

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE SURE FOUNDATION.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 4th, 1859, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

“For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes; behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” Zechariah iii. 9.

OUR text is rather a long one, but we may notice it under three main ideas. The first is that of *the foundation*; the second is that of *the perfection thereof*; “Upon one stone shall be seven eyes; behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of Hosts;” and then third *the freedom*; “And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.”

There are two things that I feel in the beginning of my discourse this morning very much concerned to make clear; the one is *the foundation itself*; and the second is, *what it is to be rightly built upon this foundation*; for we may be upon the right foundation, but at the same time be the wrong materials and be wrongly built. “Have we not prophesied in thy name; and have we not cast out devils in thy name? and in thy name have done many wonderful works.” These persons were upon the right foundation, but they were not the right materials. Therefore, whilst in the day in which we live the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, simply in the letter, is almost everywhere known, and I am glad of it, I will not complain of the fact; yet at the same time it is a solemn thought that thousands are resting upon this foundation that are not put there by the Lord, are not put there by the Holy Ghost. First, just a word or two upon the FOUNDATION; the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason that he is spoken of as the foundation is because he has gone to the end of the law. With God everything must find its level; God is a just God; and wherever in his holiness in his justice, in his integrity, in his authority, in his sovereignty—wherever in any way he has been sinned against, reparation must be made, either by the damnation of the soul in hell, or else by the great Substitute, Christ Jesus the Lord. Our God, while he is a Saviour, is a just God. Christ, therefore, is called the Foundation, because he has gone in his obedient life and in his atoning

death to the end of the law and its curse; so that by him mercy and truth meet together, by him righteousness and peace kiss each other, by him holiness is established and honoured; by him justice is met and satisfied; by him the authority—yea, in a word, all the perfections of God are established. Before we enter further into this matter, let us hear what is said of this foundation. “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone,” called a stone because of its solidity and durability; “a tried stone,” he was tried at Calvary’s Cross; that was the great trial of the Saviour; if he could there bear the weight of the sins of the church, if he could there bear the curse of the law; if he could there encounter and conquer immoveably all the powers of hell; if he could there swallow up death in victory—that was the great trial of the Saviour; he never had such a trial to encounter before, it was such a time with him of trouble as never was before, and never can be again. We see him rise triumphant from the dead; he did endure the trial. See how true it is that he is a *tried* Stone. “A precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth”—he that believeth in him, he that believeth that Christ hath endured this trial; that he has thus survived the curse, survived death, survived wrath, survived hell—yea, he has overcome the whole; he therefore remains as the foundation; “he that believeth in him shall not be ashamed.” What a sweet thought to be brought to believe in him wherein every sin is ended; wherein the curse is ended; wherein death is ended; wherein the law is established; and wherein God by this foundation is on your side, immutably so; brought to rest upon this foundation the Lord deals with you according to the position into which you are brought; the Lord Jesus Christ continues with you according to the counsel of the Father; “And it is not the will of the Father which hath sent me that one of these little ones should perish;” and so the Holy Spirit carries on his work sovereignly and effectually according to this foundation, according to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. But perhaps one may be saying well, I have no other hope than this, all the hope that I have of eternal life is that foundation. Then the question is, how have we come to this foundation? Have we been brought rightly to it? Let us hear the Saviour! The Saviour says, “He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a man that digged deep, and built his house upon the rock; and when the floods arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock.” He who builds upon this foundation lays hold of the great testimony that “The gift of God is eternal life;” and from that testimony he cannot go back. And “I have,” saith Job, “esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.” We know what providential sustenance can do, and we know what it cannot do. And I ask you, my hearers, have you ever been brought into such a state of mind before God as to feel that nothing but his word could support you? looking for a word from the Lord; and saying, oh, if the Lord would give me some promise, speak to me as he did to Jacob, when he said, “I am with thee in all places, and will not leave thee nor forsake thee;” If the Lord would speak to me as he did to

