

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

WORKS OF FAITH

SERMON – by MR. JAMES WELLS

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“Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”—1 Timothy vi. 19.

Works, as evidences, are connected with the final acceptance of the people of God. Hence said the Savior, “Behold, I come quickly, and I will give unto every one of you according to your works;” and again, “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city;” and so many other scriptures. Is it not, then, important that we should look to this department, as well as to others, and see how matters stand with us here? For if our faith be not a practical faith, if our faith be alone, and without works, however sound we may be in creed, and however highly we may think of ourselves, yet we are informed that faith without works is dead. Then, of course, it may be asked, What will you say to infants? You believe in infant salvation. Yes, friends, I do. Well, you will say, where are their works? Well, if they had grown up, and had been called by grace, they would have practiced the works of faith; so what they would have done if they had been under circumstances to do it, is set to their account as much as though they had done it. Just so with the thief and many others that are called at the eleventh hour they are not in circumstances to do any works, or to follow any of those works that will come before you this morning; but they are set down to them as though they had done them, because they would have done them if they had been placed in the same circumstances that we are. And, indeed, we may here quote what the Savior said at the last, — “I was hungry, and ye gave me meat;” and so of the rest; —that cannot apply to all the people of God, for it is the lot of some to be poor all their days. We have some among us that I have known pretty well forty years, and they were poor, and they are poor, and I suppose they will die poor; —we have been helping them for pretty well forty years, and they have never had anything to give. Well, what do you say to such? Why, I say this, —that if they had anything to give, they would do so; so, the Lord accepts the will for the deed, where they have not wherewith to do the deed. “If there be a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.” It is our mercy, then, that the Lord is the Judge.

There are two main points or parts in our text. Here is first a foundation to be laid up in store against the time to come; secondly, the ultimate object, — “that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

First, here is a foundation to be laid up in store against the time to come. I think this places the practical works of the people of God in a very important light; but it will require great care this morning lest we legalize the text, and make it say something contrary to the freeness and fulness of that grace by which we are saved; and therefore I shall be very careful to point out the several different respects or senses in which the word “foundation” is used. “Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation.” There are no less—indeed, there are more, therefore I am perfectly safe in saying there are no less—than four different senses in which the word “foundation” is used, — “foundation” and “foundations,” —as applied to matters pertaining to eternal salvation. Let us, therefore, be careful to distinguish between the different kinds of foundations, lest we should put our works into the place of Christ, or into the place of some great essential of the everlasting gospel.

First, the Lord Jesus Christ is called the foundation; and he is called the foundation because of his righteousness; in other words, because of his mediatorial work. Let me make the matter plain to you, or rather show that the word of God makes the matter plain. The foundation of our misery and condemnation is in the fall of man. Adam being the root, by his fall the root became sinful, and so the branches are sinful; the root withered and died, and so the branches die. We have all died in Adam, for in him we sinned. The root was cast out, so are the branches; the root became, as it were, lost, condemned, so are the branches. The apostle in the 5th of Romans traces this matter out; he shows that on the one hand, as by one man’s offence, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, so by the obedience of one cometh the free gift upon all men unto justification of life; as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many are made righteous. So then Jesus Christ thus becomes the foundation; and if I can make it more clear by using the word I just now used—that of the root, —he is called the root. He is a holy root and therefore the branches are holy: he is a righteous root and therefore the branches are righteous; he is that root that is exceedingly fruitful, and therefore the branches are fruitful. Thus you will see that Jesus Christ is the foundation on account of his righteousness; - he has laid his righteous, his mediatorial work at the foundation of our eternal welfare; and as he can never wither, as he can never sin, and as his work can never give way, this foundation is, as we observed last Lord’s day morning, laid in Zion as a sure foundation. This is not the foundation spoken of in our text, No other foundation than Christ Jesus can be laid for eternal salvation; and sweet it is to rest upon such a foundation, —a righteous, holy, sure foundation. And I should think that proverb must refer to the dear Savior where Solomon says, “The righteous is an everlasting foundation;” and as Daniel says, “He hath brought in everlasting righteousness.” Ah, then, when we discover what we are by the first Adam, we shall renounce all that we are there; and as the first Adam is all and in all in our sinnership, so the Lord Jesus Christ is all and in all in our eternal salvation. It requires some deep experiences to beat us off from all other confidences, all other foundations, and have nothing to rest our soul’s welfare upon but that foundation which God has laid in Zion. This we will call the mediatorial foundation: —that is one of the senses in which the word “foundation” is used in the Holy Scriptures.

