

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE WONDROUS COVENANT.

A SERMON

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31ST, 1912,

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNAACLE, NEWINGTON.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”—Heb. viii. 10.

THE doctrine of the divine covenant lies at the root of all true theology. It has been said that he who well understands the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is a master in divinity. I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scripture are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenants of law and of grace. May God grant us now the power to instruct, and you the grace to receive instruction on this vital subject.

The human race in the order of history, so far as this world is concerned, first stood in subjection to God under the covenant of works. Adam was the representative man. A certain law was given him. If he kept it, he and all his posterity would be blessed as the result of obedience. If he broke it, he would incur the curse himself, and entail it on all represented by him. That covenant our first father broke. He fell; he failed to fulfil his obligations; in his fall he involved us all, for we were all in his loins, and he represented us before God. Our ruin, then, was complete before we were born; we were ruined by him who stood as our first representative. To be saved by the works of the law is impossible, for under that covenant we are already lost. If saved at all it must be on quite a different plan, not on the plan of doing and being rewarded for it, for that has been tried, and the representative man upon whom it was tried has failed for us all. We have all failed in his failure; it is hopeless, therefore, to expect to win divine favour by anything that we can do, or merit divine blessing by way of reward.

But divine mercy has interposed, and provided a plan of salvation from the fall. That plan is another covenant, a covenant made with Christ Jesus the Son of God, who is fitly called by the apostle, "the Second Adam," because he stood again as the representative of men. Now, the second covenant, so far as Christ was concerned, was a covenant of works quite as much as the other. It was on this wise. Christ shall come into the world and perfectly obey the divine law. He shall also, inasmuch as the first Adam has broken the law, suffer the penalty of sin. If he shall do both of these, then all whom he represents shall be blessed in his blessedness, and saved because of his merit. You see, then, that until our Lord came into this world it was a covenant of works towards him. He had certain works to perform, upon condition of which certain blessings should be given to us. Our Lord has kept that covenant. His part of it has been fulfilled to the last letter. There is no commandment which he has not honoured; there is no penalty of the broken law which he has not endured. He became a servant and obedient, yea, obedient to death, even the death of the cross. He has thus done what the first Adam could not accomplish, and he has retrieved what the first Adam forfeited by his transgressions. He has established the covenant, and now it ceases to be a covenant of works, for the works are all done.

"Jesus did them, did them all,
Long, long ago."

And now what remaineth of the covenant? God on his part has solemnly pledged himself to give undeserved favour to as many as were represented in Christ Jesus. For as many as the Saviour died for, there is stored up a boundless mass of blessing which shall be given to them, not through their works, but as the sovereign gift of the grace of God, according to his covenant promise by which they shall be saved.

Behold, my brethren, the hope of the sons of men. The hope of their saving themselves is crushed, for they are already lost. The hope of their being saved by work is a fallacious one, for they cannot keep the law; they have already broken it. But there is a way of salvation opened on this wise. Whosoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, receives and partakes of the bliss which Christ has bought. All the blessings which belong to the covenant of grace through the work of Christ shall belong to every soul that believeth in Jesus. Whosoever worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, unto him shall the blessing of the new covenant of grace be undoubtedly given.

I hope that this explanation is plain enough. If Adam had kept the law we should have been blessed by his keeping it. He broke it, and we have been cursed through him. Now the second Adam, Christ Jesus, has kept the law, we are, therefore, if believers, represented in Christ and blessed with the results of the

obedience of Jesus Christ to his Father's will. He said of old, "Lo, I come, to do thy will, O God! thy law is my delight." He has done that will, and the blessings of grace are now freely given to the sons of men.

I shall ask your attention then, first, to the *privileges of the covenant of grace*; and, secondly, to the *parties concerned in it*. This will be quite enough, I am sure, for consideration this evening during the brief period allotted to our sermon.

