

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A GOOD HOPE.

## A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 4TH, 1860, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"A reason of the hope that is in you." 1 Peter iii. 15.

A MAN may believe every word of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation; he may love the Bible, may be glad of it and glad with it, and live in that gladness, with a firm persuasion of its truth; and yet be eternally damned at the last. This is shewn in the case of the stony ground hearer he believed; it is true we read of his falling away; but suppose he did not fall away; suppose he continued in his belief, suppose he continued in his gladness, suppose he continued in his glee, suppose he continued in his comfort; he is not a regenerated man, his faith is not a living faith, it is only natural, arising from natural conscience and the persuasive power of the letter of the word; and thus that man must be lost if he die in that state. And there are, as Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light, there are so many ways of deceiving the soul that where the soul is regenerated, such a man, being aware of that, is perpetually feeling about for the reason of the hope that is in him. The question, in the progress of the real Christian, arises, thousands of times, what reason, what scriptural, what real reason have I to hope that the Lord is mine? There must therefore be a reason of the hope that is in us. It is not the greatness of the experience we want; it is not the greatness of terror that we want in experience, though there may be that, and often is; nor is it a deliverance so conspicuous as some have that we want; in a word, it is not the quantity that we want, it is the quality we want; when the quality is right, we like then the quantity to be great as well. When a man's conviction of his need of Christ is of the right kind, then the deeper it is the more earnest that man will be for fellowship with God and for the liberty of the gospel; and on the other hand, the more such an one is favoured to rise into sweet fellowship with God, the more powerfully will that man feel the goodness of the Lord towards him.

I have then, this morning, to point out to you in the first place as well as I can *the reason*, and secondly, *the nature of the true hope of the gospel*.

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I. I notice first, THE REASON. "The reason of the hope that is in you." And as I have already hinted, what we want is quality; not so much quantity as quality. However much error there may be mixed up in the mind of the sinner at the first, yet if he have the root of the matter he will by degrees come right. Let us therefore begin in this description of the reason in a kind of A. B. C. way; let us take, to begin with, the circumstance in the 9th chapter of John of the man whose eyes the Saviour had opened; and let us look at the results, what it led him to, and test ourselves this morning by that circumstance. The first was it enthroned the Saviour as a prophet in the heart and mind of that man. When he was asked what this Jesus of Nazareth was who had opened his eyes, he said he was a prophet. This, of course was very much short of what he came to be acquainted with afterwards; but still the beginning is good. He got hold of the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was the truthful one; he could see that the truth of God was with him, that the truth of God was by him. "I was once blind, but now I see." I see that he is that true prophet; I see that grace and truth (truth again, you see,) came by Jesus Christ; and that that truth by which alone a sinner can be saved is by Jesus Christ. Now this is beginning on very low grounds; still if we are brought to feel even thus far, and put into the right path, we shall still go on. When this man was questioned very much as to this Jesus of Nazareth, there was one thing you are aware they could not persuade him out of; when they said, "Give God the praise this man is a sinner." "Well, whether he be a sinner or no, I know not;" of course, if he is only a prophet, merely a man, he can be a sinner, in himself considered, as well as a prophet; because all the prophets were, apart from the grace of God considered nothing but sinners; they were poor sinners made acquainted with God's salvation, and conveyed unto others that which the Lord had made known with saving power unto them. Therefore, "whether he be a sinner or no, I know not; one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." And then they went a step farther, to try to persuade him that Christ was not of God; "Why," he said, "herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." So the poor man went on, and he felt sure that Jesus Christ was of God; he felt sure he had got so far hold of the truth. They boasted of being Moses' disciples; and when they found they could not move him, they cast him out. Now I am fully aware the mere natural professor may apparently follow me in what I am now saying as far as this, and perhaps farther; but as I just now said, the point is what that principle that is at the root of your religion and constitutes the main element of your religion—what it leads to. So here, in this case; he sees in the first place that Christ is a prophet, and does not seem to see much more in him than a prophet; but then he goes on into

