

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE TRUE FAITH.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 14TH, 1863, BY

MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

"Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."—John vi. 29.

You find at the end of this chapter, "many of his disciples"—nominally disciples, of course—"went back, and walked no more with him." If they had known the "gift of God; if they had known the Christ of God; if they had known the mercy of God, they would not thus have gone back. Little did they think what they were leaving when they left him. So it is where there is not divine teaching; all mere natural religion, when put really to the test, is sure to give way, and leave us in a worse state than that in which it found us. But without making any further remark by way of introduction, I come at once to the three things we have to attend to in our text. The first is *the mission of the Saviour*. The second is *saving faith in him*. The third and the last is, *how this faith is the work of God*.

First, then, just a word or two to give a sample of *the mission of the Saviour*; and I take only a sample thereof. We have, in connection with our text, I may call it a beautiful threefold representation of the mission of the Saviour. First, to give life unto the world. So, then, the world is dead in trespasses and in sins; and in the law of God, and in the justice of God, and in the powers of darkness, there lieth the soul; its really sad condition none can understand but the Lord himself. And he came therefore to give life unto such. And how doth he give this life? He gives this life—if we say by his word, we are right; and if we say by his Spirit, we are right; and if we say by the will of the Father, we are right; for "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live;" and it is the Spirit that quickeneth, and the Father quickeneth whom he will. And so, when life enters into the soul, then such begin spiritually to live, and that life is known by the sustenance which such are sure to seek. For the Saviour saith in connection with this, that "he that shall eat of this bread," meaning himself, "shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst;" and in another part of the chapter he saith, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up again at the last day." You observe the meaning here intended of these different phrases, meat, flesh, bread, all substantially meaning the same thing, that of

sustenance, spiritual sustenance; that one evidence of being taught of God is this,—that as we cannot do without food naturally, so the man that feels he cannot hope in God without Christ, that he cannot be sustained in the hope of eternal life without Christ, that he cannot be sustained without him; he who feels he can be sustained only by the Lord Jesus Christ in what he hath done—for he alludes to the achievement of his sacrificial perfection—“He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood.” So that all who are partakers of this life, they can be sustained in no other way but the atonement of Jesus Christ in what he hath done. The next part of his mission is to ingather all that the Father hath given him. “All the Father giveth me shall come unto me.” And then, that we may never be discouraged: for men try to turn the doctrine of discriminating grace into a source of discouragement, and when they have done that they try to reproach the Saviour; but the Lord will teach his people to do better than that; he will teach them better gospel manners than that; and so, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out;” knowing that none but those whose names are in the book of life will ever know their need of what the Lord Jesus Christ is, and what the Lord Jesus Christ hath done. Here is a sinner that from his own personal experience of his state as a sinner, his own personal apprehension of the terrible majesty of God’s righteous law—here is a sinner under a sight and sense of his own helplessness, guilty and wretched, and feels he deserves the lowest hell, and that he hath no hope but in what Jesus Christ hath done; and so wends his way by faith and prayer towards Jesus Christ, and begins to hope that, as he is able to save, and came for the very purpose of saving, that he lived to save, and died to save, and rose to save, and intercedes to save, and reigns to save, who knows but that he may save me? “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” If I am thus come to him as my only hope, it is a proof that he hath come to me, it is a proof that I am given to him. And this is the meaning of the Saviour. He knew the enemy would be throwing in discrimination as a kind of stumblingblock, and saying, What’s the good of your coming? if it should turn out at the last that you are not one of the elect, you would be cast out again. But then we argue, in answer to that, that none but those that the Lord hath chosen will ever know their need; so that the very fact of their knowing their need of Christ, and being brought to believe in him, and rest on him as their only hope, is an evidence of their election of God. And their experience will tell them, and the word of God will confirm them in that experience, that if they are chosen, that choice commenced not with themselves, but with the Lord. “Ye have not chosen me;” though it is a fact that they have chosen the Lord, and chosen that good part which shall not be taken from them; but the choice did not begin with them,—“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” And then the third part of his mission, and the last I here name, is to establish the eternal security of the people. You see every part is important. How essential it is, in the first place, that we should know our need of him! In the next place, how essential it is that we should come to him, that is, come to the terms of his salvation!