Abraham, "Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;" as he did to one when he said, "Daughter, be of good cheer, thy faith hath made thee whole;" as he did to another when he said, "I am thy salvation," as he did to another when he said, "Thy sins are all forgiven thee, go in peace." My hearer, I will leave you to judge what you know of coming into this bitterness of spirit, of coming under that burden which Christ alone can bear away, of longing to see his face, and of holding fast his truth, holding fast his way, holding fast his testimony, and esteeming the words of his mouth more than your necessary food. Everything temporal may leave you; we see instances of this in circumstances around us every day; but take the case of Job, the richest man in the East, yet how soon everything departed from him, but the Lord did not depart from him, the truth did not depart from him, nor did he depart from the truth; and in the midst of all his tribulation he could say, Great as the desolation is into which I am brought, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and that I shall see him." Again, in order to be rightly built upon this foundation, we must know something also of that Scripture in Isaiah where the Lord after speaking of this foundation, says, "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." Here is a sinner who feels his need of a refuge, and he tries by his own righteousness, his own holiness, his own works, to make a kind of refuge, to make up something to fly to, to make up something that will hide him. But the Lord will bring your own sins upon your conscience, he will open up the concupiscences of your heart; the corruptions of your heart shall roll over your soul like a storm of hail, and the waters of iniquity within you shall go over your head, shall flow over your refuge, sweep away your hiding place, and make you feel there is no hiding place but in the rock, Christ; "Other foundation can no man lay but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus the Lord." "Behold," then, "the Stone which I have laid before Joshua." To be rightly built on him, then, is to be convinced of our need of him, is to receive the truth concerning him; I cannot lay too much emphasis upon that, to receive the truth concerning him. Remember that Christ's *prophetic* character is the highest of all the characters he bears. There is no official character that Christ bears that is so high as his prophetic character. His priestly character stands high, and is the first essential, his regal character stands high, his matrimonial character, as the Husband of the church, stands high, but there is one character the Saviour sustains that stands above them all, and that is a character which I think is thought very little of in our day, and if you ask what that character is, it is his character as a Prophet. God's truth stands above everything. The priesthood of Christ does not regulate the truth of God, but the truth of God regulates it. Christ's eternal kingdom, his royalty, does not govern the truth, but his truth governs that. His matrimonial character as the Husband of the church does not govern the truth, but the truth regulates that. So his pastoral character and all the other characters he bears, none of these characters

regulate his truth, but his truth regulates the whole. Away with that delusion wherein men tell us it does not matter about doctrine: it does matter, it all lies there. Here then to be rightly built upon this foundation, we must be brought off from every other foundation, and be led to receive that truth which shews us that we are saved by grace, that Christ is the way, brought to receive that truth which shews that everlasting life is the gift of God, brought to receive that truth which will be sweeter to us than honey and the honey-comb.

Let us hear another word upon this building in the New Testament. The apostle, when speaking of the work of ministers, says, "If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself, (the minister), shall be saved; yet so as by fire." Here is wood on the right foundation, but it is only wood; it is not silver, it is not gold, it is not precious stones. Here is hay, on the right foundation, but it is not gold, it is not silver, it is not precious stones; here is stubble, on the right foundation, but it is not gold, nor silver, nor precious stones. What disproportion of character! Here is a complete contrast of character! the wood, the hay, the stubble: the gold, the silver, the precious stones; all on the same foundation, but what an infinite difference between the characters! Before me, I have no doubt are both these characters, that is to say, those who are reckoned as wood are persons that cannot stand the fire of tribulation for the truth's sake; if tribulation come in for the truth's sake, you, not knowing the value of the truth, would give up that truth, and put something else that would be more convenient to you into the place of it. But the gold—the man whose character is real, the man who is born of God; let there be lighted up what fires there may, let there come what tribulations there may, that man cannot for any present advantage, for any fleshly convenience, for any worldly friendship, give up the truth. The wood gives it up; the man who is this mere worthless character, when the trial comes he gives up the truth; he is not rightly built, he is not the right material. You see here you may be a great professor, and you may boast of being on the right foundation; at the same time you are not built upon that foundation, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost; you are not brought to know the value of the truth, nor to esteem the truth, nor to hold fast the truth; and your profession, without the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, is altogether worthless; it is the wood, that cannot stand the fire, but the gold and the silver can stand the fire. And this foundation is marked by its being a *precious* stone. So if the Lord Jesus Christ, in the perfection of his atonement, in the perfection of his righteousness, in the eternity of his priesthood, in the eternity of that covenant which he hath sealed; if in these relations he is precious to you, if you can say,

"Yes, thou art precious to my soul,
My transport and my trust."

