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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

TRUE PATIENCE.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 5TH JULY, 1868,

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”—
JAMES i. 4.

THE Lord was pleased at the beginning of the gospel dispensation—and we hope that before the end of time there will be a repetition of the same kind of mercy manifested,—the Lord was pleased to call a large number of the Jews; and these Christian Jews are now called the twelve tribes. Because the twelve literal tribes are now done with, they are thought nothing of, they are never wanted any more; the design of their organization has been answered, the whole is abolished, and now the whole election of grace are reckoned to be the true twelve tribes of Israel. Yet James, no doubt, writes chiefly to the Jews, calling them the twelve tribes; and he commences his epistle with subscribing himself that that you and I should be glad at all times to be able to subscribe ourselves—“a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The meaning of the word “servant” there must be explained by a circumstance in the Old Testament. When the servant said, “I love my master, and it is well with me,” that servant was to be the property of the master for ever. And that is the kind of servant that James means he was—that he was brought into the love of God, therefore sealed and constituted a servant of the Lord for ever. Now those to whom he was writing then he calls the twelve tribes. He knew something of the tribulations that surrounded them, and said that they ought rather to rejoice that they had tribulations than not. “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,” which word, I think, would be better rendered “tribulations.” “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers tribulations;” for the Lord certainly brings more good to the souls of his people by tribulation than he does by any other earthly means. There is no man who has had much trouble but must acknowledge how greatly the Lord hath enabled him to profit in eternal things by those tribulations. Therefore the apostle saith, “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

We have, then, in the first place, *the perfect work of patience*; secondly, *the design thereof*,—"that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

First, *the perfect work of patience*. I will mention four things wherein we want a perfection of patience. Let us be careful to point out what it is we are to be patient about; and taking the dear Saviour as our guide, we are then sure to go right. Now the Lord Jesus, see what a perfection of patience he manifested. To let patience have her perfect work simply means to hold out to the end—never to give up. Let us, then, take a fourfold view of this. First, the truth of the blessed God,—“Let patience have her perfect work;” never be out of patience with the truth. I have so often, I was going to say, defined what we mean by the truth, that it would be superfluous for me to do so now. Suffice it to say, then, that all truth is summed up in the sworn promise of the blessed God, in which he appears in that form, as represented by his truth, as having loved us with a love that is endless, as having chosen us as an act of amazing grace, and as having shown the greatness and eternity of his love in the gift of his dear Son, and in remembering us mercifully in our low estate, and bringing us to see and to feel that we were in that low estate, bringing us to know something of Jesus Christ, and to raise us up by precious faith in him above all that stood, or that doth stand or ever can stand against us. Now, in order to test such people, they must have tribulation. I will mention some of the things that try their patience in this matter. The one is—and I know not anything that doth so far as that—what we call, and perhaps very properly, the hiding of the Lord’s face. When there is not his presence, all is dark and all is dull. How true are those words of the apostle, that “to be spiritually minded is life and peace, and to be carnally minded is death”! As soon as ever the Lord is pleased to hide his face from us, and not to grant us his presence, we are then carnally minded, and just in proportion as we are carnally minded we are dead to spiritual and eternal things. And no man can keep alive, much less quicken, his own soul. In this condition there seems to be no experience, I was going to say, good or bad. This is a state that tries our patience very much. We see it in the ancients as well as feel it in ourselves; one saying that his hope and his strength was perished from the Lord, and saying again, on another occasion, “I will speak in the name of the Lord no more.” So David said, “I will not make mention of the name of the Lord any more.” This hiding of the Lord’s face, then, is one of the things that try us. But then “let patience have her perfect work;” still hold fast the truth, do not give that up. Hold fast the truth as confirmed by the atonement of Christ, and if you hold fast the truth as confirmed by the death of Christ, you will not then be able to find any reason why you should give up the truth; your sin and sinfulness of which you are the subject will thus be to you a mighty reason why you should hold fast that truth that sets forth the Saviour as having finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and having brought in everlasting righteousness. Let your sin and sinfulness be what they may, they will be turned, when you are made wise unto salvation, into so many reasons why you should hold fast God’s truth, and never get out of patience with that. Then, again, if the Lord deal very roughly with you in thwarting you, and appearing to act in direct opposition to your prayers and desires, nevertheless hold fast the truth. We read of a good man in the Holy Scriptures that prayed for his children. Job offered sacrifice. He said, “It may be my sons have sinned, and anathematized God in their hearts; and thus did Job continually.” By and by the Lord stepped in in his sovereign dealings, as you know, and swept everything away; and yet