the assurance that Jesus Christ is of God, and cannot be beaten out of that; and so they cast him out. I wonder what this Jesus Christ is; I wonder what his real person is; he is a prophet, and he is of God; but I should like to know a little more of the truth. And the Lord knew that. And so, my hearer, you may just know that you are a sinner, just know that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners: but as yet know but very little of the blessedness and fulness, and glory of that truth into which this same man was afterwards brought. And hence, when the Lord heard that they had cast him out, he found him, and said unto him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Here is another step in the right direction; the Son of God; the child born, the Son given, the Son of God! Here is relationship introduced. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The Holy Spirit set in with the word, opened the man's eyes; and he said, "who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" "And Jesus said unto him, thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him;" recognizing the dignity of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he was God as well as man. Here see what an infantine acquaintance he had at the first with Jesus Christ; he then goes on a little farther and a little farther, till he comes into the wonderful dignity of the glorious person of Christ; and then Christ becomes an object of worship. And what would be this man's conclusion? He would say, this person is God; and therefore the work that he says he is come to perform will be like himself; it will have in it eternity, it will have in it all that a sinner can need to save him from hell, and give him the victory, and bring him to everlasting glory; the righteousness that this wonderful Person will bring in will be like himself, it will be the righteousness of God; he is God, and being God, equal with the Father, and thus an object of worship, in everything that he is in his person, in his work, in all the relations he bears, he must be infallible. Why, this man would become what in a way of reproach is now called, a hyper-Calvinist; he would fall, as it were, into the eternity of Christ's person, into the eternity of Christ's work; and in the light of the eternity of Christ's person and Christ's work he would read out the eternity of God's love, of God's mercy, of God's covenant, of that New Testament, that new covenant, of which Christ was the Mediator; he would read out in the life and death of this wonderful Person the great truth put upon record by the prophet; that "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." Now, my hearer, I despise not the little one, where there is much error, if I can but see in him something expressive of dissatisfaction with everything short of what Christ really is in his person and in his work. But in our day, in the professing world, men stop short of this; they pretend to believe in the eternity of Christ's salvation, and a pretty belief it is; they pretend to be lovers of free grace truth. Well, friends, it is not for me to judge men; God Almighty knows what such men are, for I must confess that I do not; and I cannot understand how a man can be brought to feel his need of such a Person as Jesus Christ, and to

feel his need of that salvation which Christ has wrought; and yet make light of some of the great transactions, yea, make light of all the real transactions of eternal mercy; and feel most in his element when he can be slandering those that abide faithfully by the truth, and sympathizing with those that detest the truth. I believe that the reasons that such have to hope are false reasons. Let us see, then, whether the reason we have to hope be a true reason. Are we dissatisfied with everything short of what Christ is in the dignity of his person, in the perfection of his work; in a word, to sum up this part of our subject, will nothing short of this one thing do for us, that the Lord Jesus Christ took all our responsibility, that he took all our accountability; that he became the Surety; and that he stands before God as the Surety, responsible for our souls, responsible for our bodies, responsible for our sins, responsible for our safe arrival at glory, and responsible for our being presented at the last great day with exceeding joy; that the matter lies entirely with him? Now, my hearers, are we so brought down, so broken down, and so sunk, and so humbled, that if we had not such a God as this to look to, we feel we could have no hope? I solemnly declare to you this morning, and I say it from my own personal experience, as well as from having the word of God on my side, that if you could point out to me in all the range of God's new covenant one item that was conditional, it would sink my soul into black despair. Alas, what do I find in myself? I find in myself just that which was symbolised, and perhaps really intended, ultimately intended. I find in myself just that which was symbolised by the prophet being commanded again, again, and again to turn, and thou shalt see greater abominations yet; and if thou art taught of God, thou wilt go into the chambers of thine own heart, and thou wilt see greater and greater abominations yet. And what will be the result? Why, the result will be the worship of this Wonderful Person with more earnestness, with more vitality; there will be more prayer, more seeking fellowship with him; the emptiness of every thing else will be more keenly felt; thy burdens will be heavy, thy wound will be grievous, thy sores will be putrefying sores; and thou wilt find that thou hast not within the whole range of nature any healing medicines; that the precious blood of Jesus, and that alone, can heal thy wounded soul, that the remedy must be divine; and unless he send the remedy, and heal thee, thou must lie down in everlasting despair. Can we say, then, that daily experience is such with us that while men are slandering us because of our experimental, practical, and solemn, and conscientious decision for these blessed truths of the everlasting gospel, can we say as in the sight of a heart-searching God that were not matters as they are, were it not all of grace from first to last, after that order of things in which everything is absolute and certain, such is our experience that we are more confirmed in the truth that nothing else can save us; and therefore there is not the least symptom, not the least sign whatever, of our becoming lower in our views? I hope I shall go out of the world higher in doctrine than I am now; I was going to say a higher Calvinist, but I intend to leave out the word Calvinist in future as much as I can; for there is so much said about Calvin now; what in the world have we do with Calvin? He was a good man, and so were many others who had a good deal of error about them; but let us lay them all aside; let us have done with uninspired men; and let us take the holy prophets; let us take Word of God. We will not say anything detrimental to the memory of those that are gone before us; but God forbid we should take them for our guides. I care not a rush whether I am higher than Calvin or lower than Calvin, so that I am right in my conscience, and in the Bible, and in Christ, and in the covenant, and in the sight of God. I care not one rush what men may try me by; it is a small thing that I should be judged with man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine

