

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

A PERFECT WORK.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 21st, 1862, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD. *see*

"He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."—
Zechariah iv. 7.

In the preceding chapter the foundation stone is represented as having engraven upon it seven eyes; "Behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes;" denoting, of course, the perfection of knowledge which Jesus Christ, as man, acquired by what he suffered, and by the Spirit of God, for the spirit of wisdom and understanding rested upon him to perfection; and by what he suffered he acquired as man this perfection of knowledge. "I will engrave the graving thereof;" is a declaration containing the same doctrine as that in the 53rd of Isaiah, where "it pleased the Lord to bruise him and to put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin;" the same thing. So here, the seven eyes denote the perfection of knowledge with which the foundation is laid, and that perfection that pervades the whole. And to show that it refers to the mediatorial work of the Saviour, the next clause declareth that he shall "remove the iniquity of that land in one day;" and so it came to pass on the day that he died that he did achieve this. And then follows the paradisiacal state of things resulting from what he has done. "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree;" expressive of the peaceful state of blessedness into which they are brought.

I have chiefly to notice, this morning, first, *the completion of this building*; and I shall not occupy your time by bringing forward scriptures to show that the Lord will certainly accomplish the number of his elect; that there is a number that shall constitute this building, and that when the last shall be gathered in, then that mundane time shall terminate, and that judgment shall then finally set, and the decision be finally given. Upon this I will not dwell. The topstone will mean that of completion; that is one of the ideas I shall dwell upon this morning. There are three things, then, that we have to notice. First, *the completion*; "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof." Secondly, *the consecration*, for I think that is implied in the headstone; for I think the headstone being brought forth will mean not only the completion of the building, but will mean the Lord Jesus Christ also; it will contain this twofold meaning, the

completion of the building, and the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the corner, by which the foundation is eternally sure,—by which it is eternally consecrated to God. I notice, then, first, *the completion*; second, *the consecration*; and third, *the acclamation*; “He shall bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.”

I notice, then, first, *the completion*. And you will find that the Scriptures everywhere very much delight in completion. There are four beautiful scriptures in the Gospel of John upon this matter of completion; because the completion of the building implies the perfecting of every Christian individually, and for us to understand where that completion is, and what it is, and how it is brought about, and how we are brought into possession of it, is of all favours the greatest we can have while here below. In the 4th of John, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work”—always looking to the completion. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work,” to finish that work which was appointed for Christ to achieve. And so soon as ever the Holy Spirit is pleased to bring the soul into acquaintance with what Jesus Christ hath done, we then begin to see what this finished work is unto us. For while the Saviour said, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work;” this he said in the fourth chapter, and then I think, what he saith in the 6th chapter is founded in this very truth, where he exhorted carnal disciples, on the ground of the profession they made, professing to seek him, he said, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed.” Now, as it was Christ’s meat to do the will of God, and to finish the work which the Father sent him to do, it is our meat, it is our sustenance, that it is done; we should thereby labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life; and that meat that endureth unto everlasting life, as that chapter shows, is the Lord Jesus Christ himself in what he has done; there, you see, is that which makes you perfect, and that perfection will last you for ever. There have been other perfections, which I shall notice if we have time, as we go along; but that atonement, that perfection, lasts for ever. Brought to know that, and to lay hold of it, you live by it in reconciliation to God, you die by it in peace with God. “Mark the perfect man,” the man that is perfect by faith in this finished work, “and behold the upright,” the man that is upright in his soul,—sincere in his love to, and decision for, this great truth; “the end of that man is peace;” and when that man rises at the last great day from the dead, not one of his sins will any more be able to appear against him than one of the Egyptians could come up out of the Red Sea, and appear against the Israelites on the opposite shore; they were dead, and the Israelites saw them dead. “I have cast all thy sins into the depths of the sea.” Here, then, if it were Jesus’ meat to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work, shall it not be our meat to live by the same? shall it not be our sustenance to live by the same? Shall we not say, “Evermore give us this bread”? For, of course, the terms

bread, and meat, and food, are all interchangeable terms, and therefore mean substantially the same thing. This is the first view I take, then, of this doctrine of completion,—this perfection that is in Jesus Christ. And those of you that know what you are in the eye of God's law, and that know your own hearts, and know what poor creatures you are, you will be conscious that you can have no boldness before God but by this finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, then, the Saviour,—nothing satisfied him but a finished work, that is, a complete work; that is, a perfect work; and if you have the spirit of Christ, his spirit was a spirit of perfection, a spirit that could rest only in perfection of achievement; and if you possess the spirit of Christ you will be satisfied with nothing less, with nothing short,—you will not come short of the promise of God; because the man that does not come short of this perfection shall come short of nothing. It is imperfection in the first Adam that has made us to come short of the glory of God; but here, in Christ Jesus, there is no coming short, because he did not come short of perfection. Then, again, the Saviour looks at this finished work as a witness on his side; he looks at all the works that make up the aggregate, or completeness, of his work as being witnesses on his side.

