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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

WELL FOUNDED.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, 14TH JUNE, 1868,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSBY STREET.

“For it was founded upon a rock.”—MATTHEW vii. 25.

THIS refers, as the preceding verses show, and as our two preceding sermons show, to the man who doth what the gospel commands, and therefore he shall never apostatise or be lost, for he is founded upon a rock. What those doings are you will find stated in the last two sermons, those of you that have not read them. I shall not attempt to recapitulate them here. But there are three more points which it is very important to understand. First, *what it is to be experimentally established in the truth as it is in Jesus*, here called being founded upon a rock. Secondly, *the final preservation of such*. Thirdly, *the contrast between such and those who are not thus favoured*.

First, then, *what it is to be experimentally established in the truth as it is in Jesus*—to be founded on the rock of eternal ages. Now the reason why illiterate men become wise men in the things of God; the reason why man who in literary matters or in worldly policy may be a fool, confounds him that is wise; the reason why the weak man, or the man that is weak-minded, perhaps naturally, overcomes that which is mighty; the reason why the base man, the man that sees and feels what a poor, base, despicable thing he is—the reason why such bring to nought everything contrary to the gospel is because such men have an experience of the gospel; and in them is fulfilled our common saying, that “experience makes fools wise.” Therefore do not let us dream that we can be saved without experience; for what is experience but Divine teaching? And if we are without Divine discipline, without Divine teaching, whereof all the saved are partakers, then we shall prove at the last not to belong to the family of God; it will be proved at the last that we have never been rooted up out of our state by nature; we have never undergone that described by the apostle when he saith, “Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, having delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” Here is a personal and an experimental transition. But let

us look closely at this matter. Now where the Lord intends a man to be established in his truth for salvation purposes, he deals with him more or less as described in his blessed word; his holy word must lead such through the narrow, zigzag paths of Christian experience. Let us then take the Psalmist's description. He says, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry." "I waited patiently for the Lord." Then he was brought into a state of mind that none but the Lord could put him right, neither silver nor gold, nor anything under the heavens could bring him out of the trouble in which he was. He was in soul trouble, and he saw that he could not be redeemed from that trouble by silver or gold, or any other corruptible thing. He felt he had not wherewith to redeem himself, and he himself had by Divine inspiration put it upon record that "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." And where was the Psalmist as to his state and feeling when he thus spoke? Why, he says, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit." I shall have to mention four pits in contrast to this establishment in the truth, or being founded upon the Rock of Ages. Here we have the pit of soul trouble. "He brought me up out of the horrible pit," the pit of soul trouble wherein I saw nothing but my sins. And a sight and sense of sin, and what you are as a sinner connected with God's wrath, will make you say, as the Psalmist saith in another place,—*"Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me; horror hath overwhelmed me"* (Psa. lv. 5). There will be horror in the mind, there will be foreboding; there will be a fear, there will be a trembling, there will be a struggling to get out. But when he attempted to get out, he found then that there was the miry clay. Ah, what is poor human nature but as it were the miry clay? And such a one, in this soul trouble, reads the following scripture, and he says, "That is exactly me; namely, *"The wicked are like the troubled sea, that cannot rest, but casteth up mire and dirt."* Ah, what a filthy, unclean, leprous lost creature I am! It is a horrible pit and miry clay. But still he had heard of him that should come into the world to save sinners. David knew that all that were brought out of this horrible pit, it must be by the blood of the everlasting covenant. "As for thee also, I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water." Oh, my hearer, do not delude yourself. Be assured of this: if you have not that experience that makes the Saviour in all he is the one thing needful, then you will not esteem him and appreciate him. But if you have that experience that has taught you your need, you can then indeed rejoice in the blessed truth, as Watts sings,—

*"Is he a Rock? How firm he proves;
The Rock of Ages never moves!"*

The time will come with you, if you are convinced of your need, looking to the Lord, and waiting for him—yea, it has come to some of you—when you will be able to go with me in another point I shall presently have to mention. "He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock." Now we are not at all at a loss—we should have been if the Lord had not graciously given us light upon the matter—to know how this is realized. That scripture in Ephesians ii., which throws light upon a great many things, is very clear upon this. "He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together, in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." So that David was blessed with faith in that great Melchizedek, of whom in his 110th Psalm he speaks so beautifully. David was blessed with faith in that Son of God whose humiliation and resurrection he in his 2nd Psalm had spoken so beautifully of, and also in the 16th Psalm. David was blessed with faith in him; he knew therefore it was by the pardoning mercy of God in Christ Jesus; he knew it was by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; he knew it was by the

