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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

A LIVING HOPE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 14TH MARCH, 1869,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSLEY STREET.

"The poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth."—Job v. 16.

THE wise man well saith that "the dead know not anything," and so while we are spiritually dead we know not our spiritual poverty, we know not what we need for our eternal welfare. You will see in all ages how the world has stumbled upon this one point—that which is needful for their eternal welfare. Oh, what a vast variety of shapes and forms have we had of religions as remedies for human woe! and yet the Lord alone, who hath provided that remedy which must prove effectual, can make the people feel, understand, and know their need of that which alone can bring them to eternal glory. Hence it is said, "The Lord maketh poor, the Lord bringeth low, and the Lord bringeth down." Therefore if I am favoured, which I believe I am, to speak this morning to many whom the Lord has thus taught, they will understand the meaning of what I have to say upon this subject.

Taking the words strictly in the spiritual sense, there are four things I have to notice. First, *the description here given of the people—the poor.* Secondly, *how they have hope in God.* Thirdly, *the nature of that hope;* and fourthly, *their final victory,—“iniquity stoppeth her mouth.”*

First, *the description of the people here given.* They are said to be "poor." Hence they are said to be brought low, and to mourn. Let us see what is meant by this poverty.

When the Lord brings home the words with power,—“Prepare to meet thy God;” or, “Pay that thou owest;” or, “Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing;”—when the Lord brings this home with power, then he begins to show the man his poverty. But then there must be some law, some rule, by which he finds out his poverty; and it is that rule by which Saul of Tarsus, when called by grace, found out his poverty; and that rule is the law of God. Now it is said that "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of the whole." This law demands perfect purity of nature, perfect righteousness personally, and perfect love to God and man; and one wrong inclination, one foolish thought, mars the whole. If this be true, that nothing short of such purity and perfection can be pleasing to God's law, or acceptable

to God ; then we can see very clearly, first, what Adam was before the fall ; and secondly, that none but the Lord Jesus Christ could appear before God in exactly that character which the Lord could approve. " He that offendeth in one point is guilty of the whole." Were I to go through all the ten commandments, and test your nature by them—I do not say your outward life, God forbid, for that would make you actual murderers and thieves, and I don't know what all ;—but when tested by what you are in your hearts, in your nature, there is not one commandment from the first to the last, by which you would not be brought in guilty. And when thus brought in guilty, if you were then determined to make yourself right with God, you would presently learn that it was impossible for you to please God by any one thing that you could do. If you pray merely after the flesh, your prayer is the prayer of the flesh, savours of it, and is nothing but sin ; and if you do ever so many good works,—yea, if you give all your goods to feed the poor, and your body to be burned, all this is done in order to get to heaven without Christ, to get to heaven by the works of the law ; so that your doings would become the worst of your sins,—every way offensive. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. You would then find out that it is not possible for the law of God to be anything to you but a fiery law. The Israelites could not endure Sinai : there was the voice, and the voice would not accommodate itself to them ; it was that that they could not endure, could not meet. And the law of God can be nothing to you but the ministration of death ; it genders to bondage, binds you hand and foot, and casts you into hell for ever. Hence the apostle says, " When the commandment came, sin revived." What sin ? Why, he says, " all manner of concupiscence." " All manner"—he could not say more than that—atheistical, infidel, blasphemous ;—he saw himself in his heart to be a very devil, a very beast, more loathsome than any reptile upon the face of the earth ; he saw himself as in the dust of death, as on the dunghill ; he saw himself, as far as God's law was concerned, utterly helpless and cut down. Now how is such a poor creature as this to have hope ? These are they that shall be saved. My hearer, it is such an essential matter for you to be brought where the prodigal was. The prodigal came to himself. If you have not come to yourself, you will never come acceptably to Christ. It is impossible for any man to come acceptably to God until the man is come to himself. The Pharisee had never come truly to himself, and therefore did not come acceptably to God ; but the publican had come truly by grace to himself, and therefore came acceptably to God. The many miracles the Saviour wrought upon afflicted persons are nothing else but representations of that work spiritually which the Lord brings about in the souls of his people. If the leper had not so come to himself as to consider his leprosy, would he have come acceptably to the Lord ? And if the woman had not spent all her living, if she had not been driven to downright self-desperation, and the helplessness of everything short of Jesus Christ, would she have come to him ? She had heard of his fame ; it does not say that she had heard of any promise that he would heal her ; but she had heard that he had healed others, and that he delighted to do so ; and therefore from the fame of Jesus she ventured to come to him. Just so now : if there is no promise, if no hymn, if no sermon, no sentence, that has given you the least encouragement yet whatever, so that you are in black despair ; and you are such a poor creature that though you have tried all you can, you have not one particle of holiness, worth, or worthiness to come before God with ; then, if you have nothing else, you have the fame of Jesus ; and if you ask what the fame of Jesus is, the answer is very plain and very simple : " This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Lay hold of that ; that is the fame of Jesus—that he came to seek and to save that which was lost. This is a very