own self; he that judgeth me is the Lord. I say to you lovers of the truth, then, maintain your independence; take your stand upon scripture ground; and care not for any ancient that they may bring forward; let them have their fathers, and take their fathers, if they like; but take you the Bible, take you the word of God, and entreat God your Father for more of the spirit of truth, (truth again, you see;) for more of the spirit of wisdom, more of the spirit of love, and more of the spirit of a sound mind; and then you will rejoice as did the apostle when he said, "We have received not the spirit which is of the world, but we have received the spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given unto us of God." Thus, then, if you have a right reason to believe that you belong to God, and if your hope be real, it will arise from your being thus brought down, and led to receive the truth in the love of it, and you will then be so led that Christ shall be all and in all. Free-will and duty-faith, those figments, you will despise them as so many false lights set up by that great adversary, the devil, in order that he may mislead us while we are voyaging across the pathless ocean of this world; his object is to mislead us, to carry us into Charybdis or on to the rocks of Scylla. May the blessed God still keep us looking unto Jesus, who is our Surety, our Forerunner, whose victory is complete, whose warfare is complete, who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Thus, then, I have no right to hope if I am not thus brought to receive the truth in the life and love of it. Then the second reason of this hope is to have no other name as your hope but the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the apostle Peter was questioned, by what means or what power have you healed this impotent man? he told them, "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole." And they treat his truth now as they treated his person then—"Whom ye crucified; but whom God raised from the dead." They are now trying to kill his truth, but God keeps raising it from the dead. I could mention to you now chapels where the truth has died lately; the ministers have quite changed their theme. But God will raise up the truth in other places; "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles." Whenever people put the truth down, it is a proof they never rightly possessed it. Oh, the sweet law of eternal freedom in Christ Jesus! Why, the whole universe, could it be possessed, is but a toy to it, for that must pass away; but the law of freedom we have in Christ, giving us that kingdom, inheritance, and glory, to which he will bring us, is an eternity, an infinity of blessedness and possession; and who that rightly possesseth it can part with it? God will, therefore, raise his own truth from the dead. "The stone set at nought of you builders, the same is become the head of the corner." Ah, say some, you keep saying the truth, why don't you say Christ? I say the truth because Christ has gone to heaven, and left the truth on earth as his representative. Men in our day say, Oh, never mind about the truth, never mind about the truth, Christ is everything; and so they would sever Christ from his truth, and his truth from him. "Neither is there any other name given under heaven;" and what is there to represent his name? The truth "among men whereby we must be saved." Canst thou say, my hearer, that his name as a Saviour, his name as a Surety, his name as the Good Shepherd, is thine only hope? Canst thou say thou hast no hope anywhere else? Thus, then, however infantine your knowledge may be, if it be of the right quality, it will keep up a restlessness in you until you find out the truth as it is in Jesus; second, it will lead you along until it make you renounce everything else, and you will have no hope but in the name of Jesus Christ. Now, the apostle, in stating his conversion, sums up this matter of the reason of the hope that is in us in a very beautiful way,—26th of Acts, before Agrippa,