amazing grace of God that sin was blotted out, and that he, David, became a sanctified, a justified, a saved man. "And he set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings." He so conformed me to his love that it became a customary thing—habit becomes, as it were, second nature—it became a customary thing for me to walk in his love. "He established my goings." He gave me so clearly to see the good of his chosen that I could walk therein, and rejoice; he gave me to see that the mediation of the coming Messiah surpassed, all my sins; so that every day I might be favoured to walk with God, not from any worth or worthiness in me, but by faith in the Saviour, which gives me access to God. And before I go further here, I will just name that heavenly life which the Apostle Paul lived, and which was by faith. The 1st of Colossians will somewhat explain this. "You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh," that is, through his sacrifice, "through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable." I have a modern translation by me that instead of rendering the word "unreprouable," renders it "unaccusable," and I rather like that rendering; first, because I know that the original will bear it; and next, because it is very beautiful; it is even stronger, I think, in one sense than "unreprouable;" for sin is so completely put away by the work of Christ, that Satan has lost all power even to accuse us; and even conscience there, as we stand in Christ, cannot accuse us. There the wicked one toucheth us not, and cannot accuse us; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony who are thus brought supremely to love the Lord. "Where are thine accusers?" Not one to be found; universal silence reigns; nothing to be heard there but the voice of love and salvation, and the voice of a saved and happy people; where God hath wiped away all tears from off all faces. "And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God." This is coming into the truth. David was a right-minded man, and a great lover of the souls of men, and of God's salvation, and of God's truth; he laid out his whole life, everything, for the cause of God. "In my trouble," he says, "have I thus provided and prepared for the house of God." He would not stop till he had nothing else to do. David then speaks of others. "Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Was there not a time when you did not see what Christian experience was? But as soon as you saw it what was your first feeling? Just as there described; "many shall see it, and fear." You then said, I do see that the saved man knows what soul trouble is; but I fear I do not know what it is. I see the saved man does not need anything external to teach him to pray; he prays out of his own feelings; his prayers rise from inward divine teaching; and, therefore, out of that affliction into which the Lord brings him he prays unto the Lord. He is shut up as a prisoner, and he sighs before the Lord. And we read that "The Lord looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death." "Many shall see it." Oh, how that prophecy has been fulfilled. Millions of precious souls since those words were recorded have been awakened to see that the people of God are brought thus personally and experimentally into these things, and they are made to fear that they are destitute of them. "Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Ah, says such a one, I begin to see now I must trust not in my own supposed righteousness and goodness, that I must not trust in anything of my own, for self is altogether loathsome; like the leprous house of old, it must come down—it is all bad together, and I must trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Now, there are, perhaps, some whom I am speaking to this morning who can hardly go with me in what I am saying in this

part. Perhaps you say, I am afraid I have not been so brought into that horrible pit of soul trouble, I am afraid I have not so struggled in the miry clay as some do. Well, what does that fear make you do? Does it make you desire to find the narrow path and the hidden way? Well, then, if so we must not cast you away; we must not slight you; for the Lord begins his work as he will. You see that some have that experience, and you have a fear and a concern about it. That fear leads you to place what little hope you have in the Lord Jesus Christ; and so sure as you are led to place your hope in him, so sure will he appear for you at the appointed time. Hence that beautiful scripture where the Saviour saith, "He that followeth me shall not abide in darkness;" though he may be in darkness now. "Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant;" that is, the Lord Jesus Christ; and to obey his voice is to receive his testimony in the love thereof;—let such a one, "that walketh in darkness, and hath no light; let him trust in the Lord, and stay himself upon his God." For, "unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise (not to scorch and smite you, but) with healing in his wings." Here, then, David was fully acquainted with God's blessed truth; and I trust we can follow him in some humble measure in these things. And the man that knows the solemn necessity of this personal religion and of this personal acquaintance with his condition as a sinner, that is the man that will stand out for God's truth. And if he be a minister, he will read the words of David, and look up to God and say, Lord, help me to do just as thy servant David did. It is very remarkable that after stating to us that beautiful experience, he then tells us what his feelings were towards God's truth in relation to its being preached to others; and then puts in a petition for himself, and gives the reasons thereof. He says in the same Psalm, "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart." I suppose he had met with some that said, Oh, yes, I believe in Christ's righteousness; I have got it in my heart; but it does not do to preach it much—hardly safe. I do not think preaching Christ's righteousness will do so much good as insisting upon a great amount of righteousness from the creature. I suppose David had met with some of that stamp, and he gloried in not being like unto them. "I have not hid *thy* righteousness." Five times in the 71st Psalm does he bring in the eternal righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the manifold use that he makes of it. "I have not hid thy righteousness." As it is by that that I am justified, I will preach it to others as the only way in which any man can be justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. "I have declared thy faithfulness." Then if you turn to the 89th Psalm, you will see there how he declares God's faithfulness. God showed unto David that Jesus Christ should reign for ever, and that his seed should endure for ever. "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David;" "I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail." Here is God's faithfulness in the coming of Christ, and in the eternal welfare of the people. There were plenty in that day to reckon that a dangerous doctrine, and plenty in that day that would conceal in some measure that truth, or else David would not have spoken as he there does. "I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation." And you may depend upon it what David declared in his life he declared in his death; and what he declared in his death he had declared in his life; "thy salvation." Perhaps I ought not to occupy two or three lines in the sermon by quoting the words, but you know how beautiful they are; "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation and all my desire." So that he had declared that salvation which was all his own personal salvation and all his desire. He knew that as he needed it all others needed it, whether they knew it or not. Then he saith, "I have not concealed thy loving-kindness." Thou knowest, Lord, that I feel I am a