plain and simple testimony, but it is a testimony that we shall increasingly appreciate as we go on. I must leave you to judge what you know of being thus poor. If you are really thus taught, I know very well, though you have heard a great deal against what the world calls high doctrine, against God's truth and God's people, and you are prejudiced against the people of God, the ministers of God, and the places where the truth is preached, and against the truth itself, your prejudices may be strong, but there will be something stronger yet—namely, the facts of your experience; for God will plunge you into Job's ditch; he will cause, if nothing else will do, some adverse circumstance to take place, and under that circumstance you shall say things, and do things too, in a way you never dreamt of; you shall somehow or another degrade yourself not only in your own eyes, but in the eyes of others. You have hitherto been persuading yourself that you are a very pleasing creature in the eyes of others; by and by God will spoil you of that glory, he will spoil you in your own eyes; and when that is done, you will come down to the feet of the Saviour. And I will give you the chance, if it were not throwing your time away, to hear all the ministers in London, or all of them in England—I mean apart from those high doctrine men—and there shall not be one in the whole range of your rambles that shall come right into your case; because they don't understand it. Hence in the Book of Job it saith, describing this very state of Christian experience, "His soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand." So in Job's day it was a rare thing to meet with a minister that understood the wounded, the humbled, the real condition of the man who is thus brought down into the horrible pit and miry clay, who is thus brought down into the low dungeon, and turned into a spiritual prisoner. And as to prayer, the man says,—I cannot pray; but he does pray all the time; because he sighs and groans, and the Lord looks down from heaven, from the height of his sanctuary, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, and to loose such in his own time. These are they that will be glad to listen to the provision the Lord has made. Hence in the chapter I just now referred to, the 33rd of Job, the Lord saith, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." But when did the Lord say this? Not when he first sealed instruction upon the man's conscience; not when he first began to lose his appetite for the world and false religions; but when his fleshly confidences were consumed away, and "the bones," saith Job, "that were not seen stick out." Yes, he thought he was clothed with piety, was fat and flourishing; but now the fiery law has got hold of him it has consumed the whole away, and he is reduced, as it were, to a mere skeleton. When he was thus brought to self-despair, now he is prepared for the ransom. So, then, the reason the Lord has not revealed himself to some of you seekers is, you are not poor enough yet; you are not brought low enough yet. If the Lord were to open the windows of heaven and pour out the blessing now that he has in reserve for you, why, you would not receive one-half of it. He will therefore bring you lower, make you poorer, wound you deeper; then he will say, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom;" a ransom that shall redeem him from the pit, a ransom that shall make a new man of him, a ransom that shall make him eternally rich. "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth; he shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him; and he shall see his face with joy; for he will render unto man his righteousness;" that righteousness which he intends for all them that are brought to leave off their legal working, and to begin a gospel working; for "this is the work of God," saith Christ, "that ye believe on me." "Now to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." That is what I want to see—I want

to see this downward experience ; and if you have the necessity, God has the supply ; if you have the hunger, he will bring the provision ; if you have the thirst, he will pour waters upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground ; if you have the wounds, he has the medicines ; if you have the condemnation, he has the justification ; if you have the guilt and wretchedness, he has the fountain opened, he delighteth in mercy. These are the poor and needy that shall praise his name. Now those of you that have this downward experience, you will be brought by and by into the bond of the everlasting covenant. And I cannot describe what that covenant will be to you. It will be in your eyes the perfection of beauty ; it will be dearer to your soul ten thousand times twice told than mortal life, and all that it contains. You will read of it through the Scriptures, and you will say, Here, in this covenant, I am safe from hell, safe from the fiery law, safe from all penal rebuke, safe from everything. "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure ; this is all my salvation and all my desire," even when he maketh it not to grow. The man that knows his poverty says,—Well, if this be the way in which I am to be saved, then there is a hope for me ; but if there is the least particle of conditionality for me, then I can never be saved. For myself, I would not trouble myself about religion if there were no better religion in the world than Catholicism ; or if there were no better religion in the world than Wesleyanism. I might take it up perhaps as a code of morality ; but as to taking up Wesleyanism as that that would save my soul,—it is a piece of foolery for me to trust in an atonement that lets its objects fall into hell ; for me to trust in grace that is gracious to-day, and wroth to-morrow ; for me to trust in a changing God. But when I come to the Lord's word, there I get an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure ; every circumstance of my life, every loss, every cross, every affliction, every foe, every friend, every gain, every prosperity, every advantage, every blessing, everything all arranged, ordered, settled, and made subservient to this covenant. And when I look at this covenant, and see the Mediator of it, Christ Jesus, my conclusion is that if my sins were ten million times twice told more numerous than they are ; if my sins equalled in number and magnitude the sins of an antediluvian, that lived for nine or ten hundred years—I mean a good man—and that sinned all the time, for "there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not," I dare not despair ; there is not a day passes over your head in which there are not sins enough about you, the best of you, to sink you to eternal perdition :—

