

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

SOVEREIGNTY.

A SERMON

**PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING,
NOVEMBER 6TH, 1859,**

BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE,

BOROUGH ROAD.

" What if God, willing to skew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction ?" Romans ix. 22.1

THE original principle thrown into the mind of man by the great enemy of our souls; namely, that of substituting the sovereignty of the creature for the sovereignty of God, is a principle that shews itself every where; and as Satan originally planted that principle, God alone can eradicate it; God alone can undo what Satan did. Hence, Christ came to destroy the works of the devil; and this is the original, and I may say the root of all the works of the devil, in putting the sovereignty of the creature into the place of the sovereignty of the Creator; in putting his own satanic falsehood into the place of God's eternal truth; and hereby the enemy has assimilated man to himself ; so that as Satan is a liar and a murderer, so by nature is every man ; " Let God be true, and every man a liar." And as every man is thus a liar against his Maker, he is also a murderer. There was not one unregenerate man, not one unsanctified soul, that was not willing that Christ should be put to death ; it was only those who were partakers of discriminating grace, which had delivered them

from their blindness and their state by nature, they were the persons that consented not to the counsel and deed of them that crucified Jesus. And so that which fell upon the Saviour has from his day personally on earth to the present day fallen more or less upon his truth and upon his people. Such then is the powerful working of this direful principle of advocating human sovereignty in opposition to the sovereignty of God; that sovereignty which is essential to our eternal salvation. At the same time, of course, we reverentially and tremblingly acknowledge that there is a deep in the sovereignty of God, especially in that part of it we have this morning to attend to, that is altogether unfathomable; but it is put upon record by every prophet that ever lived, and by all the apostles, and by the Lord himself. Point me to one prophet that treated the sovereignty of God lightly; point me to one apostle that treated the sovereignty of God lightly; point me to one part of the Saviour's doctrine, in which he treated the sovereignty of God lightly. It was a matter of great solemnity with them all; and so it will be with us if we are taught of the blessed God.

I shall notice our text under the following four-fold form. First, the sin the living God ; the more clearly I see what a fearful condition I was in ; and, the more clearly I see the stupendous love of Him that could send. his Son to take my awful position ; and the more clearly I see the amazing love of Him that could. love a poor worm like me; and take the curse, the hell, the wrath due to me ; and not only so, but take me also into the bosom of his love, and engage in his eternal Suretyship responsibility, to see me safe through life, and safe through death, and. present me at last in all the' triumphs of his righteousness, and. with his sacrificial perfection. Oh, how can I love a God like this enough! How can I exalt a Saviour like this enough! How can I speak well enough of that Divine Teacher, that Eternal Spirit, that has left so many thousands where I once was, and where I still' should have been, but for God's absolute sovereignty in embracing me in his love, and not appointing me unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by the Lord. icsus Christ ? Men then are demeritively fitted for destruction ; sin deserves it, and. they deserve it by sin; on the other hand, seeing this is our state, there can be no escape but by him who is the Mediator ; and there can be no escape by him only in the perfection of his work. " The carnal mind is enmity against God." Man is therefore blind to what God really is ; he is shut up in unbelief, shut up in enmity. If a natural man got to heaven, he could not be happy there, because his enmity would go with him ; and he would do there as angels once did, he would fall, being a carnal man. Can he be happy even now in the church below ? Can he join with the saints in their soul-troubles, in their realizations of mercy ? Can he join with them to speak of the Saviour's name