Then that is just a proof that you are precious to him. Here then, is the solemnity of the matter; that you may be upon the right foundation, at the same time not the right material. In order to be the right material, you must have God's truth; that must be written in the soul by the Holy Ghost, that will bring you to build rightly upon this one foundation. It all lies in that small compass; love to the truth or hatred to it. If you are built upon this founda-

tion, at the same time have enmity to the truth, be assured of this, if you never hear my voice again, that when the great day shall come, you will prove to be wood, hay, stubble; but not gold, nor silver, nor precious stone. Nay, your profession kills itself; you who profess to love Christ, but hate his truth—why, these two can never stand together: his truth can never fall, therefore, you must fall, and be cast out. Oh, my hearer, it is an infinite mercy then to be brought down to the footstool of grace, to receive the great and blessed truth that salvation is entirely of grace. Then if you know the value of truth, whatever you may have to encounter, you will hold fast the truth, buy it at any price, and give it up at no price. Let me look back again at the words that “If any man’s work abide, he shall receive a reward,” that means the minister of the gospel. But why does the minister build up this hay, wood and stubble? Simply because the minister takes men on the ground of what they profess; he receives them according to the best of his judgment, but they have deceived him, they have deceived him, but the deception is greater to themselves than to any others, that is how he has done it. These are the first to find fault with the minister, he goes too far, he is too high in doctrine for them, too narrow-minded for them, so that the minister finds he must suffer the loss of these, and he himself must suffer; he must be saved so as by fire, they will give him some trouble, burn his cloths if they can’t burn him; perhaps they may burn him a little, but never mind, he must still go on. Again, see my hearers, the enmity of Satan against God’s truth. Ten thousand plans does he devise to deceive our souls. Here is the foundation, are we the right materials? have we been brought under such a sight and sense of our need of this foundation that we feel we could not give up the truth concerning it for a thousands worlds? If so, then we are living stones, that shall remain for ever.

I notice, in the next place, *the perfection of this foundation*. “Upon one stone shall be seven eyes.” This, you observe, is a figurative expression, and is taken from an ancient custom, with which custom we are made acquainted in the book of Esther, where the Persian kings had seven counsellors, and these counsellors were by a figure of speech called “eyes,” because they gave the king all that information concerning the affairs of his kingdom that would enable him to govern to the advantage of the kingdom, and to his own honour. Therefore they were called the eyes, and the king was supposed to see everything going on in his kingdom by these seven counsellors. That is the circumstance to which the seven eyes refer. But here is this difference, our text says, “Upon *one stone* shall be seven eyes.” Christ has not seven counsellors, nor any counsellors; he knows all himself, he embodies the seven eyes in himself, he therefore did not commit himself unto men, for he knew all men, and knew what was in man, and consequently did not commit himself unto them. This is the idea. But there is a four-fold perfection implied in this part of our text: first, the perfection of the plan, secondly the perfection of the foundation; third, the perfection of the building, and fourth, the perfection of watchfulness or care with which the Lord will take care of this building, or this people. First, the perfection of the plan. You will observe in this book of Zechariah when the Lord was about to do a work, that he did it by measurement. We read a great deal of the angel measuring things. And so the Lord has a plan by which he does things, and he has appointed a way by which we are to be saved, and that way is perfect. Hence, Isaiah, resting upon this great plan of eternal mercy, has these words, “Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.” But after all, the main thing, or one of the main things here intended, is that perfection of knowledge at which the Saviour arrived. Here is an engraving, and the stone had to undergo that engraving by the