Job's patience had its perfect work, for though Job cursed the day of his birth, he still held fast the truth, he did not give that up. He well knew that, bad as circumstances were, there was in that truth and by that truth a God that could make this dark scene of things light, that could make these dreadfully crooked things straight, these dreadfully rough places plain; that could lower the mountains, exalt the valleys, and put everything right. He knew at the same time that if he gave up God's truth, then he should give up the remedy for all his tribulations. How did Satan long to get Job to anathematise God, to give up his blessed truth! That is a wise exhortation in Hosea xii. 6—"Keep mercy." Hold fast that truth that showeth that you are saved by his mercy, even that mercy that is from eternity to eternity; hold fast the truth that sets forth all the mercy that you can need, for you will need it. "Keep mercy," and the more mercy you keep for yourself, the more mercy you will have for others; the more the Lord shows his mercy to you, the more merciful it will make you to others. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." "Keep mercy and judgment," that is, decision; stand out decided, do not move to the right hand or to the left, "and wait on thy God continually." And thus holding out to the end, your faith, your patience will have its perfect work, never getting out of patience with God's blessed truth. And, indeed, after some years you are so established in the truth, and so well know the value of it, that Satan himself will hardly think it worth his while to tempt you with any other gospel, because you know too well the value of God's gospel. Here I must linger just a moment. How is it with us? Can we adopt in relation to our own feelings and experience such scriptures as the following?—"The law of thy mouth"—meaning, of course, the law of faith, the law of life, and the law of liberty—"is better to me than thousands of gold and silver;" and another saith, "I have esteemed the words of thy mouth more than my necessary food;" and another saith, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they were the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Yea, while the Lord made Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rich, yet all those riches that he gave them by his providence; passed away as so many shadows. It was the sworn promise in relation to eternal life, in relation to the eternal city, that was the treasure, and they so knew the value of it as not to part with it. And besides, the Lord will not approve of anything but his blessed truth, but he will approve of that. Time would fail me to quote one-tenth of the scriptures wherein the Lord has shown his full approbation of those that hold fast his truth. The Bible is full of it. All the wonders that we read of in the 11th of Hebrews were wrought by faith. Now what is faith? Faith is confidence that hath divine authority and divine power. Hence it was, then, that the wonderful things those great men did, they had divine authority with which to go to work. Thus they had the Lord with them, and having the Lord with them by his truth, they were sure to succeed. Hence the apostles in preaching the gospel,—the Saviour said, "Goye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" here is the authority; now comes the power, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." There is no patience without faith. As soon as ever our confidence gives way we become impatient. Lose your confidence in God's truth, and you lose everything. The apostle might well say, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." Only we must distinguish—we are obliged to do so; the word of the Lord compels us to do so, and experience compels us to do so,—we must distinguish between our confidence in God's truth as to its adaptability and certainty; and our confidence of interest in it. These are two distinct points; but if you have the first, you will in the Lord's own time have the second; or else why is it said, "The vision is for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak." So, then, they were to hold fast the truth of what the prophet had declared;

and if they had this adherence to God's truth, confidence in it, and in nothing else, such a one was never lost, and never will be. Perhaps I need not enlarge upon this, because I know very well that you have no desire whatever to deviate from God's eternal truth, nor will I, if I can help it, occupy even a minute unprofitably. I will here just say, that when I see in our day what doctrines are connected with God's truth, my soul feels a loathing to them. I cannot endure a doctrine that is a mere sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. If I believe a doctrine I must hold it in the infallibility and certainty of it; and when I look at this, and then see the doctrines of free-will and of duty-faith—which is nothing but free-will in disguise,—all men exhorted to come to Christ, and at the same time told they cannot come, yet invited to come; all that to me is loathsome. I have no antipathy to the persons, but the doctrines themselves I loathe, repudiate, detest; because I know very well it is all of grace from first to last, that the counsel of God is in the conversion and salvation of every sinner, and that what the Lord does he does by his blessed truth. As soon as ever we lose our confidence in God's truth, and think if we give that up we can convert the world by something else, then it is time for us to throw off our profession altogether. So, then, "let patience have her perfect work," by continuing your confidence in God's truth. There never were sweeter words than those of the Saviour when he says, speaking of himself as the vine and his people as the branches, "Continue in me, abide in me,"—there, and there only, you are all that God approves.