Secondly, the word “foundation” is used to express the beginning of the work of grace in the heart. And we ourselves sometimes speak in that manner; we say, We fear that that man has no foundation in him; we fear that his profession has no foundation; meaning, we fear that no work of grace is begun in his heart. The foundation is the beginning of the building; and it is very important the foundation should be good, or else how can the superstructure stand? And so this beginning of the work of grace in the heart, is called a foundation. Hence says the apostle, “Leaving” -that is, he was going to leave this part, and go on to set forth that eternal perfection we have in Christ, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again” —that is, not stating to you again, as I have stated it before— “the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God.” So you here observe that those two graces of the Spirit, repentance from dead works and faith toward God, are called the

foundation, because they are the beginning of the work of grace in the heart; for the reigning idea of the word “repentance” is more that of change than of sorrow. Sorrow is, I think almost the only idea that is attached generally to that word; but the original conveys another idea, even stronger than that; it signifies change. And so, when the Lord shone into our souls, and showed us our state as sinners, what a change it wrought! How did this world sink in our estimation then, and how did godliness rise! how did we then turn away from what we were, and turn to God! as the apostle says, “Ye turned from dumb idols to serve the living God.” “Faith toward God.” It is a great thing to be enabled to compare our experiences with the word of God, to prove that we have undergone that change, and that we have been blessed, not with the repentance merely of reformation, but the repentance of regeneration; for the repentance of regeneration stirs a man up, makes him unhappy, and keeps him more or less unhappy, until he realizes the blessedness of the man whose transgressions are forgiven, for Jesus Christ is exalted a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. So that wherever the foundation is real, wherever the work is begun, there will be a concern for the remission of sins, there will be a seeking after the realization of the forgiveness of sins; that man’s faith will not rest until it realizes something of the blessedness of forgiveness of sins; for there is no real peace with God without this. This is the second sense in which the word “foundation” is used; first, mediatorially; and secondly, the beginning of a work of grace in the heart.

Thirdly, the testimonies of God’s word are called foundations. Hence you find the city had twelve foundations, alluding to the testimonies of the apostles. And what were their testimonies? Why, that Jesus Christ lived and died for sinners according to the Scriptures, that he rose again according to the Scriptures, that he ascended up on high according to the Scriptures: that Jesus Christ came and did all that prediction said he should do. In these few thoughts are summed up their testimonies; and they are spoken of as foundations, because we can rest upon them. And if you wish me to receive the Pope as a foundation, you must excuse me if I say I should not know where to put him to. I go around the city, and I find the foundations are complete. The Pope comes and says, I am a foundation. Then I am sure I do not know where to put you. Here are the twelve, and you would make the thirteenth; and “every plant that my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up and every doctrine that God has not put into the Bible must be rooted up. So, I should not know where to put the Pope to. Let us, then, rejoice in these apostolic foundations. And they say that Peter was the foundation. Well, but the Lord said nothing materially more to Peter than he did to all the rest of the disciples. Hear what the apostle says upon this matter: “Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” Here we see all the apostles were in their testimonies, foundations, one just as much as the other. This is the third sense in which the word “foundation” is used. So, then, we have to rejoice that all these foundations are sure: the mediatorial foundation is sure; the beginning of the work of grace in the heart is sure to go on unto the day of Jesus Christ; and the testimonies of God are sure. Now they say the Pope is infallible. If there are any Catholics here this morning, you know you hold that the whole human race, the whole world, is given into the hands of the Pope. Well, then, I say this: —if he is infallible, why does he not demonstrate his infallibility by converting them all? That is what I want to know. If he would convert them all, then we should really begin to think whether there is not a little bit of infallibility about him. Oh, say some, but Jesus Christ does not convert all. Doesn’t he? Let us try it; “to the law and to the testimony;” and let us all see if Jesus Christ proved his infallibility: if he did not, with reverence be it said, who could trust their souls with him? if he doth not, who could lean upon him for eternity? if he doth not, where then is the great testimony concerning him that he should not fail nor be discouraged? Now Jesus Christ infallibly converts all that are given to him. Mark the language “Thou hast given him” —here is infallibility if you like— “power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life unto as many as thou hast given him.” And he says, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring,” without the Pope to