as ointment poured. forth? The man is not fitted for it ; he is not at home there at all. 'What is he fitted for ? He is fitted for hell, for the company of devils, with whom he can join to blaspheme ; he can join with them in malice against God ; he can join with them in everything that is hellish and devilish. Therefore, man in this personal sense also, is fitted for destruction ; he is not fit for anything else. How many delusions are there abroad upon the matter of fitness for heaven. Your works fit you for heaven! Your repentance fit you for heaven ! No I Come to the Saviour's declaration, " Ye must be born again;" nothing short of this conviction of what we are ; nothing short of the slaying of this enmity, bringing us out of this blindness, and bringing us into reconciliation with God, can fit us for heaven. " Whom he did foreknow, he also did. predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Can you say that you have been brought to feel your need of that part of the line of life to be conformed to the image of his Son ? What is the image of his Son ? " He bath perfected for ever all them that are sanctified ;" that is the image, and you must be conformed to it. That is the true holiness, and that is the true righteousness. What do you say to that ? And whom he did predestinate, to be thus conformed to holiness and righteousness by the eternally perfect offering of Christ, " he also called ;" left not a particle of it with man ; called you ; made you feel discontented with what you were, and. where you were ; some of you brought like Saul of Tarsus ; others of you like Lydia, brought gradually along ; but all brought to renounce all confidence in the flesh ; and to receive the love of the truth. " Them he also justified ;" can you say you are at home in that.? The same people he also " glorified." Why, if the professing world were tested by this line of truth, how many would stand it ? Very few. In my time, I have read. a great many duty-faith men's sermons, or a great many duty-faith sermons ; and one thing has struck me very powerfully in reading them; it is this, that the farther off these men are in. their sermons from God's truth, the more they are at home, the more liberty they have, the more comfortably they preach ; but when they now and then, in order to delude us with the notion that they are Calvinists and. free grace men, when they now and. then hammer out, and stammer out, and labour out, and work out with great difficulty a high and dry doctrinal sermon, oh dear, what cold. work it is ; their zeal. dwindles to a spark. Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also ; and. if I am a lover of lies, I shall be at home in those lies, and especially if they are lies buttered with piety ; their words will be then softer and smoother than oil ; but they are nothing but lies still. On the other hand, if I am a lover of the truth, I shall be at home there, happy there, comfortable there, and nowhere else. Enmity and love are the two contrastive principles that run all through the Scriptures ; the enemy, the man that hates the truth, is an enemy, though he may come with all the

excellencies of an angel from heaven ; he comes with another gospel, he is an enemy, though he put on the garb of a friend ; he is a wolf, though he puts on sheep's clothing. On the other hand, the man that loves the truth, though he may have the faults of Noah, or Peter, or David, still he is a good man in spite of those faults, he is a friend. ; the others are enemies in spite of their excellencies.

II. Having made these few remarks, I go next to THE COUNSEL OF GOD. " What if God, willing to shew his wrath ?" There appear to me two purposes the great God had in view in suffering the fall of angels and of men the one purpose was that expressed in our text, that he might shew his wrath on the ground of their sins. This was one end he had in view ; He intended. there should be a hell, he intended to shew his wrath ; he intended that angels and men should suffer eternally on the account of their sins. Mind this—his decree here rests upon their sins ; he is in no shape or form whatever the author of their sins, but he is the author of the penalty due to sin ; it laid with him to appoint what penalty he pleased. Hence, in Job, after pointing out the judgments of God, " This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed. unto him by God." " God hath made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil." Oh, this is unfathomable ! what a deep truth is this ! Those of you who do not believe God's word concerning this, why, you admit there is a hell, you admit that some are there, and that it is fire that is never quenched, that it is everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. Then why, admitting that part of God's truth, do you deny the other ?—namely, that God never intended such persons to be in heaven, he never intended them to be anywhere else ? The other purpose for which he suffered the fall is expressed in the next verse, as well as in other scriptures, " And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had. afore prepared unto glory." Here then, man hath by his sin fitted himself for destruction ; but man hath not by his works fitted himself for salvation ; no. There is the distinction in the language ; I am willing to admit it ; that the vessels of mercy he hath afore prepared, that is, provided them ; when ? "From before the foundation of the world." They were chosen in Christ, given to Christ, and. he never refused them, and never will ; and they will never be taken from him, nor he ever taken from them. " What if God, willing,"— you, a little piece of clay ! Ah, but, say some, clay has no feeling. I know that; and the natural man has no feeling for God's truth, no right feeling ; he has no right feeling for God's Christ ; no right feeling for God's people. Here is the contrast then. Ah, but then, if this be so, it is of no use to strive. That it is not; that is just what I am aiming at this morning ; if any of you are striving, I am trying to stop it, to show you it is of