and in order to come to terms we ourselves must come to nothing, Jesus Christ must be everything. And then, when we are brought to nothing, as a scripture beautifully expresses it, "When they had nothing wherewith to pay, then he frankly forgave them all." Thus, then, here is eternal life by him; and here is ingathering by him—"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Now you must know whether you have any other hope or not; if Jesus Christ be your hope, whether it is a hope dear to your heart. But again, he came to establish the security of his people. "This is the will of him that sent me, that of all that he hath given me I should lose nothing, but raise it up again at the last day." The Lord Jesus Christ did the will of God perfectly while he was on earth. And if it was the will of God that he should lose nothing, what shall we say to that doctrine that doth charge him with losing something, when men make such a terrible mistake (and mercy forgive them) as to say some are in hell for whom Christ died? Does that sort at all with the Saviour's words? He says, "It is the will of him that sent me, that of all that he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." And you must remember that the Saviour not only did the will of God, but he did it with infinite delight. It was the very delight of his soul to do the will of God; it was the great object of his life and of his death. So that he did the will of God while on earth; he did the will of God after his resurrection. And the Saviour has never changed that rule of action; he still reigns by the good will of God; it is by the good will of God that he will reign for ever and ever. Oh, then, here we have life, here we have acceptance, and here we have security. And the Saviour would encourage us in this matter of eternal certainty by repeating the same truth with a little variation, adding a little to encourage us in our acquaintance with these things. Hence, he repeats the same thing in beautiful and encouraging words; "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son;"—bless the Lord, we do see him, we do see him as the gift of God, we do see him as the substitute, we do see him as the Saviour, and we do see him "as the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is our beloved among the sons;"—"and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." You see the Saviour adds those words, "and believeth on him," because many have that kind of view of him so as to hate him. What an awful thing that is! But let the eternal perfection of the Saviour's work appear, men who are compared while in a state of nature to bats, and to owls, and to moles—they have just visual power enough to dislike the light; and so, when that eternal perfection which the people of God have by Jesus Christ, when that appears, the natural man does not like the sight of it, he hates it; that is a dangerous doctrine; it is a very partial doctrine, that is a kind of favouritism doctrine. Well, now, perhaps I am speaking to some with a little light, but you so see it as to dislike it. Yes, I can see what your doctrine is; I can see your doctrine is that Jesus Christ hath perfected for ever them that God the Father hath given to him, without their helping in the matter. Yes, that is just the doctrine. Then, say you, I do not like it. Then you are not a friend

of Jesus Christ; you are in a state of enmity against him; you so see him as to hate him; you do not so see him as to believe in him and to love him. And another says, Well, yes, I can see what your doctrine is; I can see that your doctrine is this, that you unite inseparably the present seeing and believing with certain resurrection to glory at the last day; and that whatever may take place between those two times—the time you are brought to see and believe, and the resurrection day—whatever may take place between those two times, it cannot shake the divine truth, that the same person shall rise triumphantly in all the spotlessness and perfection of Jesus Christ at the last day. That is your doctrine, say you, is it not? That is just it. Then, says one, I do not like it. Then may the Lord open your poor blind eyes.

Then I notice, in the next place, *saving faith in him*. What is that saving faith? Now there are three things essential to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and those three things must go together. First, you must have the right object. Hence it is said that he that cometh to God must believe that he is. You must believe in God's eternity, in God's underived existence; in a word, believe in him as he is revealed in the holy Scriptures. So that your faith must be in God. And before I come to the other qualities of faith, let us just for one moment look at this, that God, the everlasting God, there is no want of power. His power is almighty and eternal, and in a word, all his perfections are infinite. And for you to have faith in him, for him to be on your side, is it any wonder that the Saviour should say that all things are possible to him that believeth? Oh, what a source of consolation is this to those that have the other two qualities of faith I have presently to name; when they look at God's eternity, when they look at God's omnipotency, when they look at the infinity of God, the infinite resources he hath at command! Oh, what seasons those are when we can rest in his eternal power, when we can rest in his eternity, rest in his love, rest in his wisdom! "There is no searching of his understanding. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the Lord, the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" And he brings himself, wonderful as he is, he brings himself under the law indicated in the case of Jacob. For when a man was conquered by another in ancient times, it was understood that he in future was to be that man's servant, and was to be called for whenever that man wanted his services. Well, now, the Lord suffered himself to be, as it were, conquered by Jacob; and now, Jacob, as I have suffered myself to be conquered by you, whenever you want me in future you must call for me, and I will always come. The Lord will be faithful to that which he has undertaken. Think not I am going too far here; for you will find, 43rd of Isaiah, the Lord says, "Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." Take those words on to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is Immanuel, God with us; and he served God with our sins upon him, and he underwent weariness with our iniquities. Our iniquities did not make him weary of us, no; but he served God for us with our sins upon him, and underwent weariness for our iniquities. Now, then, this God who gave us his Son; this Jesus Christ who gave us this precious life, and this Holy Spirit of God who hath thus revealed these things, what will he not do? So, then, our faith is to be in God, our hope is to be in God, our glory is to be in God. Secondly, your faith must be right not only in object, but also in order. Your faith must be in order. Men have made dreadful mistakes upon this. I will give you some instances from the Bible; and even good men have erred upon this all-important department, and the Lord has shown some solemn chastisements where they have deviated from that order which is essential to salvation. Now you notice that men may have the right object in their faith; but if the order be wrong, their faith is nought; and it may have both the right object, and be of the right order.

