

# SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

INFALLIBLE PROOFS.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 27TH, 1862, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days."—Acts i. 3.

THE apostles were blessed previously to the day of Pentecost with infallible proofs of Christ's resurrection; and on the day of Pentecost all the preceding proofs, if they needed confirming, and in one sense they did, because the Saviour had promised the outpouring of the Spirit on that day, and it was, therefore, needful that they should realize on that day what the Saviour had promised, and what was predicted; but that these disciples, or apostles, were on that day constituted infallible witnesses; so that, we have come down to us the testimony of Christ's resurrection by infallible proofs. And yet, it is not the demonstration that was given on the day of Pentecost that is referred to in our text. We have, this morning, to notice those proofs of Christ's resurrection which the disciples were favoured with previously to the day of Pentecost; and these our text declares to be infallible proofs. I shall, therefore, in the first place, give a *sample of these infallible proofs of Christ's resurrection*; and then, secondly, *the time during which he was on earth previously to his ascension*: he was with them forty days.

I first, then, just give a concise sample of the infallible proofs of Christ's resurrection with which the disciples were favoured. There are, of course, a great many more infallible proofs than I can mention; I shall, therefore, mention simply a few that appear to me self-evident. The first that I name is, that they were able to recognize the Saviour; for you must understand, that these were infallible proofs to the disciples,—not to other people; they were not infallible proofs to other people; other people had no proofs at all; and hence we find, that whilst the Pharisees, that hated the doctrines of Christ, pursued and persecuted Christ, the Sadducees, who hated the doctrine of the resurrection, they followed up, after Christ's resurrection, the persecution of the Pharisees previously to Christ's death. You will find that the Pharisees were the more conspicuous sect in persecuting Christ before his death, because they objected to his doctrine; but at the same time, these Pharisees did hold with the doctrine of the resurrection; but the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, either in angel, or spirit, or in future existence at all; and, therefore, they followed up with the same zeal, after Christ's resurrection, that the Pharisees had persecuted Christ before his death; the Sadducees now took the place of the Pharisees in thus persecuting Christ. And thus you will see that Satan has his different regiments, his different orders, which he brings into the field to wage war against the various truths of the gospel, and against the saints of God, in that way for which Satan knows they are the best qualified, and the most suited to answer his purpose. You must, therefore, distinctly understand that these infallible proofs belonged to the apostles, and to the people of God

at large; for he was seen, we are assured, by above five hundred brethren at once.

Let us look then, first, at their power of recognition. They had been with him daily, more or less, for three years; they had personally witnessed his miracles, and the wonders he had wrought; they had personally witnessed the sinlessness of his conduct; they had listened to his discourses; and though they had not as yet very clearly understood them, yet such was their acquaintance with him that, when he re-appeared, they could not well be mistaken; they recognized him, and knew that it was the Lord. It is true, Mary appears to have made a momentary mistake upon this, supposing him to be the gardener; and you read in another place that some doubted; but then they did not doubt very long. When they thus contemplated his person, and looked back at their acquaintance with him; when they looked at the wounds in his hands, and feet, and side, and viewed him altogether, it became an infallible proof unto them that this was that same Jesus that died on Calvary's cross, and that he was risen from the dead; they felt no manner of doubt about this matter. And we find on one occasion, so strong, so overwhelming, so convincing, was this power of recognition with which they were blessed, that one could not stop in the mere fact of his being the same person, but was overwhelmed with the majesty of his presence; and although, previously to that, we hear what the same person said, that unless he should see the prints of the nails, unless he should thrust his hand into his side, he would not believe; and this may again remind us that these disciples were not in a temper, or in a mood of mind, to be deceived; they had made up their minds not to be deceived; they thought they had been deceived, and thinking they had been deceived, they would not receive him very readily; they would not receive him, only on the ground of undoubted assurance that this was the same person; and I cannot suppose but the rest of the disciples entered somewhat into the same spirit, and felt a little of the same blessedness, when Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." Now, the Saviour said, "Thomas, because thou hast seen thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." It is well worth your while to observe the absurdity of the idea of the Saviour letting such a declaration pass if it had not been true, when Thomas said, "My Lord and my God!" I think that the word "God" there is a declaration of his Divinity; and I think the word "Lord" there is a declaration of his manhood; and thus, as man, he was Lord of all, for "the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath;" and in his Divinity he was God. Here, then, was a recognition, not only of the sameness of the person, but also of the Divinity of his person. They were thus favoured to distinguish him from all others.

