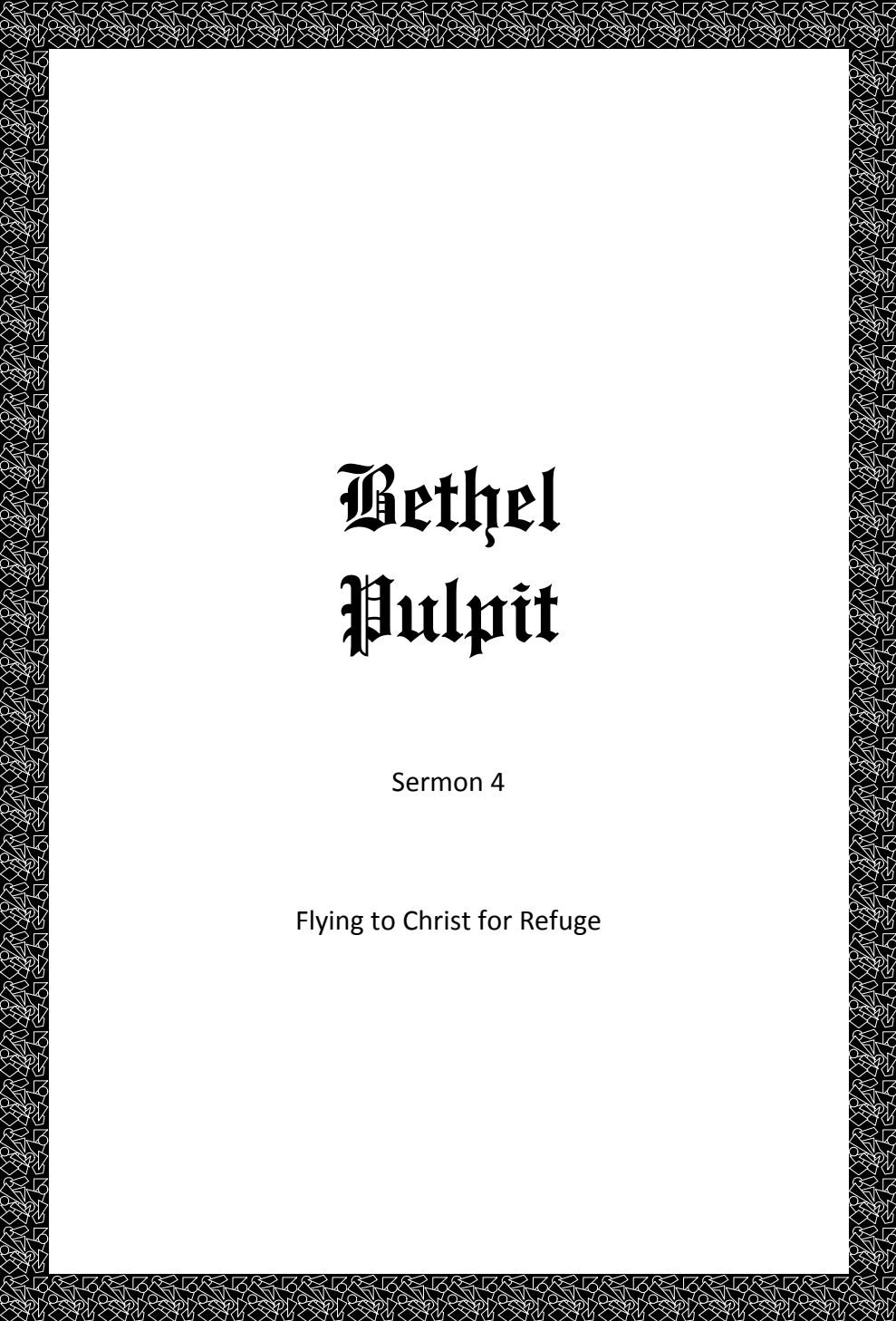




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 4

Flying to Christ for Refuge

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 5th September, 1974**

Text: “*Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?*” (Isaiah 60. 8.)

Twice this question is asked in the Word of God, “Who are these?” Once in the Book of the Revelation: “Who are these that are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?” The other occasion here: “Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” Twice this question is asked, “Who are these?” and the answer in each case is exactly the same: the people of God in all ages. One is a view of them landed safe in heaven, the other a view of them in the exercise of their soul here upon earth. “Who are these that are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? these are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The people spoken of here (in the text) are the very same people, the identical people, not yet safely landed, but in the exercise of their souls: “Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?”