help me, “and there shall be one fold and one shepherd; and none shall pluck them out of my hands.” So, I say we have all the infallibility in the dear Savior that we can desire. Let, then, the Pope prove his infallibility by converting all that are given into his hands. I say it is an eternal disgrace to the Pope and to all that uphold him if the whole world be given into his hands to save them, and he lets ninety-nine out of a hundred go to hell; it is an eternal disgrace to him to suffer such a thing as that. If they are given into his hands, why does he not save them? All that are given into the hands of Christ he saves; and let the Pope do the same—save all that are given into his hands; then we shall have some little idea that there may be some truth in that which we now know to be a huge lie. Jesus Christ does not drag those whom he saves through a purgatory. Ah, say they, don’t you blame his Holiness for not saving all, for Jesus Christ could not save all; Jesus Christ tried, and couldn’t. How do you prove it? Why, by the 23rd of Matthew: — “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her Chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” They quote that as a proof of the Savior’s fallibility. Now the question there was not a question of salvation; the gathering them together there as a hen doth, her chickens was not a question of saving repentance, nor a question of salvation, nor did the Savior fail, the Savior was then speaking in the language of the old covenant and the question there was their repentance of persecuting Christ. Now mark; “Thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee.” Now, Jerusalem, — you rulers, let me gather the people together; I will speak to them from God’s word, and if they will repent of that murderous conduct of their forefathers and turn from it, and cease from persecuting me, cease from seeking my life, cease to be blind followers of the priests and rulers, and repent, then the nation shall not be destroyed. Just as I spared Nineveh, so would I thus spare you; for if the mighty works that have been done in you had been done in Sodom, the city would have remained to this day. It was a question, therefore, of the repentance of reformation, and the continuation of their city, instead of its destruction. Ah, if the Savior had been speaking in the language of the new covenant, would he have said, “I would have gathered you together, and ye would not”? Ask yourselves the question, when he said to anyone, “Follow thou me,” did he go and ask the rulers whether he should make that man follow him or not? When he said, “Son, thy sins are forgiven thee,” did he first go and ask the rulers whether he might say so or not? And when he went up into a mountain, he called unto him whom he would, and they came unto him/ So, then, we explain those scriptures by the two dispensations—the one was that question of repentance such as that of the Ninevites, which preserved their city; what a huge and blasphemous lie is the Pope’s pretended infallibility! but when we come to salvation matters, “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life unto as many as thou hast given him.” Thus, we have three of the different senses in which the word “foundation” is used; the mediatorial work of Christ; the beginning of the work of grace in the heart, and the testimonies of God’s blessed word. And look at these foundations—they are all firm; none of them can give way. What said the Psalmist in the 11th Psalm? “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Be destroyed too—that would be the result; but the foundations remain, and these foundations are in the holy mountains of eternity firm forever.

Then we come to the fourth foundation—the works of the Christian. “Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation.” Now this means an outward, evidential foundation. Let us trace this out as concisely as possible, and see whether our faith be of this practical kind that we shall not be wanting in an evidential foundation. There must be something to evidence, there must be something to prove; for the Lord will reward us according to our works, and we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive the things done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil. These scriptures clearly show that there must be a practical faith, or else it is of no avail. First, then, faith must be a self-sacrificing faith; that is the first feature I will notice; that is to say, if our faith be real it will work by love, and the consequence will be, there will be nothing so dear to us as our God. We shall look at God our Father, and shall see him in his love, and shall love him; we shall look at the blessed Redeemer, and see him in his

work of love, and shall love him; we shall look at the Holy Spirit in his testimonies of love, and shall love him. Therefore, whatever the Lord calls upon us to part with, we shall not hesitate, but be quite willing to part with it. Let us take Abraham as an instance. "Was not Abraham our father," says James "justified by works?" Our equitable justification is by the righteousness of Jesus Christ; but our evidential justification is known by works. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" That is, Isaac being thus dear to him, when God commanded him to give this up, he gave it up rather than give up God's truth. And so James says, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works?" that is, his faith worked by love. Well, he says, I love God, and God is able to raise him up again; it seems a strange thing that the very person from whom the Messiah is to descend, that the very child who is a child of promise, is thus to be taken away; therefore, I can only account that God is able to raise him from the dead. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect. And the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness," evidential righteousness, "and he was called the Friend of God." Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Let us come home to our own souls here. I do trust in this assembly there are many hundreds of you with whom the truth of God is, in such a way that you understand its value; that the words find an entire, voluntary, and complete response in your souls where it is said, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." Whatever your darkness, and deadness, and doubts and fears may be, can you say that you never have met yet, and do not believe you ever can, with anything of so much value as the truth of God? Take, for instance, only one feature of that truth—that "as he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, In blessing I will bless thee; in multiplying I will multiply thee." Ah, can you say that this testimony of the blessed God is more to you, whatever your feelings may be, in your understanding, in your judgment, and in your best affection, it is more to you than anything else? This is one step, then, in practical faith—practically to realize the supreme endearment of God's eternal truth.

