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SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

SETTLED IN HOPE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, AUGUST 5TH, 1866, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel."—Colossians i. 23.

THE first thing, I think, here intended, is that of *establishment in the faith*,—"if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled." It is this being grounded and settled that I shall dwell upon in the first part. Secondly, *the stability of a true gospel hope*,—"and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel." Thirdly, and lastly, *the great ends that are hereby attained*.

First, then, I notice *establishment in the faith*. "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled." Faith is a divine and vital persuasion of the suitability of the Lord Jesus Christ to our necessities as sinners, connected with an assurance that the great God never was and never will be on any man's side only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; because without faith in Christ, without receiving Christ, it is impossible that our responsibilities should be taken from us, or that we could meet the law, and justice, and holiness of God. But by Jesus Christ all this is brought about, and we are prepared, as we shall have to observe in the last part of our discourse, to meet our Maker. I notice, then, first, this establishment,—"*grounded and settled*." Now there must be five good things in order for you to be grounded and settled; there must be five good things in order to make you a real, true grounded and settled believer. You will observe, in the first place, that the words "*grounded and settled*" are architectural phrases, and refer, of course, to the material being laid on the foundation; and then, after due trial, it settles, and you are satisfied of its stability. Now there are five things essential, then, to this stability in the faith. The first is, you must have a good foundation. And what shall we say in the very setting out of this subject? Can we have a better foundation than we have? Hear the word of the Lord, "Behold, I lay,"—so we needed a foundation which none but he who created the world could lay; he alone could find a foundation strong enough, he alone could find a foundation good enough, he alone could find a foundation durable enough; therefore he saith, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone,"—the very word "*stone*," as you are aware, is intended to convey the idea of strength and durability,—"*a tried stone*;" mark, it is a tried stone. Jesus Christ was tried through his life in a way that awakens, when at all understood, the deepest sympathies of all that belong to him; and he was tried in the mock judgment, tried at Pilate's bar, tried with all our sins, tried with God's wrath, and yet never gave way. Truly he stood every test. In how many respects doth every

Christian feel that he is a poor, pliant, weak creature? Not so with Jesus Christ. He took our sins and our infirmities, but he endured the trial, and never gave way. He is thus, then, a tried stone. And then the consequence follows, "a sure foundation." Now it is in his mediatorial work that he is the foundation. You see that our foundation that we had is gone. Our first foundation was the holiness, the righteousness, and the uprightness in which we were created; but sin destroyed that foundation; and now the foundation, if we are not Christians, of our precious souls is in the dust. That is the only foundation we have, and it is a foundation that doth indeed give way. So that all of us by nature have nothing, apart from Christ, to build on but the sand; and the time must come when the rain of God's wrath will descend, when the floods will rise, and when the whirlwind of his eternal law will sweep everything before it, and then all that are not built upon the foundation that God hath laid must fall into hell. Well might the Saviour say of the house that "it fell, and great was the fall thereof." May the Lord make us feel the weightiness of these things, especially in our latter days, that increasingly we may be assured that we are prepared to cross the Jordan. Now here, then, is a good foundation,—Jesus Christ. And those who are taught of God are brought, I say, to see and feel that their foundation is in the dust by nature, and that there stands against them God's eternal law; yea, God himself. But now Jesus Christ is the foundation. There you may hope for life, and you will not be disappointed; there you may hope for pardon; there you may hope for sanctification, and justification, and salvation; in a word, everything that you can need. This is, therefore, a good thing to be grounded and settled upon. How are matters with us in this? Let us talk together this morning familiarly upon these solemn and weighty matters. Can we say that we are perfectly satisfied with the foundation? If so, then we shall never seek another Saviour; we shall never seek another foundation; we shall never be moved away from the hope of the gospel, for we are grounded and settled. But there must not only be a good foundation, the material built upon the foundation must also be good; for if the material be bad, that gives way, and it might as well have not been built upon the foundation at all. Hence you read of gold, silver, precious stones, built upon this foundation; you also read of wood, hay, stubble, built upon this foundation. You will see that the one material is good, that the other material is bad; and that therefore, in order to be grounded and settled, in the sense of my text, there must not only be a good foundation, but the material itself must be good; that is, your faith must be good, or, to speak plainer if I possibly can, you must be the subject of a work of grace in your heart, and you must be brought to feel what a poor, lost creature you are, and that you rest upon this foundation in your feelings in accordance with its importance. That is the idea; I think I shall be able to bring out what I mean under that one idea. Your hope must be upon this one foundation, according to the importance of it. You must feel that all the silver and gold, and all the honours, and pleasures, and possessions of this world, are as passing shadows in comparison of the infinite importance of such a foundation as this, and that you are built by a divine persuasion upon this as every way adapted to you: and that in connection with this faith you also love the God that hath laid this foundation. So it must be the man that is built upon it according to its importance. You will reason thus: Why, this is my escape from hell; this is my escape from sin; this is my escape from guilt; this is my way of access to God; this is the way that God will dwell with me; for the building is to be for an habitation of God through the Spirit. When you see this and recognize this, Why, you will say, that work of grace in my heart shows to me that I in my doings am nothing but hay, wood, and stubble; and if I am tried by the fiery law of God I must be consumed. But I believe on Jesus, and