Secondly, let patience have her perfect work in relation to the ways of the Lord. Do not let us get out of patience with the ways of the Lord. Shall the time come when the Sabbath shall be a kind of burden? Shall the time come when a little cold, or a little heat, a little shower, or some little inconvenience hardly worth naming, which you would not reckon or take into account if you were seeking your worldly calling—shall trifles hinder us from the house of the Lord, from the ways of the Lord? It is not merely to go and hear a man preach the gospel; it is not merely to go and hear one of the Lord's ministers; it is something beyond this. Think you that the Lord doth not tell the truth? Think you that he will not be as good as his word? Think you that he has spoken without meaning when he saith, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"? We come here to enjoy Jesus' presence, and that his name, by his own divinely instituted means, may be as ointment poured forth; "Where I record my name, there will I come unto thee, and I will bless thee;" "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." Shall we, then, fail in this? God forbid; for as soon as ever we begin to fail in this, something dreadful will follow upon it. The apostle saw this when he said, "Not forsaking the assembling ourselves together, as the manner of some is." It is a strong symptom of something wrong at the bottom; there is a worm at the root somewhere; and this carelessness about the house of God may terminate in dire apostasy, and the man who was just now apparently at the gate of heaven is now on his way in the downward road to hell. Therefore, as long as we live may our language be that described in the 122nd Psalm,— "I was glad"—not sorry—"when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem,"—the New Jerusalem; there the Lord blesseth us sometimes with sweet views of the New Jerusalem, even the heavenly, and the blessedness of belonging to him. "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together;" one part cannot be severed from the other. Where is the enemy that can rush through the New Jerusalem? Where is there an enemy that can set up a garrison in the New Jerusalem? Where is there an enemy that can scale the walls of the New Jerusalem, or move the foundations of the New Jerusalem, or dry up the river of the New Jerusalem, or cut down the tree of life of the New Jerusalem, or darken with clouds

the New Jerusalem, where God and the Lamb are the light thereof, or in any way bring the people of the New Jerusalem into bondage? "Our feet shall stand within thy gates," by precious faith now, and actually, personally, and in perfection hereafter. "Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of Jehovah." What do they go to? Why, unto that which I must say I take a little comfort from, without presumption, as being true of us when we come to the place with which we are favoured, "unto the testimony of Israel." Now the testimony of Israel was nothing else but the testimony of Abraham and Isaac, handed down to Israel; and the testimony of Abraham was that God had sworn unto him an oath of infinite sacredness and of infallibility, to bless him and to multiply him. He had borne the same testimony to Isaac and to Jacob; there was the yea and amen promise. I do flatter myself with the notion that when you come to the Surrey Tabernacle you can say, Well, how far we shall be profited; how far the Lord will be with his servant in the manifestation thereof, and how far he will be with us, how far we shall hear profitably, the Lord alone knows, he alone can help us in this matter; but we do know one thing,—we shall have the truth; it will be the testimony of God, the testimony of Christ; it will be the truth. "For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David;" that is, those gospel laws of judgment that give judgment in favour of the people of God. I wonder if it has ever occurred with any of you, that you have come up to the house of God writing bitter things against yourself, and that the minister has been so led that the tide of captivity has been entirely turned; and while you have been writing bitter things against yourself, the minister has been so favoured as to blot out all these bitter things, and make you feel, in spite of yourself, that there is hope for you, that God is on your side. Ah, this is nothing else but the Lord in this New Jerusalem giving judgment in favour of every poor sinner that is seeking after God by Jesus Christ, "Fear ye not, for I know that ye seek Jesus." Then the Psalmist says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee." Let us not get out of patience with the ways of the Lord. And hear what the Saviour saith; look at his gracious promise,—oh! it is sweet to be one with him, to work with him, to be workers together with God, not to work without him, for without him we can do nothing, but to be workers with him, going on believing and praying as he enables us. Now hear the gracious words of the Saviour; "For my brethren"—see how he recognises the citizens as his brethren,—"For my brethren and companions'"—look at the two, because they are his brethren he makes them his companions, and they will be his companions to all eternity,—"For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee."

He breathed peace into the souls of his disciples;—"My peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you;" and how on his return to them did he revive that peace! "For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will," saith Jesus, "seek thy good." Should we as a people, with the universal opposition we have had from professors and from our own mother's children—that is, from good people—they made us out to be rather black, and then dealt with us as such—should we be where we are if Jesus had not sought our good? But he hath sought our good, wonderfully sought our good, and the good that has been done has been great, though we hope that greater things will yet be done. So, then, "let patience have her perfect work." I can sympathize with you,—I assure you I often pity you when I feel that I am as insipid as death, that I am powerless and helpless; and while, perhaps, I myself know that I am trying to set before you what has been life, and spirit, and power to me, and made my soul bound with joy, yet when I come to try to express it all seems gone, and the time is barren with you, and you may well be tempted to go somewhere else, or to stop at home altogether.