he sums up the whole in a very nice way, when describing his mission to the Gentiles, "To open their blind eyes;" let us stop at each clause. What say we to this? Are our eyes open to see what the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world for? Are our eyes open to see the order after which,—for there is an order in all the relations Christ Jesus bears,—there is an order? Melchizedek had no predecessor or successor; and he therefore is brought in to shew two things: first, the perfection of Christ's work; and second, the eternity of it, the eternal certainty of it; a priest after the order of an endless life. "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light." Now there are some people's eyes are opened just far enough to turn away from the light; as is the case with the conversions of the present day, most of them; if you state the truth to these hot-house converts, they will turn away from it directly. Put me, or one like me, into the pulpit of some of these wonderful men, and let the truth be set forth, they would turn away from it directly, unless you mix it with fuller's earth, or duty-faith honey, or free-will sugar, or something else; then it will just go down, and hardly that. But then it ceases to be God's truth if it is mixed with anything else. "To open their blind eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." When there is a real illumination, there will be a turning to the light, a turning to the truth, an overcoming of Satan. What is the business of Satan? The business of Satan is to accuse; he is the accuser of the brethren. Satan tells you that these high-doctrines are dangerous; Satan tells you that all these people are bad people. He worked so mightily upon the people upon that score until they crucified the Saviour; and Satan worked so mightily upon that point with the apostles that the apostles were the worst creatures on the face of the earth. Paul sums up the world's estimation of him thus—"We are," he says, "like the offscouring of all things." The original word means that that is the vilest refuse, the vilest scum of the earth; such was the estimation in which the holy prophets of God were held. Ah, my hearer, this is Satan's work, to poison the minds of men against that by which alone they can be saved. Now, then, if thou art not delivered from that enmity, with all thy conversion, and all thy praying and doing, thy hope is a false hope; thy soul will be damned, die when you may, if you die in enmity to God's truth. There is the opening of the eyes, then; then the turning to the light; then the overcoming of Satan; and then when your enmity is slain, then comes the forgiveness of sins; "That they may receive forgiveness of sins;" and that forgiveness of sins is by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And then in comes the inheritance; "an inheritance among them which are sanctified;" here is their consecration unto God; "by faith that is in me;" there is the order of it. Thus, then, if I were called upon this morning to give a reason of the hope that is in me, setting aside for one moment the *minutiæ* as it were of my own experience, I would say that the Lord has brought me into the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that the Lord has so led me as to make me exclude all other hopes; that the Lord has led me to the light, to love the light, to overcome Satan; and there is forgiveness of sins, that forgiveness I have realised; and I bless the Lord that that forgiveness is an eternal forgiveness—it stands thus, "Thy sins and thine iniquities will I remember no more."

II. But I must now hasten to this hope itself. This hope is said to be "a lively hope." It is not a dead, careless hope; it is a lively hope. Did it ever strike you, there is a beautiful analogy between the first part of the first chapter of the First Epistle of Peter, and the first chapter of Ezekiel? There is a beautiful analogy. The first thing that will strike you in the analogy will be the presence of the Eternal Three in these two chapters. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father;" there is the