rest upon this foundation, and renounce all confidence in the flesh, and he is precious to me; I see that there is an infinity of importance in him. The heart sinks at the very thought of its own sins, at the very thought of its own responsibility, at the very thought of living and dying under the wrath of God. The consequence is, that you will prize this foundation. "Unto you that believe, he is precious." You thus prove that you are a good material; that you are not a mere flimsy professor, having a tolerably sound creed in the head, but no trembling or love in the heart; having a pretty clear intellectual idea as to Christ being the only foundation, but no real building thereon from day to day, no real earnest looking to God by him, no real sighing after God's presence, no real mourning his absence. I lay great stress upon these two; because God is in the building as it goes on; yea, he himself carries on the building, he himself is the Builder. "Upon this rock will I build my church." And it is as true under this phrase, under this architectural idea or imagery, as it is true under the arboricultural, that "every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up;" and so every stone he hath not laid upon this foundation as a living stone shall be thrown down, not one ultimately shall be left upon another. I therefore lay great stress upon the importance of this, that there will be a prizing of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that there will be a solemn grief at times because you do not appreciate him more. You will thus know the difference between the absence and the presence of the Lord. And I am sure if we are taught of God, we shall more and more desire that religion by which we shall prize these eternal things. Know ye not, brethren (if I may change the simile for a moment), that an intensity of thirst for Christ is a sure evidence that for you there is a fountain of living water? Know ye not that the mourning your darkness, and longing to see the light, is an evidence that the Sun of Righteousness is on his way to you, with healing in his wings? Know ye not that an hunger for the bread of life is an evidence that there is the bread of life for you? Know ye not that a trembling lest God should not be your friend, and a solemn desire that he would be merciful to you, and be your friend, that this feeling is in itself an evidence that he is your friend? Hence, all through the holy scriptures, those who have these feelings are everywhere spoken of as the objects of the promises of God, as the objects of his mercy, yea, the very vessels of his mercy? Thus, then, the foundation must be good, and the material must be good; for if the material give way, that will show that the Builder himself did not put it there. For our Builder is not like earthly builders. Earthly builders, when they engage to erect buildings, they are not all of them honest; they will put in all sorts of materials if they are not looked after, and when you expected the building to be settled you will find it will be dreadfully unsettled; for this has given way, and the other has given way, and you have to get it all down again pretty well. Not so the Lord, he builds up his church with good materials, and there shall not be a bad material found in the whole building. I venture to say that Solomon had to take none of the temple to pieces after he had built it. I will venture to say that Zerubbabel had not to change any of the materials. "The top stone"—still dealing in the solid; no wood, no hay, no stubble: something solid, something valuable—"the top stone shall be brought home with shoutings of grace and grace unto it." Such persons know that grace alone can give them this position and keep them in it. Thus, then, the material must be good. A man must be spiritually a living stone, and he will not give way. Now I have known some of you three or four-and-twenty years, some of you thirty years, some of you five-and-thirty years, and some of you very nearly forty years. I think one of our members I have known forty-one years. Well, now, you have worn well; you have not been moved all that time. How many storms you have had, how many trials, how many sorrows, how many