Hence you find, in the 5th chapter of John, he said, "The works which the Father hath given me to finish"—there it is again, you see, to finish—"the same works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." Is it so, then, that Christ likes to be testified of by the works that he has finished? So that if you bear testimony of him by a sort of a shilly-shally salvation, by a sort of shilly-shally redemption, by a sort of an uncertain atonement, that some are in hell for whom Christ died, the Saviour will not accept such a testimony; he will not reckon himself honoured by such a testimony. He says, in the 5th of John, "The works which the Father hath given me to finish bear witness of me." So God the Father will be for ever testified of by the appointment of a complete work; Jesus Christ will be for ever testified of by the achievement of a perfect work; the eternal Spirit will ever act and ever be owned as the revealer of a perfect work; and all the people of God shall nicely bear testimony that he is a rock, and that his work is perfect.

Again, not only is this finished work our meat that endureth unto eternal life, with eternal certainty; not only shall this finished work bear testimony of Christ, but mark something else—that Christ himself will speak of his people, and does now, to God the Father, by what he himself has done. He presents them by this finished work; he presents them without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. But again; the Saviour finds the eternity of the glory that he is to enjoy with his people, and his people with him, upon the completion of this work. "Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." And what follows upon it? Why, universality of power is the first thing that follows upon that. "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should"—offer? No,—"*give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*" Christ looks up into the counsels of eternity, and there he sees in God's mind, purpose, counsel, decree, grasped the whole (for Christ was God as well as man) that were given to him. Then he surveys the valley of time, and sees them under sin, some in one condition, and some in the other. There he stands on the ground of his finished work, armed with omnipotent, with universal power; and to all that were embraced in the covenant of eternity he will minister eternal life,—"*to give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*" So that the ancient counsels of heaven, the perfection of Christ, the excellence of his power, and the people, shall all come together by his finished work. "And this is life eternal, to know thee"—in what he has done. If you do not know Jesus Christ in the eternity of his priesthood, you do not know him at all; your knowledge

of him is a false knowledge; your light is darkness; your hope is delusion; your faith is fancy; your love is the mere feeling of the flesh; and there is nothing in it acceptable in the sight of God. It is the sinner that is cut up, root and branch, and all his refuges of lies swept away, and he is left hopeless and helpless; and the great Redeemer appears in his wondrous achievement, and there the sinner feels a little hope rise when he sees the possibility of his salvation; and if you have hope in any other way, your hope is delusion. The Saviour requests himself to be glorified on this very ground. "Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Most of you know what that glory was which he had with the Father before the world was; and on the ground of his finished work he prays that he may be glorified with that church that he had in the counsels of eternity before the world was. Secondly, he had the work that he was to do; he had that in counsel with the Father before the world was; and so he prays to be glorified according to that glorious work that he had to do,—that he had with the Father in counsel before the world was. Third, the blessedness of the state that was to result from his work he had in covenant with the Father before the world was; and he prays to be glorified with this. And I must confess, for myself, this is all I want. Give me heaven according to electing blessedness; give me heaven according to mediatorial perfection; give me heaven according to covenant settlement and arrangement, and then all my springs will be in God; he will be my exceeding joy; and while mortal flesh and mortal heart fail from day to day, and every human hope gives way, the living God is left as the strength of our hearts and our portion for ever. See, then, in this doctrine of completeness, first—here is the meat that endureth unto eternal life; secondly, that the living God will be remembered and borne testimony of by this finished work; and that the people shall be spoken of in and by this finished work; and in the Scriptures they largely are thus spoken of; and, third, that the Saviour founds the eternity of his glory upon the same foundation. And while we get this threefold representation, then, in John, we come to the 19th chapter of John, and we watch the solemn steps of the Saviour, and presently we arrive at those beautiful words, "He said, It is finished; bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." Here, again, it was spoken of before, as though it was done; because of the entire certainty thereof. Nor need I in this part to illustrate this matter,—bring before you typical circumstances. If there be an air of sublimity, which there is; if there be eloquence, which there is; if there be sense profound, which there is; if there be a majesty, if there be a solemn joy, that you seem somewhat carried away with, when one by divine inspiration said, "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them; and on the seventh day God rested from his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day," with what superior force,—wonderful as is the creation, salvation is, nevertheless, more wonderful,—with what superior force may the words be written at Calvary's cross! Thus the new heavens and the new earth are finished, and all the hosts of them; all the hosts of Israel are completed, all the tribes of Israel are completed, all the election of grace completed. And God rested on the seventh day; but it was but a day; but here is a rest that is everlasting. God resteth in Christ, and Christ resteth in God; and God will rest in the church, and the church shall rest in God. And I have nothing better to say to you all day than this, namely—this completeness of the work of Christ. What should we do without it? Oh, how black without it are the heavens! how tempestuous, how threatening the heavens! There is nothing, without this work of Christ, to be seen, but an angry Judge; there is nothing but sin, and hell, and damnation, without this wondrous work of the blest Redeemer.