yet if it be wanting in the other quality I have presently to notice, their faith is nought. Men may say what they please about there being only one kind of faith spoken of in the Bible; but we know better than that; we know there is a faith that is dead; we know that there is a faith in human tradition; we know that there is a faith, the faith of apostasy, and we know that the faith of those that are not saved differs, and is essentially deficient in the qualities possessed in the faith of those that do believe. Now it must not only be the right object, but also the right order.

Let us take two or three instances of this. There are two men; both have the same object for their faith—viz., God,—but then, one is in order, and the other is out of order; the consequence was that the one was accepted and the other was rejected. Cain looked to God, his faith was in God, but then he was out of order. Cain, where is your sacrifice for sin? Oh, I do not believe in that. Where is the spotless lamb? where is the mediatorial righteousness? where is the fulfilment of the law? Oh, I do not believe in it; I think, if I do to others as I would they should do to me, and just bring a little of what I have got, just a little fruit of the ground, that will do. And so he made religion a very little thing, and so do people now. Millions make nothing of it, thousands upon thousands more make little of it, and it is only those that are taught of God that make everything of it. Now then, Abel had the same object that Cain had—both right objectively,—but Cain was wrong as to order, but Abel was right; Abel came with a spotless lamb. So my text says, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent;" and of course that means believing in the sender as well as the one that is sent. Now then, Abel was in order; and the result was, he obtained witness that he was righteous. Here, then, is the difference between the two; the one missed the right way, and is rejected; the other is led into sacrificial perfection, and is accepted. So with Saul and David. David knew the great Melchizedek; David knew the blessedness of this eternal priesthood; he was led to put upon record the oath of the blessed God in relation to the eternal priesthood of Christ; and David therefore had access to the Lord, and had the Lord on his side. But King Saul did not see this. He took the priesthood into his own hands without any authority so to do. So that Saul looked to God, the same object; but then, being out of order, having no right faith in mediation, and being of another spirit, not possessing the spirit of the gospel, Saul therefore was out of order, and so the Lord answered him not by visions, or dreams, or prophet; but he answered David. So he will you, only you must come into order; it must be by Christ Jesus in the perfection of his work. Why, some of you Wesleyans now, when you kneel down to pray, you talk almost like Calvinists; how in the world can you plead before God a sacrifice that lets some for whom it was intended fall into hell? I say to you in all solemnity, I should be afraid to go before God with such a sacrifice as that; I should be afraid I should be spurned away, and that God would condemn me for coming before him with a sacrifice that was sick, and lame, and blind, and not able to accomplish the great end for which it was designed. So, my hearer, when thou art taught of God, thou wilt come before God with a sacrifice that answers all the necessities of the sinner, that maintains and sustains the promise of his holy word, and then thou wilt be right in order. So that thy faith must not only have the right object, but the right order. So, again, you see the Pharisee and the publican. The Pharisee was right as to the object of his faith—viz., God; "God, I thank thee." He did not go to idols, nor even to human tradition. He seemed to pass by the whole and come to God. He was right in object, but he was wrong in order. Now the publican, he stood there, and while he was standing trembling, bewailing his condition as a sinner, the Holy Spirit set in with the publican, and revealed to the