I. AS TO THE PRIVILEGES OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

The first privilege is, that to *as many as are interested in it there shall be given an illumination of their minds*. "I will put my law in their minds." By nature we are dark towards God's will. Conscience keeps up in us a sort of broken recollection of what God's will was. It is a monument of God's will, but it is often hardly legible. A man does not care to read it, he is averse to what he reads there. "Their foolish heart was dark," is the expression of Scripture with regard to the mind of man. But the Holy Spirit is promised to those interested in the covenant. He shall come upon their minds and shed light instead of darkness, illuminating them as to what the will of God is. The ungodly man has some degree of light, but it is merely intellectual. It is a light that he does not love. He loves darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil. But where the Holy Spirit comes, he floods the soul with a divine lustre, in which the soul delights and desires to participate to the fullest degree. Brethren, the renewed man, the man under the covenant of grace, does not need constantly to resort to his Bible to learn what he ought to do, nor to go to some fellow-Christian to ask instruction. He has not got the law of God now written on a table of stone, or upon parchment, or upon paper; he has got the law written upon his own mind. There is now a divine, infallible Spirit dwelling within him which tells him the right and the wrong, and by this he speedily discerns between the good and the evil. He no longer puts darkness for light, and light for darkness, bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. His mind is enlightened as to the true holiness and the true purity which God requires.

Just mark the men to whom this light comes. By nature some of them are deeply depraved. All of them are depraved, but by practice some of them become yet further dark. Is it not marvellous that a poor heathen who scarcely seemed to recognize the distinction between right and wrong, before the Spirit of God entered his mind, has afterwards, without needing to be taught all the precepts individually, received at once the quick light of a tender conscience, which has led him to know the right and love it, and to see the evil and eschew it. If you want to civilize the world it must be by preaching the gospel. If you want to have men well instructed as to the right and the wrong, it must be by this divine instruction which only God himself can impart. "I will do it," and oh! how blessedly he doeth it, when he takes the man that loved evil and called it good, and so sheds a divine beam into his

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soul, that henceforth he cannot be perverse, cannot be obstinate, but submits himself to the divine will. That is one of the first blessings of the covenant—the illumination of the understanding.

The next blessing is, "*And I will write my law in their hearts.*" This is more than knowing the law—ininitely more. "I will write the law, not merely on their understandings, where it may guide them, but in their hearts where it shall lead them." Brethren, the Holy Spirit makes men love the will of God, makes them delight in all in which God delights, and abhor that which God abhorreth. It is well said in the text that God will do this, for certainly it is not what a man can do for himself. The Ethiopian might sooner change his skin or the leopard his spots. It is not what the minister can do, for though he may preach to the ear he cannot write God's law on the affections. I have marvelled at the expression used in the text, "I will write my law in their hearts." To write *on* a heart must be difficult work, but to write *in* a heart, in the very centre of the heart, who can do this but God? A man cuts his name upon a tree in the bark, and there it stands, and the letters grow with the tree; but to cut his name in the heart of the tree—how shall he accomplish this? And yet God doth divinely engrave his will and his law in the very heart and nature of man!

I know what the notion is about Christian people, that they do not conform to this and that custom because they are afraid; they would like to revel in the vanities of the world, but they do not care to encounter the penalties. Ah! ye sons of men, ye comprehend not the mysterious work of the Spirit! He doeth nothing of this sort. He maketh not the child of God to be a serf, a slave, in fear of bondage, but he so changes the nature of men that they do not love what they once loved; they turn away with loathing from the things they once delighted in, and can no more indulge in the sins which were once sweet to them than an angel could plunge himself down and wallow in the mire with the swine. Oh! this is a gracious work, and this is a blessed covenant in which it is promised that we shall be taught the right, to know and love the right, and to do the right with a willing mind.

Am I addressing some to-night who have been saying, "I wish I could be saved." What do you mean by that? Do you mean you wish you might escape from hell? Ah! well, I would to God you had another wish, namely, "Oh, that I could escape from sin! Oh, that I could be made pure! Oh, that my passions could be bridled! Oh, that my longings and my likings could be changed!" If that is your wish see what a gospel I have to preach to you. I have not to come and tell you—do this, and do not do that. Moses tells you that, and the preacher of the law speaks to you after that fashion, but I, the preacher of the gospel, unveiling the covenant of grace to-night, tell you that Jesus Christ has done such a work for sinners that God now for Christ's sake comes to them, makes them see the right, and by a divine work upon them and in them makes them love holiness and follow after righteousness.