Lord. He arrived at a perfection of knowledge. And herein as I go along, I shall have to shew there is a likeness between Christ and the people, that as he learned by the things that he suffered, so the people of God must learn also, as one of the means by which they learn, by the things they suffer. First, it will mean the Lord Jesus Christ coming to a perfection of knowledge as man by the things which he suffered. No one ever knew sin as Jesus Christ knew it; he had a perfect knowledge of sin, in and from that which he suffered from it. He took sin in its penal form, and therefore he knew all its intensity; he knew all its bitterness:—his knowledge of sin was perfect. That is one part of the perfection of Christ's knowledge; and that is a perfection it is not necessary for us to arrive at. He arrived also at a perfection of knowledge of the curse of the law; he knew from experience what that curse was; and hence he is set forth again and again as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He knew all the bitterness of the curse and of death in perfection; no person ever knew it as he did. Therefore, it is said of him that he learned by the things which he suffered; that he grew in wisdom and in stature: and although as God his knowledge could neither be diminished nor augmented, yet as man he grew in wisdom, and arrived at perfection; not that there was ever any imperfection in Christ; he always had during his whole life that knowledge that corresponded with the position in which he stood, corresponded with the age, and with everything. We must never admit that there was anything in the shape of imperfection about this Wonderful Person. He underwent, then, all that by which he should come to a perfect knowledge of sin and of the curse, by enduring and putting the whole away. But there is another side to this question, and that is this—the Lord Jesus Christ, as man, arrived at a perfect knowledge of God's eternal covenant, of God's counsels, and of God's love, and of everything that pertaineth to the eternal welfare of the people. And then, it will mean, also, the perfect care that the Lord exercises over his people; for in the next chapter these eyes are called the eyes of the Lord. And what can be a sweeter truth for us to live in, than that, the care which the Lord takes of us? But where, and in what way, does he take care of us? If you think that the Lord will take care of you on the ground of some worth or worthiness in you; then alas! alas! you will have but very poor thoughts of the Lord; your affection to the Lord will not be very great, your concern for fellowship with him will be very, very faint. But if you are enabled to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, and look at what he is, and has done, and to feel that whatever Christ is, that you, by oneness with him, are; and as such the Lord will receive you: then, how exalted will be your thoughts of God, and how great your affection towards him. With what confidence you may every day look to the Lord. Does a day pass over, and have you, during the day, been subjected to a great many vexations and trials; perhaps some unadvised words, and perhaps, some unadvised works too. Ah, the enemy comes in, and says, where are you now? What are you going to do now? What will become of you now? How can you expect the Lord to bless you, or have mercy upon you now? Ah, precious faith steps in, lays hold of the Saviour's perfection, demolishes this doubting castle that Satan is building; demolishes all this unbelieving, despairing feeling, brings the whole of it to the ground, and John might well say, "This is our victory over the world, even our faith." That is the man that Satan hates. Ah, says Satan, that man if I bring his faults to him, bring his infirmities and his troubles to him, he has such a hold of the Saviour's name, of the Saviour's righteousness, of the Saviour's atonement and conquest, he has such faith in Christ, that when I go to that man, he sets the Saviour's name up between me and him, and shields himself behind the

Saviour's name; and the Saviour's name to that man is a sun that shines upon him, in spite of all his faults, a shield that defends him in spite of all his infirmities. It would be well for us, my hearers, if in our sermons, and if in our prayers, private and public, and indeed in all our thoughts, and confidences, we could make more use of the perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We talk one half of our time as though he was not above one half Saviour; as though it was a foundation that must give way if we did not help keep it up; as though his atonement could not avail without a little of our assistance. Oh, that was a happy life which the apostle Paul describes, when he says, "The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Oh, my hearers, we know but little of a Saviour's blood, we know but little of his perfection, in comparison of what will be known before the end of the world. We shall have by and bye, a race (I think so, it looks so from the Word of God) a race of men spring up, like some of the primitive preachers and Christians; not your duty-faith, half way, compromising system of men we have in our day: we shall have men spring up that will enter into the depth of the sinner's state by nature, that will open up the perfection of the dear Saviour, and speak of the glories of that perfection not in that poor, stammering, weak, milk-and-water way in which I, and most of our preachers, do; but shall speak with an eloquence that shall find its way into the souls of the people, and Christ will become all in all more than he ever yet has been.