tremblings, but you have never all that time stumbled at God's truth. Here you are, through his mercy, with as firm a persuasion of the truth and of Jesus Christ as you ever had in your life; here you are, through his mercy, with your hope upon no other foundation, and you desire no other foundation; here you are, valuing and esteeming the dear Redeemer as much as you ever did in your life; here you are prizing vital and practical godliness as much as, or more than you ever did in your life. You may well here erect your Ebenezer, and say, "Hitherto the Lord hath helped me." You may well say, can he have brought me thus far to put me to shame? No, he has been with you, is with you, and will be with you. God grant that you young ones may wear as well, those of you that are both young in the ways of the Lord, and young in the faith. Depend upon it you will need all the grace the Lord is pleased to minister to you. I hope in thirty or forty years time, should you live so long, you will stand just where those now within these walls, that have lived so long and worn so well, are still standing. Truly, truly, such have continued in the faith—such have been grounded and they are settled, and have not been and never shall be moved from the hope of the gospel. We must have then this good foundation, so that that will not give way, and we must have good material. A real believer, a true character, a living stone, doth not give way. Then the third good thing we must have is good workmanship. There may be a good foundation and good materials, but the workman may so lay some of the materials that the building shall be very much out of square, and some of the materials slip out of their place perhaps, through the ignorance and awkwardness of the workman. Therefore the workmanship must be good; it must be of the kind that will make you square with the building. Shall I have that idea and work it out? Jesus Christ is the corner stone, and the workmanship must be such that we shall lie at right angles with him; we must be in entire accordance with him. You may be built partly upon Christ and partly upon self, as I myself was. I was built partly upon a little Church of England prayer saying and partly upon Christ. Well down I went. Then I was built after that upon a little free-will and partly upon Christ. Down I went again. And then I was built upon duty faith and partly upon Christ, and down I went again, and I did not know what was to become of me. Now all this was bad workmanship; I had got into bad hands. The great Builder allowed these foolish builders to try to put me right, and I could not put myself right. By and by the Lord stepped in, and when he stepped in and showed me the completeness of Jesus Christ—"ye are complete in him,"—why, that put me at once into right angles with Jesus Christ, and with the everlasting covenant. Thus, then, we must have the workmanship good, the blessed God so fixing the house that we cannot be moved. "They shall be as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed." "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Now, then, we must have these three good things in order to be settled in the faith; but we must have two more good things. The fourth good thing we must have is right to build. You know if you were to build upon people's premises without a proper right, they would soon make you take the building down again. Therefore right to build upon certain premises is certainly one very important item in this matter of building. We all know that we could not begin to build here till we got the right. We looked at the ground and liked it, and hoped it was the place; and as we made up our minds to get it if we could, then the next step was to get the right to build. Then when we got the right we could go to work. Now, then, we have said that Jesus Christ is the foundation; suppose we say he is the ground then upon which we are to build. Let us, if we can, at least bless the Lord that the right is divine. Yea, it is proclaimed that "whosoever cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." There is the right; and that "this is the will of him that sent me, that every one

that seeth the Son and believeth on him hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." There is the right; and that "he came into the world to save sinners." There is the right; and that "he receiveth sinners and eateth with them." There is the right; and that "every one that thirsteth, let him take of the water of life,"—that is, the word of life,—"freely; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." So, then, here is the divine right to build upon Jesus Christ. It is true religions have arisen that have taken this divine right, and have put human right into the place of it. They have sought to build upon Peter instead of Peter's Master; and worse than that, to build upon the Pope instead of building upon Christ; or to build upon some human invention instead of building upon the foundation laid in Zion. But if you have this divine right, then you will not have to be pulled down again, you will not have to be taken away again; that is, if you are settled and satisfied with such a Jesus Christ as this, he will not cast you out. Those of you that are thus settled down upon this foundation, that have no desire to live carelessly concerning these eternal things, but the reverse—those of you that thus feel you have a right—they are yours. "As many as received him, to them gave he power." Now all agree that the word "power" there is a kind of legal phrase, meaning a proper right; "to them gave he right," for that is the meaning of the word "power" there. Hence we often use the word "power" in that respect when we speak of legal right; we say, "We have no power to take such and such steps;" meaning we have no legal right to do and so; and "We have power to take such and such a step;" meaning we have a legal right to do so and so. "As many as received him, to them gave he right to become"—to conclude that they were—"the sons of God." Here, then, we get a good foundation—we get good materials—but they are not good until the Lord makes them good; we get good workmanship, we get a good title, we get a good right—a right that can never be invalidated, the right of God's own authority. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Now we want something else yet, which every Christian will feel anxious to know. Ah, say you, we shall do now; we have got a good foundation, and good materials, and good workmanship, and a good title; why, what do you want next? The approbation of the proprietor. You know people are careful what is built upon their land. And it is no little pleasure to one's mind to know what high approbation has been from the proper quarters expressed concerning your work here, how pleased they are with the building you have erected; and the surveyor said to me the other day, "We are satisfied, and we shall be satisfied." So I liked that twofold testimony. Well, I thought, then the past will do, and taking the past as a kind of pledge of the future, that will do. Just so we want the manifest approbation of our God; we want from time to time a word with him, to know that he approves us, that he has accepted us, that he is satisfied, and that he will at the last say unto us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant;" and that he will then show that we are part of mercy's building, and that he will by his eternal presence cheer us and make us happy for ever. These, then, are the five things essential to being grounded and settled in the faith. Continue thus settled; continue the foundation; continue the earnestness; let the good workmanship, which it will, continue; the title will continue; the Lord's approbation will continue. When the tabernacle of old was finished according to his plan, he approved it, and showed his approbation by filling it with his glory. He showed his approbation of Solomon's temple by filling it with his glory, and no doubt Zerubbabel's temple as well. And so he will show his approbation of his people hereafter by filling them with his glory. "I reckon," saith the apostle—and God grant that we may more and more reckon like that,— "that the sufferings of this present time"—let them be what they may—

"are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Such, then, is the establishment.