no use. That's discouraging, say you. Just what I want, to discourage you; I want to stop you; I want to see you leave off your formalities, your prayer-books, your empty doings, and fall down at the footstool of God's mercy ; and to make you feel that it is not of you that will, nor of you that run, but of God that sheweth mercy ; and then as soon as you leave off this empty, deluded striving, you will turn your head another way, you will view God in another light altogether ; you will be humbled deeply in the dust, you will become nothing ; and. that will be a sign and token that you are among his people. All the time you are striving to make matters right in a way contrary to his sovereignty, you are striving to accomplish what you can never do. It is God's counsel, then, that angels shall for their sins eternally suffer ; it is God's counsel that a part of the human race shall be vessels of wrath; and he has determined who they shall be ; he has not left the matter with man; no, no. " Esau have I hated ;" that is the man ; I have constituted him the object of my hatred. " Jacob have I loved ;" neither done good nor evil. God, in the exercise of his sovereignty, fixed upon which should be saved, and which should be lost ; it cannot be altered ; these two mountains of brass eternally stand, unshaken, immoveable ; men may nibble, and kick, and turn, and twist, and abuse their Maker ; but they will never overturn his eternal truth. No less in this chapter, than six great and prominent arguments, into which I cannot now enter, to shew up this very truth, that God has settled the matter, who shall and who shall not. A six-fold aspect he gives of this. First, that of Isaac and Ishmael ; God determined who should be the child of promise. Second, Jacob and Esau; God settled the matter. Third, in his testimony to Moses, " I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy ; I will have compassion upon whom I will." The fourth aspect is that of Pharaoh, " For this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth." The fifth is that of the potter and his clay ; and the sixth, is the substitution of the Gentiles for the Jews. That is the Apostle's train of argument, to show that God has eternally settled the matter who shall be saved and who shall be lost It is of no use mincing the matter : talking to men as though they could be saved if they will ; talking to men as though God Almighty was very unhappy because men will not be saved ; confounding a temporal dispensation with an eternal. Why, the temporal dispensation, where God. expostulated with men, the object of that dispensation was not eternal, and therefore no means were used corresponding with its being eternal ; but the objects the Gospel has in view are eternal ; and consequently, we have in that the Spirit in his eternity, Christ in his eternity, God the Father in his eternity. Where the object is eternal, there the means are eternal. The damnation of the sinner is eternal ; sin is the criminal cause, and the law is the legal cause; the

sovereignty of God the executive cause ; it lies with God. Sin is the criminal cause ; the law the legal cause ; the sovereignty of God the executive cause. There the matter stands ; the justice of God in the damnation of the lost.

III. Then comes THE CERTAINTY: " That he might make his power known." That is, in that way. He might have converted the whole world, instead of drowning them ; but that was not his will ; he was pleased to make his power known in his wrath, and not in his mercy. He could have converted the cities of the plain instead of burning them ; and he might have damned you instead of saving you ; mind that, do not forget that. If you have hard thoughts of God this morning while I am speaking to you, 'do not forget that ; I speak now to the real Christian, who may nevertheless, feel a little objection to what I am saying ; remember that he could have damned you instead of saving you; and therefore it does not become you to say anything against his majesty, or sovereignty, or power. The Lord. help you to put your mouth in the dust, and stand fast by that discriminating grace which has exempted you from the sword, and. saved you. He might have converted the Egyptians instead of drowning them, he could have done so. He could have converted the ancient nations instead of letting them walk on to destruction. He could have converted the whole Jewish nation as easily as only some thousands among them. And when a minister preaches a sermon, and there are three or four souls converted, if the minister were preaching to ten thousand instead of one thousand, God could convert the whole if he pleased to do so ; but he does not do so, because he will not ; " He hath mercy upon whom he will have mercy ; and whom he will he hardeneth." Hence, the world must be drowned, the cities of the plain must be destroyed. Ah, but, say you, he offered them a kind of chance. We shall come to that directly. The Jewish nation, he could have converted them ; and so the whole world now ; but he does not do so. Why not ? Because there is a people in whose condemnation he will make his wrath and power eternally known ; his power shall be employed to maintain every iota of his holy law; and every thunderbolt of his word shall be carried to its object ; every judgment must stand eternally good. I here throw in a gospel observation ; it is this—looking at matters in this way, just look at Jesus Christ. He stood. in the certainty of the curse ; hear his solemn words,—perhaps in all the Bible there are not words more solemn,—" If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But, no ; there was an omnipotent arm uplifted to wield the sword of justice; he is the Shepherd and. the Surety, and escape that sword he cannot ; there is an eternal certainty about it ; he endured. it; it was sure to come.

IV. But lastly, I come to THE ORDER ; " endured with much long-suf-

fering." The long suffering of the blessed God has in the Scriptures a two fold aspect ; one in relation to the ungodly, the other in relation to the godly.