But look at several more typical circumstances. What would the ark

have been if it had not been a finished ark? There was no possibility of Noah being taken away by the flood. God himself went into the ark, and he himself shut the door. The tabernacle in the wilderness, that God might dwell there, was a finished tabernacle; the temple was a finished temple; and Zerubbabel's hands have laid the foundation of this temple, and his hands shall finish it. And the priests stood still in Jordan until all things were finished which the Lord commanded Joshua, and as Moses commanded; they stood still till all things were finished, and as Moses stop to amplify these matters; but I always feel at home in the subject in which I am now. I am at home, too, in downward experience, as far as the truth of it is concerned; but still it is in this sea of mediation where one seems to bathe one's weary soul with more pleasure than anywhere else; it is here where the perfections of God culminate, where they concentrate, and where everything stands on the side of a poor sinner that has but a grain of faith to believe in the all-sufficiency of this wondrous Jesus Christ. So much, then, for the doctrine of completion—of perfection.

Now I might have handled this in another way, and I will just tell you what that way was. I might have handled this, first, to have shown that the people of God all stand complete in God the Father's counsels, for it is said of him that he is perfect in knowledge, and by that perfection of knowledge he has provisionally made them perfect, so they are perfect there; second, that they are, as I have shown, perfect in the work of Christ; and third, that they are perfect in kind in their character now. I am a perfect Christian, that is, if I am a Christian at all, and I don't mean to say I doubt that this morning. I am a perfect Christian in kind, but I am not perfect in degree—no; I am of perfect heart; I have a perfect decision for God's new-covenant truth; I am perfectly decided; I am perfect in kind, but I am not yet perfect in degree. Well, say some, I should like to see you when you are perfect in degree. Well, so should I like to see you, and so I shall too. And when will that be? At that time pointed out by the Psalmist, when he said, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." So, my hearer, at the last great day, when you shall stand with all the ransomed throng, you will then be perfect, not only in kind but in degree also; you will then be perfect personally, possess perfection, and enjoy perfection for ever. I hope I have made myself understood, and I hope this same subject is to all of you what it is to me—the very centre of my soul, the foundation of my hope, my way of access to God, my hiding-place, my righteousness, my victory, my life, my liberty, my prospect for time and for eternity, my all and in all. Bless the Lord! I often look about for an evidence of my belonging to God, and I come to that. Well, do you love Jesus Christ in what he has done? I do. I am aware the devil may beset us upon this point, but those temptations shall not last very long; and if Satan is suffered so to harass us and perplex us as to make us afraid to build here, we labour under that disadvantage; but there is one advantage we have—if Satan so torment us that we are not able to build our hope here, we can't build our hope anywhere else; we know all else is sinking sand,—

"On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All beside is sinking sand."