I now notice, secondly, *the stability of a true gospel hope*. And there may be a little difficulty in dealing with the next part without repeating some of the things I have said; but I will avoid that all I can. I will therefore say but very little upon this hope, because I have other things to say besides. Take hastily a fourfold view of this hope. It is a hope by the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace"—of justification—"wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope"—there it is—"of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience." The American Translation Society renders the word "experience" there by the word "proof;"—"tribulation worketh patience, and patience proof." I rather prefer that translation; because if you do not get out of patience with Christ's work, nor out of patience with God's truth, nor out of patience with his way, though you may get out of patience with yourself and circumstances, as Job did, and curse the very day of your birth; but Job did not get out of patience with God's truth;—if you thus still abide by the truth, then "patience worketh proof; and proof, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed;" because it is that kind of hope that endears the Lord; the love of God is shed abroad in the heart. It is therefore a hope that is by the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ; justified by him. Second, it is a hope by the eternity of his priesthood. Here is the certainty of it, "as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." As he cannot fail, so the Christian's hope is both sure and steadfast. Other hopes must of a necessity come to an end. We bless the Lord for all reasonable and proper hopes; they are useful in their place, of course; I am one of the last to make light of any intermediate and temporal mercies and dispensations, but, after all, the great thing is the ultimate destiny of the soul. The third feature of this hope is that it is a very purifying sort of thing; it keeps the people of God very much with God. There is no encouragement to follow an object when you have no hope, but as long as there is a little hope left you will cling to the object of the hope. Let us hear John's definition of it: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." What was it that roused you from your sleep, and sent you with your heart and thoughts to God this morning, and brought you here? Why, this hope. How is it you bless the Lord for a sabbath, as it is a day in which you are favoured outwardly, and in his own simple, divinely-appointed and divinely-honoured way, to appear before him and worship him? Why, it is the hope that you shall get something. Your hope is not in the minister; no, your hope is in the promise of the Lord that where he records his name he will come, and that where two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus, there he is in the midst of them. And is there a moment in your life in which you can say you do not need what is in Jesus Christ? I do not know anything we can need on earth, I do not know anything we can need in heaven, that is not included in this promise, "There am I in the midst of them." Why, if Jesus Christ is there the Eternal Spirit is there; if Jesus Christ be there the love of God is there, the mercy of God is there, everything is there that we can need for time and eternity. This sweet hope, then, purifies us

from time to time, consecrates us afresh from day to day. When we have felt as though our hope and strength were perished from the Lord, this hope has revived us again. Like some of John Bunyan's pilgrims; they seemed, as it were, set fast; presently hope springs up. It may well be called "a lively hope;" and this made the apostle desire that Christians in his day might abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost. Be not moved, then, from this hope of the gospel; be not moved from this hope of certainty; be not moved from this hope that keeps you with God, and consecrates you to him. Ah, none know the preciousness of holiness but those that experience it; none else know the fragrance and the reviving power of those seasons when we are lifted up out of our accustomed corruptions that we feel in our infidel hearts and fallen natures, and have a little respite and rest and fellowship with the Lord. Such seasons are foretastes of that perfection of purity in which the saints are for ever to live, so that already they may well give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. Again, the hope of the gospel is also a hope against hope. Abraham believed in hope against hope. If there is one thing that accompanies salvation that I bless God for more than another it is this, that we may hope against hope. There is the Red Sea; what hope is there of getting through it? No hope by any principles in nature. There is the desert; what hope of being sustained there? No hope according to any known principle or law of nature. In that arid, sandy desert there are plenty of *mirages* that mock the traveller, appearing like streams and rivers, after which many a thirsty traveller has wearily toiled till he has dropped down dead. What hope is there in that desert without water? No hope at all, according to any known law of nature. Hope against hope! Is the Lord there? He is there. Oh, how the sea leaped out of his way, and how the desert was made like the garden of the Lord! How happy were the right-minded Israelites in the wilderness! What were their troubles, those who were thus right-minded and spiritually taught? There was the presence of the Lord. Hope against hope. "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" How was it that the walls of Jericho fell down, and that such mighty nations were spiritless before the onward march of the hosts of the Most High? Hope against hope! What hope was there for David, in comparison of the relative physical strength of himself and of Goliath? No hope. He put off Saul's armour, therefore, and put on God's commandment, and went in his strength and in his armour. And just so we may hope against hope. You may be placed in circumstances where you see no way of escape, or perhaps how you even can live. But God sees a way, and he will not suffer you to be tried beyond—he will try you all that you are able, but he will not try you beyond what you are able to bear. You must not think you have got rid of all your troubles. No. When you have got rid of one the Lord says, Why, you have nothing to do now. No, nothing but be happy, eat and drink; that is all, Lord. I cannot keep you like that; you must work. And he lays a burden upon you; he will get you into the wood, and into the desert, and will make you look about, and he will hear ten times more from you when you are in these troubles than when you are out of them.

