth, it is a means of proving the stability of thy faith, the reality of thy love to God, to Christ, and that thou art willing to be poor, or anything he is pleased to make thee, rather than part with his blessed truth. And as to those of you that have it in your power the Lord having prospered you, to serve him by ministering to his cause and to his poor, perhaps you may not be able to say much;—I have found in our congregation some of the least sayers have been the greatest doers. See what the Lord has enabled you to do already. Why you are the last congregation under the heavens that ought to be discouraged in the service of the Lord, or slack handed, or backward wherever that which you can minister is needed, seeing what the Lord has already done for you. And the Lord treasures up every little thing that you do for his cause. I wish I could treasure up the works of the Lord in my mind as he treasures up mine. What, does he? say you. Yes, every one; every sermon I preach the Lord sets down to my account, every prayer. Just the same with you; every prayer you pray and everything you do he sets down to your account; but he will not set your sins down to your account, he has blotted them out, forgiven and forgotten them.

A COURSE OF LECTURES, by Mr. WELLS, upon the "BOOK OF REVELATION," every *Thursday Evening*, at the Surrey Tabernacle, at a quarter-past Seven, until further notice.