Now, let us apply each proof as we go along. We live in a day,—it may not sound well from me, perhaps, but I cannot help saying it, and I say it from a most solemn conviction,—we live in a day in which, if there ever was a time when it was a privilege to be able to distinguish and recognize the true Christ of God from false Christs, it is in the day in which we live. Oh, how many false Christs are preached in the day in which we live. It is no small mercy, then, to be able to recognize the true Christ. And how shall we distinguish the true Christ? Why, when we find out that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and that this wonderful Person,—Jehovah, Christ Jesus, God and man, puts his righteousness into the place of our unrighteousness; and when we find out that we are such sinners that, for aught we could do, we must remain under condemnation; we must remain in an unquenchable fire, notwithstanding what infidels may tell us of the fire being quenched, and souls in the future being annihilated. Infidelly-disposed men may talk in this way, but the Word of God assures us that the fire shall not be quenched, and that the worm dieth not, and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth for

ever and ever. If you find this to be your state, and see that Jesus Christ hath put his atoning death into the place of your sins, and that as that atoning death remains there for ever, your sins are gone for ever; that he has put his atoning death into the place of that hell that your sin hath lighted up, and has quenched that fire; and as his atoning death remains for ever, no more wrath can be lighted up against you; there can be no more a worm at the root of your existence, to eat up your comforts, and to prevent your prosperity; and that this same Jesus Christ remains the same in his suretyship responsibility; that the accomplishing of salvation, and the presentation of millions of people at the last great day, were committed to Christ. Now, if thou hast found this out, then thou canst recognize and distinguish the true Christ from a false Christ. A free-will Christ, a duty-faith Christ, a Roman Catholic Christ, a false church Christ, is not the Christ of God. It is by false Christs that souls are deceived. Now, the disciples were satisfied that this was the Christ of God; the same person of whom Peter had said before, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" the same person whose glory three of the disciples had before seen on the mount of transfiguration; the same Christ whom all had witnessed agonizing in the garden of Gethsemane; the same Christ that died, who had these same people witnessing all the scenes that took place at his death. I find it no small mercy thus to be able to recognize the true Christ of God. And as to its being the duty of men in general to believe savingly in this Jesus Christ, God sparing me, and giving me some piercing arrows, and a good sharp sword, I will give that such a turn, one of these Sunday mornings, as it has not had for some time; for it is lifting up its head, and because I have been quiet lately, some say, "His sermons are improved." I would not have it thought, for a moment, that I feel in my mind the least inclination to show the *white feather*, or a feather of truce at all, or to bow to anything that is contrary to the honour of that eternal perfection that is in Christ, and that perfection that we have by him. Ah, my hearer! if we are led by a false Christ, while we think we are going to heaven, we are at the same time, by Satanic delusion, alas! alas! gliding imperceptibly down into eternal perdition. Now, then, the disciples were not willing to be deceived; they were very anxious about this matter; they must have proof. And so must I. When I find out what I need, my question is, Does Jesus Christ answer my need? And, bless the Lord! I find, from searching the Word of God, that he does. So that this power to distinguish the true Christ from the false, was to them an infallible proof that their religion was real; because, if Christ were not risen, their religion was not real. I think I am not carrying it too far in embodying this idea, namely, that if Christ did not rise from the dead, then the faith of the disciples was vain,—their religion was vain. But now that here was infallible proof that he was risen, their religion was not vain. And so, if I have power to recognize and distinguish the true Christ of God, that is a proof that my religion is not vain. And you will find that the best antidote you can have to the fear either of man, or of life, or of death, or of tribulation, or of anything else,—the best antidote you can have, is a clear personal acquaintance with the true Christ of God. And this clear acquaintance with the true Christ of God made the apostle Paul say, "Thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ." He does not cause us to triumph anywhere else, for triumphing anywhere else would be but for a moment; but if we are brought to triumph in Christ, there we may triumph for ever; because the victory which he hath wrought stands good while cycles of ages run their majestic rounds; we may go on rejoicing in the Lord without limits, or without a terminus. I esteem it, therefore, no small favour to have so much of the spirit of the disciples as to be able to distinguish the true Christ from the false.