publican an atonement, a way of mercy, that should accord with all the perfections of God. And so the publican, his confidence was in the same object, but then he was in order. "God be merciful to me a sinner." The one came to bring something to God, the other came to ask something of God. The one came to set aside God's truth, if I may so speak, and the other came longing after that mercy which alone can be by Jesus Christ. Thus, then, to believe savingly in Christ, God must be the object, and Christ in his perfection must be the way. You see here, in the Holy Scriptures, the difference between the two orders of men; that they came to the same object, but then some were not in order; those that were out of order you see were rejected. Some people say, Oh, it does not matter about this particular way, or the other particular way. Hence that old see-saw, sing-song piece of poetry of Pope's that you hear in all our compromising pulpits:—

"For modes and forms let fools and zealots fight;
His faith cannot be wrong whose life is in the right."

Why, there never was a man yet whose life was in the right, if God be true, for "there is none righteous, no, not one." We must therefore have order. And we shall see that not only have men that have not been taught of God come short of this conformity to God's order, and been rejected, but even good men, when they have committed serious errors, the Lord has shown his disapprobation. Now, would you have thought it, that when they were about to bring the ark up to Jerusalem, it mattered much whether the ark was put upon the shoulders of the priests, or upon a cart? And they put it upon a new cart; going to show it great respect. We will not put it upon a cart that has ever been used for anything, because if we put it upon a cart that has ever been used for anything, that cart is therefore profaned, so we will have it upon a new cart, and that will do the Lord great honour. But where is your authority? Oh, it does not matter; it is of no importance. Presently one touches the ark, and that adds to the disorder, and the Lord smote him there and then. And this ark is a figure of God's covenant, and God will not have the covenant trifled with. If you were to take the ark of the covenant down, and rest it upon human invention instead of resting it where it ought to rest;—where should the ark have rested? Upon the shoulders of the priests. Where should the ark of the everlasting covenant rest? Upon the shoulders of our great High Priest. All the items of the everlasting covenant rest upon the eternal priesthood of Christ. There is not a mercy in that covenant of sure mercies that a sinner can ever receive but by the priesthood of Christ. It is that which bears up and bears onward both the covenant and all the people that belong thereto. And David confesses the error, and rectifies it. "The Lord smote us because we sought him not after the due order." And so Uzziah; he so forgot himself as to say, I don't want an intercessory priest. Ah, Uzziah, I am sorry to hear you talk like that. Not want an intercessory priest? What, are you become so good? Prosperity had lifted up his heart to his destruction; not to his eternal destruction, but to his present lifetime destruction. Everything had gone well; he had become important. See what human nature is, even in the real child of God, if left to it. Do not want an intercessory priest, oh no; do not want Christ to intercede for me, and there is not much to pray for; I have plenty of riches, and much goods laid up for many years, and so I will take it in my own hands. And so he began to take the Saviour's place, and undertook to burn incense. "It appertaineth not unto thee, King Uzziah, to burn incense." And the priests stood to defend the Lord's order of things, and God showed his solemn disapprobation; the leprosy rose in his forehead, the priest thrust him out of the temple; yea, he himself hastened to go out, and was a leper to the day of his death. Thus, then, you will find that while men are telling us doctrine does not matter, one order will do as well as another; when you look at

the solemn fact that men may be right in the object, but their faith be wrong in the order, and therefore rejected; when you look, secondly, at the solemn fact that even good men may err, but God will not let their error go unresented; those that do not belong to the Lord may go on in error, and go on perverting the gospel, and go on to their own destruction; but the Lord will never allow his own people so to do. Hence saith the apostle, when speaking of our going on in the straight path of eternal truth, he saith, "If ye be otherwise minded, God will show even this unto you."