I protest, I count this one of the greatest blessings of which ever tongue could speak. I would sooner be holy than happy if the two things could be divorced. Were it possible for a man always to sorrow and yet to be pure, I would choose the sorrow if I might win the purity; for, beloved, to be free from the power of sin, to be made to love holiness, though I have spoken after the manner of men to you, is true happiness. A man that is holy is in order with the creation; he is in harmony with God. It is impossible for that man long to suffer. He may for awhile endure for his lasting good, but as sure as God is happy the holy must be happy. This world is not so constituted that in the long run holiness shall go with sorrow, for in eternity God shall show that to be pure is to be blessed, to be obedient to the divine will is to be eternally glorified. In preaching to you, then, these two blessings of the covenant I have virtually preached to you the open kingdom of heaven, open to all such whom God's grace shall look upon with an eye of mercy.

The next blessing of the covenant is—"I will be to them a God." If any ask me what this means, I must reply, Give me a month to consider over it. And when I had considered the text for a month, I should ask another month; and when I had waited a year, I should ask another year; and when I had waited till I grew grey, I would still ask the postponement of any attempt to fully open it up until eternity. "I will be to them a God." Now, mark you, where the Spirit of God has come to teach you the divine will, and make you love the divine will, God becomes to you—What! a father? Ay, a loving, tender Father. A shepherd? Ay, a watchful Guardian of his flock. A friend? Ay, a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. A rock? A refuge? A fortress? A high tower? A castle of defence? A home? A heaven? Ay, all that, but when he said "I will be their God," he said more than all these put together, for "I will be to them a God," comprehendeth all gracious titles, all blessed promises, and all divine privileges. It comprehendeth—ay, now I halt, for this is infinite, and the infinite comprehendeth all blessings. "I will be to them a God." Do you want provision? The cattle on a thousand hills are his; it is nothing to him to give; it will not impoverish him; he will give to you like a God. Do you want comfort? He is the God of all consolation; he will comfort you like a God. Do you want guidance? There is infinite wisdom waiting at your beck. Do you want support? There is eternal power, the same which guards the everlasting hills waiting to be your stay. Do you want grace? He delighteth in mercy, and all that mercy is yours. Every attribute of God belongs to his people in covenant with him. All that God is or can be—and what is there not in that?—all that you can conceive and more; all the angels have and more; all that heaven is and more; all that is in Christ, even the boundless fulness of Godhead—all this belongs to you, if you are in covenant with God through Jesus Christ. How rich, how blessed, how august, how noble are those in covenant with God, confederate

with heaven! Infinity belongs to you. Lift up your head, O child of God, and rejoice in a promise that I cannot expound, and you cannot explore. There I must leave it; it is a deep which we strive in vain to fathom.

Notice the next blessing, "*And they shall be to me a people.*" All flesh belongs to God in a certain sense. All men are his by rights of creation, and he hath an infinite sovereignty over them. But he looks down upon the sons of men, and he selects some, and he says, "These shall be my people, not the rest; these shall be my peculiar people." When the King of Navarre was fighting for his throne, the writer who hymns the battle, says—

"He looked upon the foemen, and his glance was stern and high;
He looked upon his people, and the tear was in his eye."

And when he saw some of the French in arms against him—

"Then out spoke gentle Henry, No Frenchman is my foe,
Down, down, with every foreigner, but let your brethren go."

The king looked for his people even if they were in rebellion against him, and he had a different thought towards them from what he had towards others. "Let them go," he seemed to say, "they are my people." So, mark you, in the great battles and strifes of this world, when God lets loose the dread artillery of heaven his glance is stern upon his enemies, but the tear is in his eye towards his people. He is always tender towards them. "Spare my people," saith he, and the angels interpose lest these chosen ones should dash their feet against a stone.