The second infallible proof of his resurrection to them, was his faithful-

ness to his word in meeting them as he had promised. That, perhaps, may not appear very striking by itself, but what I shall bring in with it will make this, I think, appear the second infallible proof. And we must, if we possibly can, realize the position and feelings of the disciples. It is a kind of subject which, without some degree of realization of their actual feelings and position, we cannot well understand. Now you find in the 26th of Matthew, that the Saviour had promised that he would go before them into Galilee. He appoints a certain place where he would meet them. Now, I would not be fanciful, but I must indulge in just a moment's digression here, upon the idea of his going before them into Galilee. Galilee, you are aware, means *revolution*; and it comes from the same root, and is, indeed, the same word, though in different places differently spelt, as that of Gilgal. And hence when the Lord, in olden time, rolled away the reproach of Egypt—rolled away the reproach of the Israelites being slaves, and constituted them heirs of the promised land,—now that they were at home, and free, and he had rolled away the reproach of Egypt, he called the place Gilgal. And, for aught I know, the Saviour promised to go before them into Galilee, to bring, by the very word Galilee, before the disciples' eyes, the delightful truth that he had rolled their reproach away. Sin was their reproach, and he had rolled it away; mortality and all its evils he had rolled away: and now there is no reproach left. Boaz himself seems to point to this when he said to the reapers, relative to Ruth, "Reproach her not." And so it is not the business of the gospel minister to reproach the gleaner, or the poor sinner that is come from a far country, because of the name of the Lord, and wishes to glean in the fields of truth, if haply he may find mercy from the Lord. So, I say, his thus going before them into Galilee was, perhaps, to point out the truth that he had gone before them, and rolled away their reproach. And, therefore, go forward,—don't be afraid—there is no reproach from God to meet you; and as for the reproach of men, look at the reproach of men as being the mere passing breath of mortality. Go forward till you reach the Jordan; there is no reproach from the Most High to meet you. He will meet you with the ark of the covenant, with the mercy seat, and with this great High Priest. Go forward to judgment; it will be your coronation day; it will be a day when all your grievances will be redressed; when all your wrongs will be made right; when your possession of the inheritance will be confirmed.

But, passing by this digression, see the truth of the Saviour's words. The disciples went into Galilee; and yet they would not have gone if they had not been again directed. Well, but he told you to go into Galilee. Yes, but I don't know it is any use. I won't go there,—I will go to the sepulchre. Well, you might go to a worse place than that; because, certainly, the angel is there. And so, when they came to the sepulchre, what was the testimony of the angel? We shall see in what an emphatic way the angel gave his testimony. They, of course, were distressed and alarmed; and he first spake encouragingly to them,—exceedingly encouragingly to them;—and then he spake instructively to them, and then he spake directively to them; and this is all very emphatically. He says:—"Fear ye not; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified." I know that,—I know you are seeking after him, and you will rejoice when you see him; and he hath told you he would see you again, and your hearts should rejoice. He then speaks instructively:—"He is not here; for he is risen." And just mark something else, in order to make this another infallible proof of Christ's resurrection,—this angel that bare this testimony was more conspicuous than any one of the other angels—this same angel was the angel whose countenance was as lightning, which is not said of any one of the other angels, and that his raiment was white as snow, and for fear of him—this same angel—the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. How this must have confirmed the disciples,