Father; "through sanctification of the Spirit;" there is the Holy Spirit; "unto obedience, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;" there is Jesus Christ. There are the Eternal Three. Now go to Ezekiel; there you find a man clothed in linen among the living creatures; there is Jesus Christ; there you find the spirit of the living creatures in the wheels; and these wheels are the truths of the everlasting Gospel. Were they low wheels or high wheels? Ah, so high that the prophet said they were dreadful! Here is the Eternal Spirit rolling these eternal truths along: wheels, no beginning nor end, from everlasting to everlasting. And there is God the Father enthroned, with a rainbow round the throne. Here are the Eternal Three. Let us see where these living creatures came from; let us look at the lively hope in this matter. These living creatures came out of the north. The north is emblematic of the law of God, cold, barren, blasting, deadly, destructive. So they are brought out of the law into the Gospel. And the whirlwind. How men are whirled about. Do we not daily see it around us? And I think I never saw more instances of this than in this last year or two; I never saw more instances of men being whirled here, and whirled there, by adverse winds, and waves, and circumstances; there seems no certainty. Men that seemed to go on very steadily and comfortably, presently a combination of circumstances arises, and they are carried away; I speak now merely of temporal and adverse circumstances. But these living creatures came out of the whirlwind. Ah, where did they come to? Here it is, "And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the storm." Ah, sweet, dear, blessed Jesus, if brought to thee, I never can be hurled from thence; no whirlwind can be powerful enough to take me out of thine almighty hands; no whirlwind can come into that rock, and take me away from thee. Wherever we may be whirled, whether from one side of the globe to the other, whether from plenty to poverty, from health to sickness, from sickness to health; wherever we may be whirled to, if we have a hope in him, there it is an anchor of the soul; and no winds or waves shall ever move us from thence. Ah, then, these men that have this lively hope, came out of the north into the south, out of the law into the Gospel, and out of the whirlwinds of uncertainty into the rock of eternal stability; and there they stand and rejoice, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, yet their city shall not be moved; God is in the midst of her, and he will help her, and that right early. Take from me the stability I have in Christ, I have no stability anywhere else. I have no certainty anywhere but in the Lord Jesus Christ, and bless God there is certainty there; whatever else may forsake or fail us, he will never forsake us, nor fail us. But they came out not merely of the north, and the whirlwind, but there was a great cloud, a great cloud of sin; and they came out from the cloud into the clearness of forgiveness. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins." And then there was fire infolding itself; but they came out of that fire into the land described by Peter. Go back over these four ideas again, and you see the further you go the worse it is. First, it is merely the north, that is bad, blasting, cold; second, comes the whirlwind, worse; third, comes the dark cloud, that is worse still; fourth, comes the fire, that is worse than all. Just so is the progress of man, as a sinner considered: there he is under the law, whirled by the whirlwind; there is the cloud of his sin resting upon him, till the fire of God's eternal wrath breaks in upon him, and lights up in his soul a hell of never-abating despair. But out of this came these living creatures, then; a lively hope; how great the change was! see the land they came into. Now, mark, as Ezekiel saw them come out of that state of things into a state of things just the reverse, so the apostle Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which

according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. "No northern blast here, no whirlwind here, no cloud here, no fire here; no, an inheritance tranquil and peaceful in every way. But we have said it is a lively hope. These living creatures were look-about creatures, full of eyes within and without, before and behind; eyes within, to see what they are as sinners; eyes to look back, to trace the way the Lord led them; eyes to look forward, to behold the glory that is to be revealed to them. They had four faces: the face of a man, there was the likeness of Christ Jesus; and the face of a lion, there is their boldness, no cowards they, they fear not the face of any man; and the face of an ox there is the devotion; and the face of an eagle, there is their high-towering flight of fellowship with the blessed God, and there is the keenness of their sight. Some tell us the living creatures are the angels; but in the Book of Revelation you find these same creatures singing the song of eternal redemption; that denotes who they are; the people of God symbolically set forth. We then lose sight of these living creatures from the 10th to the 43rd chapter of Ezekiel; and between those two chapters there are a great many very hard chapters, very hard indeed; and you say, I wonder what has become of these living creatures? Says Free-will, Ah, they have sinned their grace away, and they are lost. Says Duty-faith, they have gone astray, and they may come back, and they may not. Ah, you will see them again by and bye. In the 40th chapter there is a city revealed. Well, I myself, a high-doctrine man, a free-grace man, should expect if I saw them anywhere, to see them in that city. They have been through a great many hard chapters,—and depend up it, you have a great many hard chapters to go through, those of you that know the Lord, before you get to the end of your journey. (And some chapters in Job.) I know I have had many hard chapters myself; I have thought, what is this? I hardly know what to call it, chapter of trouble, chapter of accidents, or what? Well, we go through them all; and if we expect to find these living creatures any where, it must be in the city of God. In the 43rd chapter there they are. The prophet says, "And the visions were like they ision that I saw by the river Chebar." I saw them in the land of captivity, now I see them in the land of freedom; there they are; they have got through all the hard chapters; they now sit down i eternal ease; like John, seeing them sealed in the 7th of Revelation, glorified in the 14th.

Now ready. Part first.

**SELECTIONS FROM THE SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT, FOR 1859.**

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