"The sins of one most righteous day
Would plunge us in despair ;
But all the crimes of numerous years
Shall our great Surety clear."

When you thus understand this covenant, you will take such a defiant position that you cannot describe how dear that covenant is to you. Listen to the Lord's own description of it :—"The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness"—creatures may withdraw their kindness ; brothers and sisters in the Lord may take offence, and withdraw their kindness, turn round, reproach, and even persecute you, for they have a nature bad enough for that, as well as other people—"but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." This is that everlasting covenant that defies all the powers of hell, of sin, and of tribulation ; this is that everlasting covenant by which we are more than conquerors, through the boundless, eternal, and immutable love thus revealed, swallowing up the soul ; and we stand and wonder at the infinity and perpetuity of the goodness of our God in entering into such a covenant, into such an oath, establishing

such a priesthood, and bringing us into this river of mercy, that cannot be passed over. How is it with you, my hearer? You must die presently, you know; I want you to be favoured with something to die with, and nothing else will do but being brought into the bond of this everlasting covenant. And if you have this downward experience, and know your own poverty and wretchedness, then you will listen to the tidings of the true gospel of the true God. Remember what is said:—"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound;" and what is the joyful sound?—"mercy and truth shall go before thy face;" and this the New Testament calls grace and truth by Jesus Christ. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound," they that receive this blessed testimony; "they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance;" the Father likes to see his people walk in intense admiration of the person and work of his dear Son; yea, the dear Saviour saith, "Blessed is he," even "that is not offended in me;"—look at that—"that is not offended." And the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ by making us know our need of him, causing us to admire him in what he is. "In thy name"—not in their own name, like the Pharisees of old, who loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. You cannot have both, though some people aim at it. If you will have the praise of God, "ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake;" and he that shall endure this hatred "unto the end," by the mighty Conqueror, "shall be saved." "In thy name shall they rejoice all the day long, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted." Ah, poor sinner, whenever thou art lifted up into a little gospel comfort, it is by faith in Christ's righteousness; it is his righteousness, and not thine own, that lifts thee up acceptable to God, and presents thee righteous as he is righteous.

"The poor;"—these are they that are driven to this rock of eternal truth for refuge and for shelter. The Saviour has taken all the threatenings out of the way, nailing them to his cross. When I read a scripture describing just what I am in my heart, and there is a penalty attached to it, I have nothing to do with that;—I am in Christ Jesus. The threatenings will not come there to me. There must be something against him before there is anything against me. There is a fiery law—it will not touch me in Christ; Christ is the end of it. There are your own daily faults, rebellions, the atheistical abominations of your heart; your hard thoughts of God. Very true; that will make me hate and loathe myself, reject and humble myself, and hold myself in contempt, and think no name too bad to describe what I am; but at the same time, that cannot touch me as I am in Christ. My life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ, who is my life, shall appear, then shall I appear as happy, as holy, as triumphant, and as glorious to all eternity as his life can make me.

Secondly, I notice that which I have in a great measure anticipated,—*how they have hope in God*. "So the poor hath hope." It is a remarkable thing, confirming what I have said, that in connection with our text we have the way in which the poor are to have hope; and the description of the way in which they are to have hope is expressive at once of the sovereignty and freeness of the mercy, love, and blessing of God. It saith, "He giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields; to set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety." Here is the low made high; and here is the poor mourner—the same character—out of danger, exalted to safety. "So the poor hath hope." Now you know that "rain cannot be gotten for gold; neither shall choice silver be paid for the price thereof;" that rain cannot be obtained by human might, or human doing. What is there more sovereign, what is there more free? Is it not, therefore, beautifully representative of the way in which the poor hath hope? And to define it, the doctrine is this, that the poor hath hope by the manner in which