Now the next thing is, in this faith you must not only have the right object—namely, God,—and the right order—namely, perfect mediation,—but you must have something else in your faith, and that is, such a love to what you believe as never to leave it. That is the next thing. If you have not such a love to this Jesus Christ in whom you believe as on no account to leave him—if you have not such a love to this covenant God in this order of things as on no account to leave him—if you cannot say spiritually as the servant of old said, when he said plainly, "I love my master, and it is well with me," and he was content to be sealed for ever,—if you have not this love, you may be right in the object, and right in the order, but at the same time you do not possess this love. Hence it is a man may adopt a sound creed, and his heart at the same time as rotten as a pear; for if a man have not this supreme love which will make him stand out in decision for God's truth, then such a one is merely sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, saith the apostle. "Faith that worketh by love." It is all nothing without this. Well, I have not so much of this quality as I could wish; but I can say that I do, with all my heart, and soul, and might, love my covenant God in Christ, that I do, with all my might, and heart, and soul, and mind, and thoughts, love my blessed unchangeable Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and I do love the Holy Spirit of God; and that gospel that reveals this blessed God to me, endearing in every shape and form. So that, while I have been preaching the gospel upwards of thirty-five years, it seemeth only a few days, from the love I have had and still have to his blessed name; it seems as though I had hardly entered upon it.

" 'Tis love that makes our cheerful feet
In swift obedience move."

It was from love that God gave us Christ; it was from love that Christ laid down his life for us; it was from love that he abode by us; it is from love that the Holy Spirit carries on his work, and the Christian conquers by love. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, and loved not their lives unto the death." Now then, hast thou, my hearer, this faith? Art thou brought to the right object—namely, God? and art thou brought into the right order, that thy religion is not after the precepts of men, but after the power of God? and hast thou that love that endears the blessed God? and art thou constrained from time to time by love? It was this that inspired the prophets, it was this that inspired the apostles, it was this that made the apostle so happy in his work, "exceeding joyful in all our tribulations;" this is the faith that hath works, all the works that we can reasonably expect or desire.

Well, now, I have just one more point; after thus concisely pointing out the Saviour's mission, and saving faith in him, that it is right in its object, right in its order, right in its character, worketh by love. That's the man that is a Christian; that's the man that will go to heaven; that's the man that will never, no, never be lost; that's the man to whom all the promises in the gospel to them that love God belong, and for whom all things must necessarily work for good.

Now I notice, lastly, *how this faith is the work of God*. I will assign three reasons, but must not stop to amplify. First, because he commands

it; second, because he approves it; and third, because he sustains it. First, it is the work of God because he commands it. And how doth he command it? He commands it thus, "Let there be light: and there was light;" and that brings faith into the soul; "and God saw the light, that it was good;" God sees this faith is good. But I am sure unbelief is a thing of nought. "And God divided the light from the darkness," and he divides the believer from the unbeliever. "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." How does he do that? By commanding the light to shine into their hearts, to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But doth he thus command all men to repent? If he did, all would repent. He doth not. "All men" there means men of all grades, and classes, and nations; for wherever the command comes there it is effectual—"Lazarus, come forth!" So, then, it is God's work, because He effectually commands it; sometimes in one shape, sometimes in another—"Follow me!" What was that command? what did it do? Why, made the person so commanded believe in Jesus Christ, and follow him. The three thousand at the day of Pentecost were commanded to repent and to believe; and how did God do it? By pricking them to the heart, opening their understandings, and bringing them to believe in Jesus Christ to the salvation of their souls. So, then, it is the work of God because it is his gospel command. Faith is not the cause of life, but the effect of it. When God commands faith, therefore, he does it as effectually as he did when he said, "Let there be light: and there was light." I have the apostle on my side; for under the same circumstances—"He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness." It is the work of God, then, because he effectually commands it. It is the gift of God unto you; it is given of God. Second, it is the work of God because he approves it. Yes; Abraham believed, and God so approved it that he counted him righteous. Then, if God so approve it as to count me righteous, I am no longer reckoned guilty, I am no longer reckoned unclean, an enemy; I am now reckoned righteous, approved—"Without faith it is impossible to please God." And, lastly, it is the work of God because he sustaineth it. Everything else must break down, but shall our faith break down? Never, never—"Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last day." The Lord will let my poor body down into the grave—won't let it lower than that; but never let my faith down, that is, not fatally so, until it is lost in sight. Jesus is the Author, and he is the Finisher of our faith. Ah, then, my hearer, if this mission of Jesus be dear to thee, if God be the object of thy confidence, Christ the way, and thy faith worketh by love, then thou hast the work of God, thou art working the work of God. We are co-workers—no, I have no objection to the word—we are co-workers, of course we are, we are co-workers with God; we work together with him; we can't work without him, and we do not want to do so. By this faith we work with him, he works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. May the Lord lead us more and more into these blissful mysteries, for his name's sake!