People have their treasures, their pearls, their jewels, their rubies, their diamonds, and these are their peculiar store. Now, all in the covenant of grace are the peculiar store of God. He values them above all things else besides. In fact, he keeps the world spinning for them. The world is but a scaffold for the Church. He will send creation packing when once it has done with his saints; yea, sun, and moon, and stars shall pass away like worn-out rags when once he has gathered together his own elect, and enfolded them for ever within the safety of the walls of heaven. For them time moves; for them the world exists. He measures the nations according to their number, and he makes the very stars of heaven to fight against their enemies, and to defend them against their foes. "They shall be to me a people." The favour which is contained in such love it is not for tongue to express. Perhaps on some of those quiet resting-places prepared for the saints in heaven, it shall be a part of our eternal enjoyment to contemplate the heights and depths of these golden lines.

II. And now, brethren, I wish I had time to go over the other parts contained in the eleventh and twelfth verses of the chapter, but I have not, for I have a practical business to do, and it is to enquire—FOR WHOM HAS GOD MADE THIS COVENANT?

I said he made it with Christ, but he made it with Christ as the representative of his people. The question to-night for you, and for me, and for each one is, "Am I interested in Christ? Did Christ Jesus stand for me?" Now, if I were to say that Christ was the representative of the whole world you would not find any substantial advantage in that, because the great proportion of mankind being lost, whatever interest they may have in Christ, it is certainly of no beneficial value to them as to their eternal salvation. The question I ask is—have I such a special interest in Christ that this covenant holds good towards me; so that I shall have, or so that I now have, the enlightened mind, and the sanctified affections, and the possession of God to be my God? Be not deceived, my brethren; I cannot, and you cannot, turn over the leaves of the book of destiny. It is impossible for us to force our way into the cabinet chamber of the Eternal, I hope you are not deluded by superstitious ideas that you have had a revelation made to you, or that there has been some especial sound or dream which makes any one of you think you are a Christian.

Yet on sounder premises I will try to help you a little. Have you obtained already any of these covenant blessings? Have you got the enlightened mind? Do you find now that your spirit tells you which is the right and which is the wrong? Better still, have you got a love for that which is good? Have you a hatred for that which is evil? If so, as you have got one covenant blessing all the rest go with it. Now, men and women, have you passed through a great change. Have you come to hate that which you once loved, and to love that which you once hated? If you have, the covenant lies before you like Canaan before the ravished eyes of Moses on the top of the mountain. Look now, for it is yours. It flows with milk and honey, and it belongs to you, and you shall inherit it. But if there has been no such change wrought in you, I cannot hold you out any congratulation, but I thank God I can do what may serve your turn. I can hold you out divine direction, and the direction for the obtaining an interest in this covenant, and for clearing up your interest in it, is simple. It is contained in few words. Mark well those three words—"Believe and live," for whosoever believeth in Christ Jesus hath everlasting life, which is the blessing of the covenant. The argument is obvious. Having the blessing of the covenant you must needs be in the covenant, and being in the covenant Christ evidently must have representatively stood sponsor for you. But saith one, "What is it to believe in Christ?" Another word is a synonym to it. It is—*trust* Christ. "How do I know whether he died for me in particular?" Trust him whether thou knowest that or not. Jesus Christ is lifted up upon the cross of Calvary as the atonement for sin; and the proclamation is given out, "Look, look; look and live," and whosoever will cast away his self-righteousness, cast away everything upon which he now dependeth, and will come and trust in the finished work of our exalted Saviour, has in that very faith the token that he is one of those who were in Christ when he went

up to the cross and wrought out eternal redemption for his elect. I do not believe that Christ died on the tree to render men salvable, but to save them; not that some men might be saved "if," but really to redeem them, and he did there and then give himself a ransom; he there paid their debts, there cast their sins into the Red Sea, and there made a clean sweep of everything that could be laid to the charge of God's elect. Thou art one of his elect if thou believest. Christ died for thee if thou believest in him, and thy sins are forgiven thee. "Well but," saith one, "how about that change of nature?" It always comes with faith. It is the next akin to faith. Wherever there is genuine faith in Christ, faith works love. A sense of mercy breeds affection; affection to Christ breeds hatred to sin; hatred to sin purges the soul; the soul being purged the life is changed.