the Lord cometh unto him. He does not come to him here by fire, but by the rain; the meaning of which we shall presently see explained. How suited that is! I say. I know some will say, Well, rain cannot be obtained by silver or gold, or human merit, but it may be obtained by prayer. Very true; but then who gives the thirst? Elijah stopped rain for three years and six months, and Elijah by prayer obtained rain; and the Lord saith, "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field." This, then, is by prayer. What is prayer? Prayer is a thirst for God. If you have the thirst, then the Lord will, in his own time, visit you, and will enrich you from the river of God, which is full of water; he will indeed answer the prayer. But let us keep to the point of the freeness and sovereignty of the grace of God as here expressed. Let us hear what the Lord himself saith about it. So the poor hath hope by that which is free. The rain comes freely. I think you will admit this, that the rain is entirely at God's command—that is a self-evident truth. Now what is the doctrine there? The Lord causing it to rain upon one city, and not upon another; what is the doctrine? Why, that he will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. We must learn this; we must find out our need of this; then, when we find out our need of this, we are prepared for it. Let me tell you, then, what the Lord will do with you. He will do with you that which he himself explains as the meaning of this rain; for he saith, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater;" there is the Lord's account of it. Now we will call the gospel your land—we will call the gospel your fields; but these fields of the gospel can bring you no sheaves, no fruit, no pastures, only as the Lord is pleased to cause them so to do. Let us then hear the Lord's explanation: "So shall my word"—take that to be the word of promise to the poor and needy—"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void;" there is no uncertainty about it. Uncertainty! An uncertain gospel is not the gospel of God: God's gospel is a certain gospel.

"The sacred truths his lips pronounce
Shall firm as heaven endure;
And if he speak a promise once"—

though he should never speak it again,—

"The eternal grace is sure."

"My word shall not return unto me void." And the promises are all to the poor and needy. He may keep you poor for a long time, but he will come by and by, he will visit you; he will come down as the rain upon the grass, and as the showers upon the mown grass. You wait in the Lord's own ways, and his doctrine by and by will come down upon your soul as the rain, and it will distil as the dew, in a quiet, soothing, pleasing, and softening way; and as the showers upon the tender herb. You will by and by learn this, and then you will enter into all that the Lord describes in the scripture I referred to just now, "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please." I am not come this morning with any uncertainty; I am not come to beg, and pray, and hope, and trust, and woo, and soo, that you will accept this and that and the other. I might as well ask a parcel of dead stones. If the Lord does not make you receive it, you will not receive it; your stony hearts would reject every word, and your carnal minds would go after your shops, and your business, and your circumstances, or something worse; I should not get a thought all the time. My dependence is upon the Lord; and those of you that know what you are, your dependence is upon him. The preparation of the heart is of the Lord, and the hearing

our in of the Lord; if we profit by the truth it is of the Lord; if we mix faith with the word, God himself must give us that faith; hence it is said to be the faith of the operation of God. Here I am safe. I shall tumble down into the grave some day; but what of that? My soul will ascend into the highest heaven—into the highest glory, far above all heavens; for Jesus' people are to be where he is, and he is far above all heavens. There is no heaven possessed by seraphim, angel, or archangel, so lofty in dignity, or so great in glory, as the heaven of the saints. God hath passed by the nature of angels, and left them immeasurable degrees beneath the nature of his people. They are one with Jesus, God manifest in the flesh, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus the Lord. "It shall accomplish that which I please." He speak a promise, and not fulfil it! He give a poor sinner to hope in him, and then disappoint that hope! He humble a sinner down to his feet, and then send him away! He never did such a thing, and never will. Whom once he receives, he receives for ever, and loves them to the end. "It shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." It does not matter where he sends it to—to a Saul of Tarsus, a Manassah, or to any other—it shall prosper. What will be the consequence to these poor people that are thus humbled down? "Ye shall go out," from all your guilt, misery, darkness, and bondage; from the world, and from everything that has distressed you. "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." And instead of being a poor thorny thing as you have been, you shall be a fir tree. Would you think it?—such a poor shrub of a thorn as I am in myself, a fir tree as I stand there. Instead of the brier which you are by nature, you shall be a myrtle tree, ever green:—"And it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Thus, after this sovereign, free manner, the poor hath hope; the poor can have hope in no other way. As I so often say, in these great things I am what I am of necessity. I don't care what people call me: they may call me an Antinomian, or devil, this, that, and the other; I don't care a rush for it; let me live in the bulwarks of Zion; let me walk from day to day in that city where there is no breaking in, no going out, where there is no complaining in the streets, where I am happy and satisfied. And if they were as content, if their religion were as good as mine, they would not find fault with me. I don't grudge them their religion; they are quite welcome to it. They grudge me mine though, and want to persuade me it is not in the Bible; because they are blind, and cannot see it there, they take it for granted I cannot see it there. Why, the Pharisees of old, the learned of the day, were great readers of the Old Testament; they kept an account of the letters, how many letters there were;—great care they took of the Old Testament; and when a word became coarse or vulgar, which words do sometimes in process of time from the new uses to which they are put, they would put a decorous word in the margin, and by and by the word in the margin would get into the text. So they took every possible care of the letter of the word, and yet they could not see Jesus Christ in all those scriptures. But when the Saviour came, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all those scripture the things concerning himself. In one place you see he divides the Old Testament into three parts:—the law, that is, Moses; the Psalms, and the prophets. And all that were taught of him could see these things. Thus, then, the poor and needy are pushed along; their paths are the paths of safety, and they receive the truth from necessity also.