debtor entirely to thy loving-kindness, thy free, eternal, immutable love. Well, I don't know that you will give much offence, David, if you are only careful, and do not go to far. So David keeps the most offensive thing to the last; "I have not concealed thy loving-kindness, and thy truth." Ah, I suppose you mean in a little back parlour, to just a select few, just a few that could be trusted; you would not tell all these terrible doctrines to everybody, would you? Well, I have done so. "I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation." He was the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and sounded out through the length and breadth of the land the righteousness, the faithfulness, the salvation, the loving-kindness, and the sworn truth of the blessed God. David was aware of God's sworn truth; no man knew better than David did that God entered into an immutable oath to bless Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to bless all his people. Ah, saith David, that is not all—he hath sworn unto me that of the fruit of my body will be set upon my throne; that is, my antitypical throne. So you go on generation after generation, and no king comes without his infirmities, faults, and drawbacks. By and by David's Greater Son appears; he keeps the covenant that God taught him, he confirms the promises, and by him God dwells in Zion, blesses her provision, and reigns for ever and ever. Here is David's experience, then—"founded upon a rock." Then he puts in a petition for himself, and assigns the reason. "Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord." I am a poor creature, and as I have not withheld thy blessed truth from others, do thou manifest thy tender mercies unto me;—in entire accordance with the promise, "The liberal soul shall be made fat;" and "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth;" and "He that watereth others shall also himself be watered." "Let thy loving-kindness and thy truth continually preserve me." So the Saviour saith, "Continue ye in my love." It can be always trusted, for it is always the same. And John saith, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." Now what is the matter, David? Well, he says, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up." I feel as though I should be lost after all; I don't know what to make of it. "They are more than the hairs of mine head; therefore my heart faileth me." Ah, do you know what this is, to see and feel that the iniquities of your heart are innumerable? Meditating upon this this morning, I thought I had much cause to rejoice; and then I thought of some of you somewhat mournfully, because you are not so attentive to the house of God as I could wish, and not so devoted to his cause as I could wish; more worldly sometimes than I like to see, running away after worldly pleasures. Ah, you will suffer for it some day. I thought of you this morning, and prayed for you, that you might be delivered from it. And then I thought, Well, you lament over that, but look at your own heart. And I must freely confess that I have more to lament over in my own heart than in the faults of all the people put together." It may well be said, "They shall know every one his own grief and his own sore." Innumerable evils compass in ten thousand ways; and the more devoted you are to God, the more Satan will stir up the infidelities of your nature to oppose you; so that you may well say, "Withhold not thy tender mercies from me, O Lord; let thy loving-kindness and thy truth continually preserve me." Thy loving-kindness suits me, and thy truth suits me;—and we know the Lord will hear and will answer. Thus David was founded upon a rock. Can we say, then, that we are, in a way of understanding, in a way of decision, in a way of devotion to God, thus established in the truth as it is in Jesus, and founded upon this immovable rock? the privileges thereof are innumerable.