Now I can sympathize with you, I feel for you in all these cases. Still at the same time our text saith, "Let patience have her perfect work." "Ye have need of patience that after ye have done the will of God ye might receive the promise;" and it is as much the will of God that you should undergo sorrow as it is you should have joy; it is as much the will of God that you should be deprived sometimes of the power as that you should have the power. "The days come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from you," not as to union, or relation, or interest, but as to communion. So that you have need of patience after you have done the will of God; and after you have suffered all that he intends you shall, then he will step in at an hour when you think not, and you will say, How glad I am that I tarried by the stuff, that I departed not from the house of the Lord, that I still united with the saints! I got nothing at the time, but I do not know what evil I might have got if I had gone elsewhere; if I did not get any good, I got no harm, and I cannot tell what good those things may be another day that I have now heard apparently without profit. God commandeth the snow to be upon the earth; and the snow of the sermon shall lie upon the mind for some time; by and by the Sun of righteousness rises, the snow melts, the letter is turned into life, and you say, I thought nothing of that sermon when I heard it, but since then it has been made precious to my soul. So, then, "let patience have her perfect work," as to the truth and the ways of the Lord.

Then, again, as to the commands of the Lord also, "let patience have her perfect work." I do not know anything that he more strongly commands than brotherly love. You know, friends, how much stress the Saviour from time to time lays upon this,—"that ye love one another." And I am sure I shall have your consciences, and your sentiments and sympathies on my side when I say that the Saviour was well authorized to give such a command, seeing he himself has shown to us infinite love, seeing that all he has done has been in love to his brethren. He laid down his precious life for the brethren. So, then, do not let us get out of patience with the commands of the Lord. Now we are called upon to do all we can for the poor of the Lord's people, the needy, the distressed, in whatever form or shape it appears, and likewise for the cause of God; and all the time there is a single thing to be done that can at all better the position of the cause of God, if in our right minds we shall say, I will not leave that undone. In this you have been above all praise. I should really be unkind, and unthankful, and everything else, and unchristian too, were I not thus to speak. What the Lord has enabled you to do is indeed wonderful. As to the little question we have on hand now, some of the friends do not feel so much interest in it, for the simple reason that they really do not understand it. There are three houses belonging to the chapel, and those three houses were built with borrowed money; and as soon as ever those three houses can be paid for, then, if I should soon die, and you should get low, and be in danger of losing the chapel, the rent of those three houses would pay the ground rent of the place; and if it should not be needed for that purpose, there are other objects. I think you have upwards of thirty—I forgot to ask our good deacon before I came into the pulpit, because I knew my subject would lead me to make a remark or two upon this—but I believe you have upwards of thirty persons in the Aged Pilgrims' Society. Now that number can be kept up, and others added, only by that liberality which you have shown. So that when those three houses are paid for, then, if the money should not be needed for the ground rent, then you may be in a position to extend your kindness to a greater number of the poor. Come, then, *all* of you, become subscribers at once. Give what you can spare each week to the collectors at the doors. David knew that he should not see the house of the Lord built; he knew that he should not be there when it

was opened and carried on; but did David say, Oh, well, there is a great deal to do, but I shall not attempt to do it; I sha'n't live to the end of it; let the next generation do it? That was not David's language. He said, "Behold, in my troubles I have prepared for the house of the Lord;" and he points to the heaps of silver, and of gold, and of iron; and made such provision that Solomon found no difficulty in carrying out the liberality of David. I cannot speak otherwise than kindly, because I am so much a debtor in every way, but I will tell you this, I should not like you to leave one single thing for the next generation to do. I should like the next generation to be compelled to say, Well, that was a generation! I wish I had lived in that time. I wish all congregations were like Wells's congregation; they were the people—to build such a place as this, and then to pay for it as soon as it was up, and then set it entirely free, even from the ground rent; they did not stop until they got to the end. Ah, the minister would say, those were the happy days; we are all a dead lot; look at Mr. Wells's congregation. Now, friends, the minister would say, we, their successors, we must compete with them; we must come up to them; their example shames us out of our coldness and carelessness; we must take them for our model. Well, but they didn't provide for the ground rent; if they had done that I should have thought that patience had her perfect work; that love had her perfect work, that the people had their perfect work. So, then, some of the friends seem rather cool upon this question, simply because they do not understand it. Then some have said, Oh, Wells is seeking after himself, that is all. No, friends, that is a very great mistake; that is what I never did, and never shall do. I have always thrown myself from the very first into the hands of the people to whom I preach; they have used me well, and will use me well. When I first started there were two gentlemen, and they were to be everything. Oh, we shall give Mr. Wells so-and-so. No, I said, not a word about it. What, will you not have a salary? No, I will throw myself into the hands of the people. I will go on and preach, and after all the lawful expenses are paid, if there is anything left, then let it come to the minister; and if I should not be able by my preaching to bring in enough to pay the lawful expenses, I will get a broom and sweep a crossing, or go to shoemaking, or something or another, and earn some money to make up the deficiency. And as the Lord liveth, that is what I would have done, rather than have a beggarly salary. You shall never say to me, We will allow you so-and-so. I would not stay in such a position. The labourer is worthy of his hire; let him have the natural result of his labours; and if it is but small, God will make it enough; and if it should not be very small, no right-minded man will think it too much, and if he does, the minister cannot help that, you know—certainly not. If there should be two farms, and the one yields only about a quarter of wheat an acre, while the other farm yields five quarters an acre, you cannot blame the farmer for his farm yielding five quarters; I do not think you ought to be angry about that. So, then, let us not get weary of the command of the Lord to favour his righteous cause. "Let patience have her perfect work." Go on by slow degrees, and by and by you will come to the end, and all will be right.