First, Noah was a preacher of righteousness ; and by him the Holy Ghost testimonially strove with man for the reformation of the world ; and God gave them, all the time the ark was building, space to repent ; and had the old world have repented, as they ought to have done as rational, moral, and responsible beings, then the Flood. would not have come. The Lord gave Ahab space to repent, and he did repent, and deferred the judgment. He gave the Ninevites an opportunity to repent, and they did repent, and their city was spared. Jesus Christ gave the Jewish nation forty years in which to repent ; but they did not repent, and therefore the judgment came. If I am speaking this morning to an ungodly man, an enemy to any of God's people, he has given you space to repent, and if you repent, then temporal judgment may not cut you off ; but if you do not repent, but go on just as you are, you will fill up your measure ; and then presently some judgment, unlooked for by you, in a way you never dreamed of, will hurl you in the twinkling of an eye into the lowest hell. That is the aspect that the long-suffering of the blessed God bears towards the ungodly. Ah, but then, say you, the Holy Spirit strove. Give me an instance in all God's book wherein the Holy Ghost ever strove to convert a soul ; he never did such a thing, never. Give me one instance wherein the Father, wherein the Saviour, wherein the Holy Ghost, ever strove to convert a soul and bring him to God. Never, never. Striving implies a difficulty, and a possible failure. Did the Lord Jesus Christ strive to convert Saul of Tarsus ? Did the Lord Jesus Christ strive to raise the dead Lazarus ? Did the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost strive to prick the people in their hearts? Oh no, he comes in the universality of his power, takes hold of the dry bones) and. there is a great shaking among them ; he brings them together, lays sinews upon them ; clothes them with flesh, and covers them with skin, breaths into them, they stand upon their feet an exceeding great army ; they stand upon the vantage ground of conquests and victory. Did the Holy Spirit strive ? No no ; no such term as that is ever used in connection with the conversion of a soul. As well may you tell me that Jesus Christ will strive to get us out of the grave at the last day. The striving of the blessed Spirit, therefore, will mean' simply the Spirit working in Noah, and striving by Noah for the reformation of the world ; but what has that to do with matters that pertain to eternal salvation ? Then the other aspect of the longsuffering of the blessed God is in relation to his people. Oh, what will he not endure for the sake of his people ? Look at his long suffering in the days of Noah ; the chief reason of his longsuffering after all was that the Ark might be finished, and Noah saved. And if there had been ten good people

found in the cities of the plain, God, for the sake of those ten would have borne with the wickedness of all the rest; there is love for you, those of you that know his name. So in the Jewish nation ; could there have been retained within its bosom real Christians enough to have warded off the judgment, it would have been done ; but they persecuted them to the uttermost, every man and woman that professed the truth as it was in Christ Jesus. I should have liked, but space forbids, to have shewn the opposite effects that this testimony of God's sovereignty has upon opposite characters. The ungodly man says, this is awful to the last degree ; I will never go and hear that man again. There we see the truth, " whom he will be hardeneth." And I could never love such a God as that. That shews what you are. The duty-faith man says, well, I believe that to a certain extent ; but it ought not to be said much about. Sir, I ask you in the name of common sense, in the name of the church, in the name of angels, in the name of the great God, whether the Bible be a private or a public book ? Oh, say you, a public book. Well then, if God had recorded these solemn matters in some private book, and if there had been a conclave of persons chosen by the Lord, and they had received communications from him, as the Cardinals at Rome, the blasphemous wretches, pretend they have ; that they have certain oral traditions which have been specially communicated by the Holy Ghost to the church, for them to deal out as matters may require ; if such a thing existed, there would be some force in the argument that these things ought not to be made prominent. The Bible is every man's birthright ; it is a public book, and God intended it to be so ; and if these things be in the Bible,—as they most certainly are,—we must speak them out. Then what is the effect this will have upon the child of God ? It will humble him deeply into the dust ; and it will lead him to take the more earnest heed to that Gospel by which he is saved ; it will give him a deep sense of discriminating grace, it will make him worship the Saviour, cleave to him, walk in his way, and glory in his name. Some say, Ah, these doctrines lead to sin. Perhaps they lead you to it ; if you so hate them that they drive you to it, we have nothing to do with that; we know the effect they have upon us ; they endear the Saviour.