Now the Lord delivers us from the pit of soul trouble, and brings us

into fellowship with himself; so we have hereby escaped our state by nature, as described in Isaiah xxiv. There is a scripture there descriptive of our state by nature, and our deliverance therefrom. The Lord, as it appears to me, is speaking of the return of the Jews from captivity. But they were never free as a people after the Babylonish captivity, and so are described in the last verse but one of that chapter as prisoners;—"They shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited." Now they did not know that they were in a pit; they did not know that they were in prison; they did not know that that was their real condition. Hence when the Saviour preached freedom,—why they said, we were never in bondage to any man. "After many days shall they be visited." Passing by many things, we come to the Day of Pentecost. What a day was that! God on that day, and the following days, following weeks, following months, and following years, visited thousands upon thousands in a way of mercy. Zacharias interweaves this in his sacred song. Speaking as it were proleptically, he saith, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people." So they shall be visited with mercy; and others shall be left to judgment, and be visited with judgment. The declaration there means, first, that they should be visited by mercy, and the others should be left to judgment. You will continue blind to your condition as a sinner, and unconcerned about it; you will continue blind to the truth of God, and unconcerned about it; or if you get a mere head knowledge of the truth, that cannot save you. A man may understand the truth clearly, and yet be a lost man. I believe the devil understands the truth more clearly than I do. And therefore you must not suppose because you are sound in your creed, and understand the truth, that therefore you are a Christian. That by itself is no evidence whatever that you belong to God. No—you must sincerely and supremely love that truth, that you understand—you must feel that your daily welfare is in it; that your life is in it, your death is in it, your eternal destiny is in it. It must so sway you that you shall feel that you would buy such truth at any price, and, God keeping you, sell it at no price whatever; and let it cost you what it may, you will hold it fast. A mere belief by itself is what James describes—"faith without works is dead;" but when that faith works, and does something like the faith of Abraham, and the faith of Rahab, and the faith of others, then that faith becomes the confidence of things not seen, the evidence of things hoped for. It must not be mere head knowledge, then; it must be that knowledge that endears the truth. Now they shall be visited and made concerned about their state. "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously." I think that we ought to feel confounded and ashamed if that scripture is at all ambiguous to us. It has no allusion to the sun and moon whatever except by metaphor. When it is said that the sun shall be darkened, it simply means, first, that the Jewish government should be darkened, all light should be taken from that nation; that dispensation should turn into darkness; and the moon turned into blood—blood is the symbol of war and death; and so that nation was to die by the inroads of the Roman armies. And another thing meant there is that the glory of the reign of Jesus Christ surpasses all worldly glory. Where will you get a government to compare with his? Where will you get a kingdom to compare with his? Where will you get such a king as he is? "He shall reign before his ancients gloriously." Say you, his ancients there are the Jews. Why, they are not half old enough, not a quarter ancient enough. Who are they? A people that were chosen in Christ before the world was. They are very ancient; God's mercy has been towards them from eternity. They trace up their pedigree beyond Adam,

beyond Eve, beyond the sun, beyond the moon, beyond all created bounds—up to the silent eternity of the everlasting God, where the Redeemer's goings forth were from of old, even from everlasting. And just so sure as they were from everlasting, they shall be to everlasting;—they shall live amidst the blazing glories of the openings up of the everlasting God in his love, counsels, achievements, and the delights into which he will bring the saints.

Then there is the pit of hell, as in Job. "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men;" there is the man fast asleep as to anything spiritual; "then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction;" then in comes the declaration, "Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom." Then there is the after pit of tribulation. You know not what trouble you will get into yet before you die. There was one good man of old, when he came to the throne the Lord was with him; everything went on beautifully. Solomon excepted, I do not know that there is one king of Judah whose accession to the throne can be read with more pleasure than that of Hezekiah; and he, I suppose, thought that his sun would always shine, that things would always go well with Judah. By and by he is brought into trouble; sickness overtook him, and there was a something that told him that matters were not right. They were right, but his unbelief was so strong. "He will cut me off with pining sickness." No, he will not. Ah, I am sure he will. Where is the peace I used to enjoy? Where is the life? where is the liberty? where is the hope? where is the light of his countenance? Where is the sweet testimony of my interest in him? It is all dark together. Instead of peace, I have nothing but bitterness. People are generally ready to say bitter things; they generally carry a pretty good supply of bitters with them, and they can deal them out pretty well, too, when they like. Well, perhaps that does more good than dealing out sweets, after all. "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness." But mark what follows. "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins"—all of them? yes, every one—"thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Ah, just so. The Lord will send a messenger of Satan to buffet us sometimes; and then there will be fresh discoveries of what we are, and we shall fear that our past experience has all been delusion, and that we shall be lost at last. What does the Lord do this for? Why, for the very purpose that he himself expresses to his servant Paul. "My grace is sufficient for thee." You began to anchor in something of your own; the Lord roots you out of it all, down with your conceit, and makes way for the increased riches of his grace. "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." Thus, then, how can that man apostatize? Here he is, personally established in the truth, founded on a rock; he has escaped his state by nature, he has escaped the pit of hell, delivered from the lowest hell, on his way to the celestial city; he has escaped a thousand pits, as it were;—some of you have since you have known the Lord. Oh, how many deliverances the Lord hath wrought for us since we have known his name! That is a beautiful scripture to turn into prayer—yea, it is a prayer—"Command deliverances for Jacob." Those words have been very dear to me many times; many times have I said, Well, Lord, it is only for thee to say, "Loose him and let him go," and it is done; it is only for thee to say, "Peace, be still," and it is done; it is only for thee to say to Satan, "Depart from him," and it is done; it is only for thee to say, "I will, be thou clean," and it is done; it is only for thee to say, "Thy faith hath saved thee," and it is done. We generally find that the Lord very seldom does a great work by a long sentence. If a sentence comes with power, there are generally very few words in it. In fact, it is not the words at all; the Lord uses the words, but it is his power that does the work. It was not his merely saying,