I now, in conclusion, just notice *the freedom*. "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." The day here must be taken both literally and figuratively. First, literally. When the Lord pardons a sinner, he does it at once. It is described in this chapter. Here is Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord, clothed in filthy garments; and Satan stood on his right hand to resist him. He would not have resisted him anywhere else. If Joshua had stood before the pope, the devil would not have resisted him there: or, before a prayer book, he would not have resisted him there; or, if he had set up his own works, and stood before them, he would not have resisted him there; but Joshua stood before the angel of the Lord, before the Christ of God; he was driven from all other hope, and there Satan resisted him. May the Lord bring you, my hearer, to see your need of Christ, and take up your position in the truth, and have no other hope. You will have plenty to oppose you; never mind, stand fast! and that the time will come when the blessed God will step in, and bring thee out of all thy trouble, and he will say, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee, is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" If Joshua had been a pharisee, he would have said, not so, Lord, I am not quite so bad as that. But no, Joshua knew that he was in the fire of sin, in the fire of God's wrath, and that a Divine hand had plucked him out. The Lord intended to turn this poor brand into a living tree; therefore, he saith, "Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with a change of raiment." "I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." Secondly. It is also beyond dispute that the iniquity of this land was removed mediatorialy, in one day. Christ took our sins into the land of oblivion; they are to be mentioned no more. In a dying hour the Lord will not name them; at the judgment day, he will not name them. I give you this challenge, find a Scripture, if you can, in all the Bible, where we are told that the real Christian will at the last great day have to give an account of his sins. I can find plenty to the reverse. Revelation i. There are the people of God, giving an account of themselves, and what is the account? "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own

Note!

blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." The judgment day to the saints of God will be the most glorious day they have ever seen; it will be the first time of the whole family of God meeting together on the vantage ground of entire perfection and freedom, and of eternal triumph. Third. These iniquities are also cast into the depths of the sea. The Egyptians could not move a tongue against the children of Israel when they were buried in the depths of the sea; they were dead. So the sins of the people of God are dead, the law was the life of their sins, and Christ is the end of the law; their sins shall ultimately be like the carcase of Samson's lion, they shall be subservient even to their good rather than not. Again, iniquity is said to be cast behind the back of Jehovah. The eternal God stands between the people and their sins, there is no danger of the two coming together again. "As far as the east is from the west," which terrestrially speaking is only about 13,000 miles, but celestially speaking is infinite; for space is infinite—"so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." But this iniquity has a twofold meaning more; it will mean the people that oppose. There were people that opposed the building of the temple under Zerubbabel; and iniquity here, therefore, will mean opposition. And so those persons who said, "Have we not prophesied in thy name?" But what have you prophesied? Free-will. We know you have, and duty-faith, and popery, and various lies, and all these men that prophesied thus, when they did these wonderful works, were opposers of God's building, opposers of God's truth, members of the mystery of iniquity, and so Christ says, "I never knew you, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity;" because they stood opposed to God's truth. But "I," saith God, "Will remove the iniquity," I will overcome the opposition; "and upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The last idea is that iniquity will mean the effect of iniquity. The effect of idolatry in the land of Canaan was desolation; the Lord will remove that desolation, and there shall be no more famine in the land: we have the bread of eternal life, the water of eternal life, the tree of eternal life, the word of eternal life, and so shall we live, and not die.

Thus then, I have in a very feeble and stammering way, but at the same time sincerely—if I can say nothing else of my sermon, I can say, as in the sight of a heart searching-God, that I have spoken sincerely;—tried to set forth this foundation, what it is rightly to be built upon it, what the perfection is, and what the freedom is; but time forbids me saying more.

Gov 2/10/1916

The Six Sermons preached by Mr. JAMES WELLS in Exeter Hall (during the closing of the Surrey Tabernacle) may be had in one part, neatly stitched in a wrapper.