that this angel was an angel from on high—that he was an angel of God. And he says, “Go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him; lo, *I have told you.*” So, if you do not see him there, say I am a liar; that is what it imports. He was not afraid to set his message afloat; he says, “There shall ye see him; lo, I have told you.” I, whose countenance you see to be as lightning—I, whose presence struck terror into these enemies, there they were as dead men—I, who have thus spoken to you encouragingly—I now tell you; as though he should say, If you have not much faith in his word, I have; he said he would go before you into Galilee. And the same chapter confirms the message of the angel; they went to Galilee, and there they saw him. And even then, some doubted; some are uncommonly good hands at doubting and fearing—I am myself. If I were half as good a hand at believing as I am at doubting and fearing, I should be a very much happier Christian than I am. So that, even then, though they had the fulfilment of the Saviour’s words, and the angel’s testimony—all this amounted to an infallible proof, there could be no deception about the matter—even then, some doubted. But Jesus pretty soon put these doubts to an end, by bringing into exercise his own almighty power, and saying, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Look, then, at the faithfulness and stability of his word; that word stood good, and left no doubt upon their minds. And so it is now; if we are enabled to watch the hand of the Lord, we shall see the fulfilment of his word. For instance, in accordance with what I have now been saying, suppose I take that one promise, “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice.” Now, I would ask this assembly—and I believe there are some hundreds of people here this morning that are born of God, that will go to heaven, and that understand what I am saying when I ask the question—is there any one part of the word of the Lord more conspicuously true than that, “I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice”? Oh, how often have we been cast down, and fettered, and trembling, and fearing, and rebelling, and exclaiming, “All these things are against me”? and has not Jesus come again? has not his name been unto us again as ointment poured forth? have not his endearments been renewed? and have not the rays of his glory shone upon our minds afresh again and again? What meaneth it, when one hearer says, Well, the text struck me, and was a sermon to me? and another says, Well, such and such remarks melted my heart, endeared the Saviour, and I felt it good to be there? and another says, Well, it all seemed for me from beginning to end; I have not heard so well for ever so long? Why, what is this but the re-manifestation of the Saviour? what is this but the fulfilment of his own word, and an infallible proof that you are a Christian? for in the first place, if you were not a Christian, you could not so recognize the true Christ of God as to abide by him, and reject all false Christs; and in the second place, if you were not a Christian, you could not mourn his absence. And the very thing the disciples sought, they certainly did obtain; they were seeking Jesus, and they saw Jesus. And just so with us; we have sought him, we do seek him, and we have not sought him in vain. Here, then, is another infallible proof that our religion is real.

Third, his vanishment from the disciples would be to them another infallible proof. He walked with them by the way, and how silent they were—how astounded they were—when he, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the Scriptures all things concerning himself. What a very large space of the Scriptures must be occupied by the Saviour, for him to begin at Moses and all the prophets,