The second step in this practical faith that I shall concisely notice is that of sterling fidelity—standing by the truth and cause of God under all circumstances. I shall make no apology for following out the word of the Lord, as James there goes on, "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" There were three parts in the conduct of Rahab: the first was, she received them; that was one evidence of the reality of her conviction, as expressed by herself; and it was, in the next place, a proof that she could not side with the Canaanites against the Israel of God, or against the God of Israel; but at the risk of her life she received them. This was one step in this matter, and the apostle Paul mentions one step; James mentions the first and last step. If we are taught of God, and we meet with a minister of God, and he stands manifest to us as a minister of God, we receive him as circumstances may direct; and if we meet with a person who stands manifest to us a child of God, we receive him as such; and if under such circumstances that their lives were in danger, and we could in any way shelter them from that danger, if our faith be real we should do so. John says, "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." It is true this is going into points that we do not know much of in our day, but still we have the same spirit; every Christian has a martyr's spirit; it is not every Christian's lot to be a martyr, but he has a martyr's spirit, if the truth be more to him than anything else. Rahab, then, is mentioned three times in the New Testament, because of her great and sterling fidelity. She is mentioned in most honorable association in the 5th verse of the 1st chapter of Matthew; then in the 31st verse of the 11th chapter of Hebrews— "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace;" would not have hurt a hair of their heads; she placed herself in danger, and received them. Then James, in his 2nd chapter and 25th verse, says, "She received them, and sent them out another way." "Was not Rahab justified by works?" that is, her receiving them, and hiding them, and sending them off safely—finishing the work; for if she had not completed it, her faith would have failed; and if she herself had not been saved at last through faith, the faith of the spies would have failed. But none of it failed; as her work was complete towards he

spies, so the work of the spies was complete towards her. As the Holy Spirit made her faith complete towards God, God made his faithfulness complete towards her. But look at our sapient divines; Ah, say they, James mentions her receiving them, and mentions her sending them out another way; but James, with terrible disgust, passes over the middle part of her conduct, wherein she hid them James was ashamed of that, and so he did not name it. That is their interpretation. But I have often said that it is not safe to take any one scripture by itself upon any one subject, if there be other scriptures that will throw a little light upon it so “he that is first in his own cause seemeth just, but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him out.” Now let us look at the middle part of her conduct; let us look at the evasions which, by divine inspiration, she uses; let us see whether the Holy Ghost has anywhere sanctioned that part of her conduct. If so, then we have the eternal God on our side, and I care naught for the reasoning of sapient divines or anybody else. I go to the 6th chapter of Joshua, 17th verse, — “The city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord; only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid” —not because she received the spies, not because she sent them out another way; Joshua leaves out that; but just that which our Pharisees so kick at, — “because she hid the messengers that we sent.”; Then go to the 25th verse of that 6th chapter; there you read, “Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father’s household, and all that she had,” —I dare to say first and second cousins too; no doubt the house was rarely crowded; “all her kindred,” it says in the 23rd verse; saved them alive; what for? — “because she hid the messengers which Joshua sent.” Thus Paul gives us the first part, James gives us the first and the last, Joshua gives us the middle; and I will stand before this assembly this morning and tell you that I believe the words recorded in the 6th of Joshua were as much divinely inspired as the words of Paul in the 11th of Hebrews, or the words of James in his 2nd chapter; unless you will choose to adopt the modern custom of believing that part to be inspired that you like; and then as to the parts you do not like, say with a late Church of England parson, who is now a little bit notorious for his Socinianism, say that such and such parts are not inspired. His plan is, when he meets with what he cannot understand, to say it is not inspired. But once set out in that path, where will you stop? You will get rid of the Bible altogether. But, bless the Lord, “all scripture is given by inspiration of God:” and while I breathe I trust I shall receive into my soul every testimony of the Bible.