Thirdly, *the nature of this hope.* I will just give a fourfold view of it. What kind of hope is it? First, it is a lively hope; not a dead hope, that crawle along, and says, I hope so, and I hope so;—it is a lively hope. As Mr. Murrell says, Hope is like a nurse, sits up all night;—you will

always find a nurse there; and the worse the patient is, the more busy the nurse is. So the greater your troubles, the more busy Hope will be. Your nurse, Hope, will sit up with you all night, never goes to sleep. Sometimes you may think the nurse is out, like one of old, when he said, "My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." But the nurse soon looked in again, and then he said, "The Lord is my portion; therefore will I hope in him." The nurse is come back again now, and I shall get on. This hope is a lively hope; it—

"Looks out for blessings great,
And though they're long delayed,
Hope is determined still to wait,
Until they are conveyed."

"I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." I will not go away: if I perish, I will perish here; if I am lost, I will be lost at the Saviour's feet; if I am lost, I will be lost resting my hope upon the eternal foundation that God has laid in Zion. It is a lively hope. Come to chapel, says Hope, I hope there will be something. Hope stirs us up. Keeping up Mr. Murrell's idea of the nurse, the nurse says, You are better now, you can get up now; you can walk about a little now; you must not give way; you will lie in bed till you will never think of getting up again. I am sure you are better; your appetite is better; come now, you can get up and get about a bit. So Hope nurses us, and nourishes us, and enables us to get up and run about, and feel we are better. O Lord, thou hast given me a little heavenly food, said Jonathan: "I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand." So if we have but a little of the sweetness of God's truth, it lightens the eyes, delights the heart, exalts the soul, and makes us bless God for a lively hope. Then it is also a saving hope; because this hope keeps us, if I may so speak, hanging on, and looking to the Lord. It is also a sure hope, because it is anchored in two things—the eternal priesthood of Christ, and the immutability of the blessed God. It is also a defiant hope. Abraham hoped against hope. Everything would seem to forbid his expecting what God had promised; but he said, God is able to perform that which he has promised. Therefore he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. God help us to do the same. Ah, says one, you do not know what a wretch I am. Never mind; do not despair while Immanuel is the Saviour. You don't know, says another, what a tangled skein of circumstances I am surrounded with. Never mind; do not despair. Ah, says one, I am so involved, I am afraid I shall never be able to pay my debts. Never mind, stand fast, look to the Lord; he will give you the means by and by. Work hard, and look to him; do not despair; there is nothing too hard for the Lord. If we are enabled to cast our care upon the Lord, we shall see that terrible as is the Egyptian host, the Lord is greater; terrible as is the roaring sea before us, the Lord is greater; terrible as is that distant, gloomy, horrible-looking wilderness, the Lord will be there, and that will take the wilderness character away, and make the desert to blossom as the rose; if God be with us, all shall be well. Thus it is a defiant hope: hoping against hope. Why, if any one had told me forty years ago the Lord would have made the use of me as a minister that he has done, I should have said, You might as well say he will make use of that old hedge stake, or that old shrub there. But so it is:—the weaker the instrument, the more is displayed the power of God. We have this treasure of heavenly knowledge and truth in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of man.

Lastly, *their final victory*. "Iniquity stoppeth her mouth." This means two things: first, the enemies of the people of God, and secondly, that sin is eternally terminated, and not a fault can be laid to the charge of the people of God.