and show that the main theme, the main object of all things, was himself. I must not attempt to make a guess at the course that he took ; but if we go back to the first sacrifice, or if we go to the ark, or if we go to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; if we go to the salvation from Egypt, the supply of water from the rock, the crossing the Jordan, the victories obtained, the land given, the sacrificial service established, the mercy-seat, the royalty—all these things, even these typical things, all pointed to him. And then, if we come down to prophetic delineation, which no doubt he did—and I have no doubt that was one of the most wondrous comments that was ever given upon the Scriptures, yet God, in his sovereignty, has withholden that comment from us ; and yet we have it, perhaps, in a way many may not think of, for we know not how much we may have thrown into the Epistles ; for when the Holy Spirit came upon them, at the day of Pentecost, then all things were fresh brought into their memory that the Lord had said unto them. Yet they did not know him ; they liked his company very much—that was a good sign. When you meet with a man, and he is a poor nothing in himself, and worse than nothing, and that man is clothed with Jesus Christ, and glories in nothing but Jesus Christ, and has a great reverence, and love, and decision for Christ, it is a good thing to feel union of soul to such a man ; and they did to the Saviour, not knowing it was the Saviour. But when he was known to them in breaking of bread, and vanished out of their sight, they put these things together, and were fully sure that it was the Lord, and so they returned to Jerusalem the same night, rejoicing in what the Lord had manifested to them, saying, “ Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way ? ” And is it not just the same now ? As this was a proof to them then, so there is a Christian experience in these days, a proof to us also. Have you not experienced the unaccountable, the mysterious, sudden cessation of everything that is spiritual ? You shall enjoy communion with the Lord, and be too spiritually minded to care for the trifles of a day, and too much raised up into the realization of eternal things, to be affected by the things that are seen by mortal eyes, perfectly acquiescing in God’s counsel, and believing he is leading you forth by a right way ; the soul is made like the chariots of Aminadab ; and all at once down you go—the sun is eclipsed in a moment, the beasts of the forest creep forth, and there is a carnality of mind, corresponding in intensity with the spirituality we before enjoyed. And then Satan comes in, and says, Now you know what is written, “ If it be of God, it will stand ; and if it be of man, it will come to nought.” Now, if your enjoyment had been of the Lord, it would have remained ; but as it did not remain, therefore it is not of the Lord. For Satan is a very ingenious preacher ; he knows how to time his text and subject. But then, as saith the apostle, we are not altogether ignorant of his devices. This is a kind of experience that, many years ago, used to puzzle me amazingly ; but I have been so used to it since, that it does not so much puzzle me now, for I know that the Lord does very often deal in this way with his people. Nevertheless, the remembrance of the refreshing we have had is pleasant. “ Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked by the way ? ”

“ If Jesus once upon me shine,  
Then Jesus is for ever mine.”

Fourth, the draught of fishes would be to the disciples another infallible proof. They had been toiling, and caught nothing. I scarcely need say that the lesson here is so plain that it needs no comment to explain it. They had been labouring all night, and caught nothing. And you know what the Saviour says upon this, “ Without me ye can do nothing.” If I try to obtain anything without Christ, I am sure to be disappointed ; I am sure to cast the net on the wrong side of the ship. And it will do us

no harm that I know of to have this idea fixed in our minds both spiritually and temporally. The Lord is a God of providence, and he does not despise anything that he has made; and he has assured us that the little sparrows are not forgotten before him; and why should you think you are such an obscure, insignificant creature, that it is hardly worth your while to trouble the great God with your affairs? Why, if the little sparrow could speak, he would reprove you, and say, Why, I trouble the Lord with my affairs; you see I am a little sparrow, and if they can get hold of me they sell me for a farthing. Ah, say you, that's more than they would give for me. Well, perhaps that might be; and yet that little sparrow is not forgotten by the Lord; and therefore, do not think that he will feel at all troubled when you trouble him with your affairs; the very hairs of your head are all numbered. And see the kind inquiry with which the Saviour came. When he died, all had fled from him, and one had denied, with awful oaths, that he knew him; and yet you see the Saviour appeared to them in the language of endearment. He stood on the sea shore, and he knew they had been toiling all night, and he saw them toiling now, and he said, "Children;"—it is a term expressive of his love, indeed, it is a kind of paternal expression; and so you recollect, in the ninth of Isaiah it is said of Christ, "He shall be called the everlasting Father;" and in the twenty-second of Isaiah it is said of him, that "he shall be a father unto the house of Judah, and unto the inhabitants of Jerusalem." And now he appears like a father concerned for his children; "Children, have ye any meat?" And the answer was very short, but very satisfactory; "they answered him, No;" there was no hesitation about it; they were utterly destitute. They did not say, Well, stop, I will ask Peter whether he has any, or James, or Thomas; all destitute together. "And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." And yet it says, "For all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." Now, previously to that, poor Peter's net was broken, just to show us, at least, it might teach us, that all earthly nets must break, and all we gain must be given up, the time must come when we must give it all up. But, bless the Lord! there is a gospel net. "Although there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Well, how did they get it to land? They tugged and pulled, and do you think they could get it to land? No; but when he gave the command, then it soon came to land; they could draw it then. Just so it is now; all carrying out the truth, that without him we can do nothing. They knew it was the Lord. I dare say Peter had got his pencil and slate, and began to calculate, Here is a pretty haul; why, we have made our fortunes at one cast, pretty well. I see what you are about, Peter; I see you are very much taken with these advantages; I see you are calculating how much money you will get; and perhaps you have almost built your house, you are going to retire into, and all the rest of it. Let me ask you a question. Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these fishes? I like them very much. Well, yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. More than these? Well, yes, I do, after all. Well, I am not going to make that sort of a fisher of you; you shall be a fisher of a different sort. Feed my lambs;—quite another thing. Lovest thou me? Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. Well, then, feed my sheep. And he asked him the third time, determined that Peter himself should be confirmed as well as stirred up in the matter. Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. Then feed my sheep.