In Rahab, then, you get sterling fidelity. Well, but, you say, she is called a harlot. That is to mortify the Pharisees, I suppose, for one thing, and to show that the Lord can save anything and every, thing that has a heart to cry to him and believe in him. We have four or five volumes written by gentlemen to assure us that it ought to be rendered “hostess,” and that she was not originally a Canaanite, but some respectable person—I do not know what all. Also, some say that the thief on the cross had never been a thief, —it was a mistake altogether he could not have become so pious all at once, and therefore there must have been some preceding Christianity, some preceding piety about him; he could not have become so good all at once. Saul of Tarsus could not have fallen down all at once, and said, “What wilt thou have me to do?” Ananias could not have gone to him and raised him up at once. The apostle Paul could not have gone and preached the gospel all at once, without first going to college, or conferring with flesh and blood. Ah, my hearers, in what a different way the great God does his work from the plans that men would devise! It may well be written, “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils;” let the Lord alone be your confidence. Here, then, is practical faith in Rahab, sterling fidelity.

Now time permits me only to advance one more thought upon this subject. Our text refers especially to those who have it in their power. “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.” Then the apostle goes on to speak of their distribution of their substance to the poor and the necessitous as occasion may require, thereby “laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come so that Jesus Christ may at the last with truth say—and he will say it only with truth; we cannot hide

anything from him, — “I was hungry, and ye gave me meat and so of the rest. And you will find, whenever the apostle speaks of this evidential foundation, these practical works of faith, he always associates them with something wonderfully blessed. Take, for instance, the 6th of Hebrews, — “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” Here he acknowledges their works in ministering to the saints for the sake of the name of the Lord. I do not feel much at liberty in one sense in speaking upon this subject, lest you should think I am speaking in any way whatever in the language of reproof. So far from that, I am not speaking in the language even of complaint. If I never had to preach again, I could say of this assembly (allowing only some few unhappy exceptions, but the exceptions only make the rule more clear), I could part with you and say that “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister; and I would say, Now that I am about to leave you, and leave the world, my desire is “that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.” Then the apostle goes on to show what promises belong to these people. “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” I need not here stop to point out to you, in the latter part of the 6th of Hebrews, what kind of promises they were. “For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself;” showing the immutability of his counsel and the eternity of the priesthood of Christ. Those are the blessed things that he brings in there. You cannot think how these works of faith encourage a minister; they wonderfully encourage him. I suppose there is not a minister of my day—not to be reckoned right out for the truth—that has had more encouragement than I have had in this matter. I have never had to complain, and trust I never shall, I have much to congratulate, much to be thankful for; much to bless, praise, and honor the name of the Lord for. I could not endure a breath of disapprobation of the people with whom I am honored to be. I know your labors of love toward his name, that you have ministered to the saints and do minister; and I know your recognition of the exceeding great and precious promises of God; so that you have an evidential foundation laid up for the time to come; “Come, ye blessed; I was hungry, and ye gave me meat.”

One more thought. In the epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle, to encourage the people of God, calls their attention to what they have suffered for the truth’s sake, and then he says, “Ye had compassion of me in my bonds,” —saw me in trouble, and thought you could help me, and you did help me; —as though he should say, As a minister I have been the means instrumentally of plucking your souls as brands from the everlasting burnings, the means of bringing you out of the greatest of trouble into the greatest of joy; therefore, as expressive of the love you have towards me, “ye had compassion of me in my bonds; and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods,” —took it joyfully; that is very pleasant; everyone likes to work cheerfully, joyfully, if he can; — “knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.”

Now, you discouraged ones, if you did not belong to the Lord you would never have done as you have; you never would have shown such love to his name; you never would thus have ministered to the saints, and especially to the minister. There is nothing Satan so grudges as he does to see people kind to the minister. Why, you will find the standing of many of our ministers is a standing in stocks. They must stand on such conditional grounds, that a deacon or deacons, or certain gentlemen, must have it in their power to give them a week’s notice any day, —to start the minister off any day; and if he is not careful to echo what they have told him on any subject, if he dare touch a subject they do not like, there are his ten or twenty shillings, —a week’s pay or else a week’s notice. Well, thank the Lord, we have not so learned Christ at the Surrey Tabernacle; you have not so brought your minister into bondage; he is as free as Job’s

wild ass, and to range of the mountains as he likes, to seek after every green thing; and the deacons are free, the members free, the congregation free, and all free together; no lords nor dukes. Now, says the apostle, "Cast not away, therefore, your confidence', which hath great recompense of reward." The Lord enable us then to hold fast what little we have, and still go on to glorify the God of our salvation. Thus it is that the grace of God forms the people to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for the hope of hopes and for the glory of glories, when Jesus shall come to receive those to himself for whom he gave himself, redeemed from all iniquity, from all sin, from all evil, from all adversity, having consecrated them to himself before they leave this world, and making them zealous of good works; and thus they glorify God here, and he will glorify them hereafter: and if we have to suffer, well, then the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.