You must not begin with mending yourselves externally; you must begin with the new internal life, and it is thus to be had—the gift of God through simply believing in Jesus. A negro who had been for some time attending at a place of worship had imbibed the idea, and a very natural one too, that he was saved because he had been baptized. He had been to one of those places where they teach little children to say after this fashion, "In my baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." "Now," said he, very simply and very plainly, for so the catechism teaches, and a gross delusion it is, "I am saved because I have been baptized; that has made me a child of God." Now the good man who sought to instruct him better, could find no metaphor to suit his intellect better than taking him into the kitchen and showing him a black ink-bottle. "Now," said he, "I will wash it," and he washed the outside of the black ink-bottle, and invited the man to drink out of it because it was clean. "No," said the man, "it is all black; it is all black; it is not clean because you have washed the outside." "Ah!" said he, "and so it is with you; all that these drops of water could do for you, all that baptism could do for you, is to wash the outside, but that does not make you clean, for the filth is all within." Now, the work of the covenant of grace is not to wash the outside, not to cleanse the flesh, not to pass you through rites and ceremonies, and episcopal hands, but to wash the inside; to purge the heart, to cleanse the vitals, to renew the soul, and this is the only salvation that will ever bring a man to enter heaven. You may go to-night and renounce all your outward vices—I hope you will; you may go and practise all church ceremonies, and if they are scriptural I wish you may; but they will do nothing for you, nothing whatever as to your entering heaven, if you miss one thing else, that is, getting the covenant blessing of the renewed nature which can only be got as a gift of God through Jesus Christ, and as the result of a simple faith in him who did die upon the tree.

I press the work of self-examination upon you all, I press it earnestly upon you church members. It is of no avail that you

have been baptized; it is of no avail that you take the sacrament. Avail? Indeed it shall bring a greater responsibility and a curse upon you unless your hearts have been by the Holy Spirit made anew according to the covenant of promise. If you have not a new heart, oh! go to your chambers, fall upon your knees, and cry to God for it. May the Holy Spirit constrain you so to do, and while you are pleading remember the new heart comes from the bleeding heart, the changed nature comes from the suffering nature. You must look to Jesus, and looking to Jesus, know that—

“There is life in a look at the crucified one,
There is life at this moment for thee.”

These blessings I have spoken of seem to me to be a *great consolation and inspiration*. They are a great consolation to believers. You are in the covenant, my dear brother, but you tell me you are very poor. But God has said, “I will be your God.” Why, you are very rich. A man may not have a penny in the world, but if he has a diamond he is rich. So if a man has neither penny nor diamond, if he has his God he is rich. Ah, but your coat is threadbare, and you do not see where means are to come from to renew your apparel. “Consider the lilies how they grow; they toil not neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” You have the same God that the lilies have, and shall he so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, and shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? I said also it would be an inspiration, and I think it is. It is an inspiration for us all to work for Christ, because we are sure to have some results. I would, indeed I would, that the nations were converted to Christ. I would that all this London belonged to my Lord and Master, and that every street were inhabited by those who loved his name; but when I see sin abounding and the gospel often put to the rout, I fall back upon this: “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure; the Lord knoweth them that are his.” He shall have his own. The infernal powers shall not rob Christ, he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. Calvary does not mean defeat. Gethsemane a defeat? Impossible! The Mighty Man who went up to the cross to bleed and die for us, being also the Son of God, did not there achieve a defeat but a victory. He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. If some will not be saved others shall. If, being bidden, some count themselves not worthy to come to the feast others should be brought in, even the blind, and the halt and the lame, and the supper shall be furnished with guests. If they come not from England they shall come from the east, and from the west, from the north and from the south. If it should come to pass that Israel be not gathered, lo! the heathen shall be gathered

unto Christ. Ethiopia shall stretch out her arms, Sinim shall yield herself to the Redeemer; the desert-ranger shall bow the knee, and the far-off stranger enquire for Christ. Oh, no, beloved, the purposes of God are not frustrate; the eternal will of God is not defeated. Christ has died a glorious death, and he shall have a full reward for all his pain. "Therefore, be ye stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."