And the Lord is so different from our fellow-creatures. If we go often to our fellow-creatures, they say, What, come again! dear me, you are always coming. Well, we cannot do otherwise, perhaps; we are limited. But the Lord is not limited; his understanding is infinite, and his power is infinite, his resources are infinite, his riches in glory are infinite. Therefore we may hope against hope. Can you have such a hope anywhere else? Nowhere else. So then if you continue grounded and settled, and be not moved away from this hope of righteousness, this hope by the priesthood of Christ, this hope by the love of God, and this hope against hope, then shall come to pass what is written.

Lastly, I notice *the great ends that are hereby attained*. And perhaps in this last part I had better confine myself to one department, though I had intended several. Suppose I thus continue in the faith grounded and settled, and am brought to love the Lord in this blessed hope he has given me, which is indeed a good hope through grace;—if I thus continue, what is to be the end? I will set before you the apostle's words, and then briefly comment upon them. "In the body of his flesh through death"—there is the atoning death of Christ—"to present you," if you continue thus in this faith, "to present you holy." Is it possible? Is it possible that those corruptions that imprison me, burden my heart, cast me down, fill me with rebellion, and make me deaf, dim-sighted, and dumb, and lame, and wretched, have to say with the apostle, "O wretched man that I am!"—is it possible that he himself by that atonement shall present us holy? Why, my hearer, is the truth that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin" a fable? Is it a mere article of faith devised by man? Is it something that we may toss about with our tongue without remembering the infinity of its importance and its blessedness? "In the body of his flesh through death"—sacrificial death—"to present you holy." Why, what a wonderful scripture! Oh! what sweet harmony between you and your God, when God in the perfection of his nature shall embrace you in his pure and everlasting love! As though the Father should say, Here is a child of mine that has been a guilty sinner, and as low as sin and Satan could bring him—everything that was filthy, vile, and bad; who stood in daily antagonism to my holiness, and all the perfections of my nature. But the blood of my dear Son has atoned for it all, put it all away. The Holy Spirit has united the soul to Christ, to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Now not a stain, not a wrinkle, not a rebellion, not a fault, not an infirmity, not a weakness, not a drawback; all is pure, all is strong, all is bright as the sun; for the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Only think of it. Is not this a tremendous question, How shall I, a vile worm like me—how is it possible that I, in that great and solemn day, can stand accepted before a holy God? Here is the only and blessed answer to the question:—"In the body of his flesh through death to present you holy"—bless the name of the Lord—"if ye continue." Ah, you aged one, you have continued. God grant that all you young ones may prove to be real Christians, and not be moved away from this blessed hope. Ah, when you come to die, there is the blood of Jesus giving you a triumphant entrance into an everlasting possession of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of glory, the kingdom of joy. The end to be answered. I am saying nothing in comparison of what it is, especially when you connect with this idea of presentation the fact that you can never sin again. No spot can ever come upon you again; no sighing, no trouble again; holy to all eternity. After eternity (for we must speak in human language of things so incomprehensible) has run ten millions of cycles, periods, ages, you will lift up you face still without spot, without wrinkle, without blemish. Your very state will bear testimony of the efficacy of Immanuel's blood, the love of your covenant God, and the skilful working of the Holy Spirit in bringing your soul into this perfection of purity, there, if I may so speak, to revel with unutterable delight for ever and ever. Again, not only holy, but "unblameable." How beautiful that is—unblameable! What, Lord?—I am blaming myself every day for something or other; yet unblameable! Not only without blame, unblameable—without the possibility of being blamed. How significant many little circumstances in themselves in the Old Testament are! Judah said, "If I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever." And, shall I say, all our blame was laid upon the dear Redeemer, he bare the blame, put that blame away, became responsible for our persons.