Now I secondly notice *the consecration*. Not only shall the building be complete; the people of God be complete; the topstone brought home with shoutings, Grace, grace unto it, but I think the headstone here may refer not only to the completion of the building, but to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. He is the head of the corner; he is the head and strength, shall I say? of the building—the consecration—by him it is consecrated to God. I will make this clear by contrast. First, the whole human race was consecrated to God in its natural and federal head, but that natural and federal head apostatized, and the whole human race, instead of

remaining in that pristine state of purity in which Adam was created, and remaining in love to God and to each other, apostatized, and the whole has broken down. But can such a thing happen in the last Adam, Christ Jesus? He is the spiritual and the federal head of his people, and their consecration, as to the perfection and the continuation of it, depends, not upon them, but entirely upon him; and as he never did break down and never can, it is by him this mystic building then is consecrated to God for ever; it must, the foundation must, remain invulnerable, and the building must remain impregnable, and the topstone, or the perfection of it, must remain; there is no failure; the gates of hell shall not prevail. Second, the Lord consecrated the Jewish nation to himself by Moses. "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself." But Moses broke down, Moses spake unadvisedly with his lips, Moses sinned, Moses rebelled, and Moses had not power to keep the people who were, by salvation from Egypt by his instrumentality, consecrated to God; Moses had not power to keep them, and so that broke down also. But Jesus Christ hath wrought a salvation, and by the salvation that he hath wrought he consecrates us to God by that salvation, and he keeps us in that consecration. Some of us, since we have received the testimony of God's free-grace salvation, we have never in one instance turned from it, we still remain. So that, not only as our spiritual and federal head, but also as our Saviour, he consecrates us to God, and severs us from everything contrary to that consecration. If his consecration stand good, then our consecration stands good. Again, the Lord consecrated a people to himself by Aaron; but, alas! Aaron broke down, permitted a golden calf to be set up, and the people went away after other gods; here was a break-down again. But shall the people whom Christ hath sanctified, shall it be thus with them? No. Hear how he traces the whole out. "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Again, "I will put my trust in him;" and, "Here am I and the children whom thou hast given me," which was what Adam could never say, what Moses could never say, what Aaron could never say. No, if the Lord say to Adam, Adam, where is thy flock, thy beautiful flock? he would hang down his head and say, Lost, lost, and I can neither recover them nor myself. Moses, where is thy flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? Oh, vast numbers of them apostatized, fallen in the wilderness, and gone, and I have now on this side of the wilderness very few left, hardly any left of those that I had when I began my journey. Aaron, where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? Ah, alas! they are gone, many of them are gone. But when the question is put to Jesus, Where is thy flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? "Here am I, Father, and the children thou hast given me." "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hands." See how, then, while the Son of God was consecrated for evermore, see how he thus consecrates the people to himself with eternal certainty, so that he shall bring forth his perfect work at the last day as the topstone, the headstone, himself thereby the head of the corner, by whom the people are consecrated to God for ever. Again, the Lord gave a people to David, a kingdom, and by the instrumentality of David consecrated them to himself; but David broke down, David sinned, obliged to retire from the whole, and find a refuge only in a covenant ordered in all things and sure, which was all his salvation and all his desire. Solomon broke down, king after king broke down, till by-and-bye the whole kingdom is trampled under foot and destroyed. Ah, Jewish royalty, where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock? Alas! alas! scattered and gone; the enemy hath trampled them down; royalty is no more; the throne, the sceptre, the crown, the glory of David is worn out, tarnished,

waxed old, and vanished away for ever. But ask the King of Zion where his flock, the beautiful flock that was given to him is; and the answer is, that "the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever;" that "they see," it is said in the winding up of the Scriptures, "they see his face, and shall reign for ever and ever." Here, again, Jesus brings forth himself at the last great day as the topstone. At Calvary's cross he brought forth himself, and now he still brings forth himself, and so, at the last day, he will come forth himself, and by his mediatorial work will be the topmost stone. All real consecration to God, then, is by him. "Ye are," saith Peter, when summing up this whole subject, "a chosen generation"—there is the beginning of consecration—"a royal priesthood"—there is the mediatorial progression of consecration; "a holy nation," there is the operation of it, the Holy Spirit; "a peculiar people," there is the severance from all other people; "that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