Then "let patience have her perfect work" also with the people of the Lord. Now I am not going to say a word—the Lord forbid I should—to sanction anything wrong; but I will say this, that you are not perfect yourselves; that is, you are compassed with infirmities, and you are in the body, and you must not expect perfection from the people of God. Do not be out of patience with them because sometimes they show a little temper, and are a little crotchety, and perhaps pushed about in their business in the world; adversity may show them up in a very unfavourable light. Never mind—rather find an excuse for them than join with

the adversary to ridicule them, or to slight them, or to reproach them. Do not get out of patience with the people of God, for you may depend upon it that, bad as they are, they are the best people on the face of the earth; that with all their faults, if in your right minds you will say, "With all their faults I love them still." We, with all our infirmities, meet at the same throne, centre in the same Mediator, we are all born of the same Spirit, destined to one end, and are of one indissoluble family, and have to live together for ever and ever. Some people say, As for those high doctrine people, I have no patience with them; whereas they are the only people I have patience with; and they are the very people that Christ has patience with. Was he ever out of patience with them? No, never.

Then I might refer to eternal glory. Let patience have her perfect work in relation to that. Oh, it is, saith one, very easy to tell me to hold on; but I shall not be received at the last. I have no experience of the incomings of heaven into my soul; I do not know what it is to be justified by faith, what it is experimentally to have peace with God, and to rejoice in him; and therefore I think I had better give it all up, for I shall not be received at the last. Now that is a very solemn matter with some, and I wish to speak of it as such. But you will easily perceive that if two men had met the prodigal, and one had told him that he had no shoes on, or at least very bad ones if he had any, and that he had very filthy garments on, and that he had a dreadfully haggard look; and that altogether, if he went to his father's house in that state, he would not be received; and if the other man had told him that his necessities simply made way for the provision that was waiting for him; that shoes were waiting for him, and a robe, that the ring was waiting for him, that the fatted calf was waiting for him, and the music, and that his father was waiting for him, and would come out presently, before he could get home to meet him, and would fall on his neck and kiss him—that he would receive him just as he was, and would give him this manifestation of his fatherly love even before he received all these things;—you can see which of the two men would be right, and which would be wrong. Just so now. The Lord looks to the heart. The prodigal's heart was now right for his father's house; he was willing to take the humblest place; and so he was received. So, then, despise not the promised land; think not lightly of the heaven that awaits you. The words of Peter are very beautiful when he saith, "Be sober,"—sober-minded; think, as though he should say, of what I have told you of election, of sanctification, of the Father's abundant mercy, of Christ's resurrection, and of your preservation in the faith. "Be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So, then, if when we come to cross the Jordan we are still in that destitute state, yet there is awaiting us everything that we can possibly need. "Let patience have her perfect work."

Lastly, *the design*. "That ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." There is a fourfold sense in which the Christian is perfect. First, in kind. "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." That is, he is perfectly sincere. There is no sham about him, no pretension. He is sincere in his profession. My conscience can never bring the slightest reproach to me upon this score. I am never at a loss here. I am often at a loss to know whether I do sincerely love God, but never at a loss to know whether I love the truth, and the truth is the representative of the blessed God, and if I love that I love him, because it is God in the truth that endears the truth. Second, perfect in decision. Stand out decided for it—no hesitation. James saith, "If any lack wisdom"—from on high—"let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." Waver? No; no more wavering in me upon that score than an iron pillar could waver, or a brazen wall, or a defenced city. Waver? No.