"Peace, be still," but the exercise of his omnipotence, that instantly controlled the winds and the waves, and made the creature feel that there was the presence of its Creator.

What shall I say upon *the final preservation*? I have a great many circumstances in my mind, but can mention only one or two. Joseph was established in the revelation God made to him, and fell not; but abode with God and prevailed with God. Moses made a mistake, certainly—slew the Egyptian, and ran away from Pharaoh and from Egypt; but he did not run away from God's truth, he did not run away from Zion. David never left God's truth; he abode by it, lived in it, and no man ever died more triumphantly than he did. The rains descended on poor Mordecai and upon the Jews, and beat upon that house; the floods rose and the winds blew. But who was it fell? Not Mordecai, but Haman. A terrible storm came down upon the three worthies, but who was it fell—those that were cast into the furnace, or those that cast them in? A terrible storm came down upon Daniel, but who was slain—those that cast him into the lion's den, or he himself? And all the saints of God that ever have been slain, their being slain did not hurt them. The Saviour says, "Nothing shall by any means hurt you." If you could see the saints in heaven now, and were to ask them, Did not those fires hurt you?—No, not in the least, we are none the worse for it; not so much as the smell of fire upon us. You see, our coats are not changed; our new covenant coat is still the same; our coat of consolation is still the same. The final preservation of the saints is sure. In the 11th of Hebrews, the apostle does not admit that one of them was finally lost. "These all died in faith." Heavy storms beat upon them, the waves of tribulation rose around them, the winds of persecution blew most mightily against them; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, in deserts, in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth; of whom the world was not worthy; but "these all died in faith." But if I am not a receiver of Christ, and am not decided for him, then I shall be like the man that built his house upon a wrong foundation—I must come to nought at last. Remember, friends, that you may build your hope upon a Jesus Christ, and be a professor, and like a gospel, and yet that may not be God's Christ. That is a remarkable scripture in 2 Corinthians xi.—"If he that cometh preacheth *another* Jesus;"—the same Jesus nominally, but they make out his salvation to be conditional, and that is not God's Christ; "or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received"—a spirit of legality from which the apostle stood clear,—that is not his spirit; his spirit is the spirit of adoption, the spirit of Christ, the spirit of dear relationship, the spirit of the Father; "or another gospel, which ye have not accepted,"—the same gospel in the letter, but it has been turned and twisted about, and it is a false gospel. How many will thus be deceived God alone knows. Oh, it is a mercy to be undeceived, and to be the subject of all that soul discipline, from time to time, that shall make us see that we are built, not with the hay, wood, and stubble of creature duties and doings, but that we are built with gold, and silver, and precious stones—the precious promises of the blessed God; and building our hope upon the Rock of Ages as a matter of necessity, understanding what we are built upon, understanding and sincerely loving what we believe, and abiding thereby. There is a kind of fivefold secret in the truth, that they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever;—first, the immutability of the counsel of God; second, the completeness they have in Christ; third, the certainty of the Holy Spirit carrying on his work to the end; fourth, that as a general truth, the people are made as willing to abide by the Lord as the Lord is willing to abide by them; and fifth, that he foreknows and has foreprovided for every possible contingency. Amen.