Thus, then, here is perfection, here is eternal consecration. I might bring forward, but time and space forbid, the new covenant relations of the great God in this matter of consecration; but I will name only one. Now all the learned agree that the Hebrew word translated "covenant" means *purification*, that it is a covenant of purification; that "as he could swear by no greater, he hath sworn by himself, I will be their God, and they shall be my people." And by this immutable oath their standing remains as unshaken as the throne of God. Thus, then, we have that which endures to everlasting life; we have that by which the Saviour is borne testimony of and glorified, and we have that consecration that prevents our coming short. Only we want more experience of this. I preach these truths sometimes hoping that while I am preaching them you may get a little experience of them. I do not, as you know, make light of the soul-troubles and the downward experience of the people of God; I like to touch upon them; still we must not remain always in one part, and I like sometimes to get a little up into these high mountains; I somehow or other feel at home there. I will tell you one of my experiences there; I wish I had more of them. And what is that? Why, "Hearken, O daughter, and forget;" that's it; it is all summed up in the little word *forget*. If I think of the world, and of trouble, and of this, and that, and the other, I get miserable, and gloomy, and rebellious, and hard-hearted, and contracted, and stupid; but when I can contemplate the mercy of God, the ability of his grace, the certainty of his love, and truth, and compassion, and pity in Christ Jesus, here I can forget my poverty, and remember my misery no more for the time being. I say that is what I want more; I want to remember my sins only just to magnify in the remembrance of them the grace of God; I want to remember my miseries and tribulations only to magnify in the remembrance thereof those consolations that shall overflow all the banks of tribulations, and waft our souls home to eternal glory.

But, lastly, *the acclamation*. The point I notice in conclusion is *the theme*; "Grace, grace unto it." Now this must be looked upon first ascriptively; that is the idea. Many people have thought they have glorified God by ascribing to him what he does not own nor acknowledge. Ah! says one, I think, if God is glorified, it does not matter about the way. That is it; that is everything, sir; the way is everything; and if it is not the way of faith, it cannot please God. Do you not read in the Bible of one that thanked God? He did thank God; and you say, That is a very thankful man; I wish I was as thankful to God as that. There he is in the temple, the right place, and there he is looking to the true God, the right God, and there he is thanking God; why, he is a very nice man. Now, would not you think that was right? Well, I should have thought so. The Lord did not think so. No; the Lord was better pleased with

the services of one that did not thank him at all. Now, is not that enough to puzzle any one? Well, it is a fact that he did not accept the one that thanked him; he did accept the one that did not thank him for anything. Well, I have heard that you say strange things, say some. Well, it is a truth. "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, nor as this publican." I am a dear good creature. He did not go down to his house justified. Were his thanks accepted? They were not. The publican did not thank God at all, because he was not sure he had anything to thank him for, not of a spiritual kind. The publican knew something went before thanks, and he wished to have something to be thankful for, and so he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That man was justified; his prayers heard, his prayers answered; and he goes down to his house full of gratitude to God. So, then, while giving thanks, it is a good thing,—even that, you see, may be done in a wrong way. You may think to praise and glorify God, but if you attribute and ascribe to him that which is not in accordance with the order of praise, then it is not accepted, nor you either. Now here you see it is grace; the ascription is grace. And why is the ascription of grace? First, and chiefly, too, because the foundation was laid by the grace of God; the superstructure has been carried on by the grace of God; the completion shall be by the grace of God.

There shall be a people down to the end of time that shall be crying, "Grace, grace unto it;" there shall be a people down to the end of time that shall feel the force of those words in the 1st of John, "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace;" there shall be a people until the very top stone, the last sinner, shall be gathered in, their theme shall be the grace of God; they shall have nothing to attribute to God but grace. They are saved originally by grace, mediatorially by grace, manifestively by grace, preservatively by grace, justificationally by grace; sanctificationally by grace; "according to the riches of his grace," "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace." These are the shoutings that shall reach the caverns of hell, the loftiest arches of heaven; shall fill the universe with their songs at the last day, and roll on to all eternity in all the abundance and blessedness of the grace, that where sin hath abounded, grace hath much more abounded. So, then, it is of grace, because they are saved by grace; and so the ascription accords with the derivation; it is the reflex, like the rivers coming from the sea, and thither they return in the shape of praise and acclamation. And then, lastly, it is "Grace, grace unto it," because of the mutuality of theme. Now by nature, while we are in a state of nature, God's theme is one, ours is another; his thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are not our ways, until he make his thoughts our thoughts, and his ways our ways; he brings us thus to make grace our theme. Grace is our theme, it is God's theme; it is that in which he delights; so that there will be a oneness of theme between God and his people to all eternity. God the Father is the God of grace; and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of grace,—

"And if we lisp a song of praise,
Each note shall echo, Grace, free grace."

I add no more.