But, fifthly and lastly, upon these infallible proofs, you may imagine the disciples saying, Well, there is one more thing we should like to see, and that is what will become of him. He has been with us now almost six weeks; that is a long time; we should like to see what will become of him, because we have always understood he was going to heaven. So he

led them out as far as Bethany, a little way on the east of the Mount of Olives, and lifted up his hands and blessed them; and was parted from them, and carried up into heaven; and there they stood astounded, in a manner confused; could hardly make it out. And "behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." And they returned to Jerusalem. You never read of the disciples being scattered after this, not in the way they were before; they abode together. And what is it keeps true Christians together now? Why, these infallible proofs.

But a word or two upon the latter part. He was with them forty days. I am not prepared to say that these forty days are intended to signify anything particular; and it is not my manner to dictate to you anything; at the same time, this space of time does necessarily irresistibly impress the mind with certain suggestions. I cannot read of these forty days without being reminded of the prophet Ezekiel, where he was to lie on his side forty days, a day taken for a year; that forty days, in the case of Ezekiel, was to signify forty years. So, when I read here of the forty days, and recollect that the Israelites travelled in the wilderness forty years, I have thought that these forty days seem to mean that while Christ had consecrated our path to heaven in his humiliation, now in his resurrection state he remains forty days on earth, perhaps indicative of the certainty of our progression, going in the strength not only of his death, but also in the blessedness of his resurrection, from strength to strength until we have travelled through the wilderness our allotted forty days. Secondly, when I recollect that Moses, and Elijah, and the Lord himself, fasted forty days—we read of no fasting after Christ's death; the apostle Peter says, "We did eat and drink with him after his resurrection;" these forty days may indicate that he has turned the fast into a feast; and so there is no more fasting; sin has brought the famine; salvation has brought eternal feasting. Third, I am inclined to think there is a kind of defiance to Satan. Fiftieth of Isaiah, where the Saviour is the speaker, "Who will contend with me? Let us stand together; who is mine adversary? let him come near to me." Now, Satan, to show I am not afraid of you, I will stay forty days on earth; and I will give you the opportunity, if you can come and charge me with anything I have done wrong, or with omitting anything that I engaged to do—I will give you an opportunity, for forty days on earth, if you can come and lay a single thing to my charge. But no Satan appeared; no adversary appeared. No, says the devil, he was too much for me in his humiliation, and I won't come near him now; I am glad to get away from him. The Saviour therefore walks deliberately over the territories of the enemy, and the enemy still as a stone; indicative of the perfection of the Saviour's conquest, that all his enemies were put to eternal silence, not one dog now to move his tongue against this wondrous person; all silent; the tranquillity expressive of that tranquillity into which his people shall enter; for "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" I think these things are suggested. One more, and then I close. It shows that the Lord does not do things in such a hurry as we often want things done. The Saviour is content to stay on earth six weeks, just upon six weeks, forty days; there is a fixed time. And so it is; the Lord has made a promise to you, and though he may seem to delay that promise, that promise will be fulfilled,