The analogy is this: the sky is darkened as with a dark cloud by the number of doves that fill it. They are coming from every quarter, from every place, but they are all centering on the same spot, they are flying “to their windows.” By these windows we understand the holes in the side of the rock. In Palestine there are multitudes of wild doves and they make their homes in the clefts of the rock. When danger threatens, then wherever they are they fly and enter into the windows, these little holes in the side of the face of the rock. Now this is the analogy. And the prophet here, by faith, looks right down the vista of time and sees the church of God in all ages. People of different nationalities, and upbringing, and experience, and background, living at various times and in different conditions, but as he sees them and the different places from whence they come, he sees that they are all converging on one spot, every one of them, they all fly in one direction, all coming to one place. That is, *to a crucified Jesus*.

So the doctrine of this text is this: that there is one point that has marked the people of God right down the ages from Adam’s day to this,

and to the end of time. That is, they all make their refuge in Jesus. So we have here “the long cloud of witnesses that marks the same path to heaven.”

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” I want to speak to you first of all of the windows, and then of the doves, and then of their flight. The great point about their windows is that they are in the cleft of the rock. O that precious character of the Lord Jesus as the Rock of ages! It speaks of His immutability: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.” It speaks of His glorious, almighty strength, “For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” And this is where the doves find their resting place, where they make their refuge, these windows in the face of the rock.

I have often said it and I repeat it now: it is in the *clefts* of the rock that the doves find a hiding place, and nowhere else. “O my dove, that art in the cleft of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs.” It is in the clefts of the rock, and there only, that the doves can find shelter. Where there is a rock and the face of it so sheer and smooth that there is not a single crack, a single crevice, a single cleft, there is no hiding place for a dove. It may be majestic in its beauty and grandeur, but it means nothing to the poor dove that seeks shelter from the enemy or from the storm. There is one thing the dove wants when danger threatens, to find these windows, some cleft in the side of the rock, some crack, some crevice. It is in the *clefts* of the rock that the dove finds its refuge. “O my dove that art in the cleft of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs.”

Now what is it doctrinally, experimentally? This: you can view the glorious Person of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God from all eternity. You can see Him as the second Person in the indivisible Godhead, one with the Father, one with the Holy Ghost; and you can wonder. But there is no hope for a sinner here, no hiding place for a dove, for there is no cleft in the rock.

“Till God in human flesh I see
My thoughts no comfort find,
The holy, just and sacred Three
Are terrors to my mind.”

Luther said, “Let me see God in my nature.” So faith goes to Calvary and sees at Calvary a cleft Rock:

“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.”

It is in the sufferings and sin-atoning death of the dear Redeemer, the work of the dear Son of God, that the weary soul finds a refuge, and there alone. It is in the cleft of the Rock.

Now these are the windows. “O my dove, that art in the cleft of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs.” This is the blessed hiding place. This is faith’s refuge from the wrath of God against sin. This is the sinner’s hope for eternity. This is the place where all the people of God, by faith, have been led, every one of them.

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” So there is this sacred revelation of the glorious Rock, and that a cleft Rock, and these windows the doves’ hiding place. Now what of the dove? If your religion is real you will be brought to fly to Christ. People sometimes ask what saving faith is; people sometimes say, “What is it really to believe on the Son of God?” And of course there are many answers. But this is one thing: faith is a fleeing to Christ. The Holy Spirit gives some sense of sin and impending danger and the wrath of God against the sinner, and then the sinner by faith is led to flee from the wrath to come, to flee like the dove to its windows, to flee to the merits of Jesus alone.

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” This is the mark of the people of God, they that have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.

“And if God the Spirit reveal this to you,
Take refuge in Jesus, though hell may pursue.”

O the welcome for sinners in Christ, their Refuge, their only Refuge!

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” Then tell me, beloved friends, has this point come into your experience, that you have felt your danger, your danger through the wrath of God against sin, your danger through a broken law, your danger as it concerns the judgment day? And have you heard that voice declaring,

“Flee from the wrath to come”? Like Lot in the city of Sodom, the city was given over to destruction, there was no hope, no refuge in Sodom where Lot lingered, but the angel said, “Flee to the mountain, look ye not back.” There was the commandment. And we read that there was something else; we read that the angel laid his hand upon Lot and brought him out of the city. Now the gospel declares, “Flee from the wrath to come”; and grace is “that firm but friendly hand” that God puts forth to bring you out of the world. He gives you no rest until you flee to the mountain.

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” Where are you building your nest, beloved friends? “Arise ye, and depart, this is not your rest, it is polluted.” Where are you building your nest? Rutherford says something like this: “Build not your nest anywhere here below, for God has given the whole forest to death. He builds too low who builds beneath the skies.” Then where are you building your nest? We all build our nest in some place or other. The world builds its nest, religious man builds his nest, the people of God build their nest. Now where are you building your nest? “He builds too low who builds beneath the skies.” If you are building in anything short of the cleft of the Rock, the precious merits of Jesus, then you are building too low. O you will have to fly as the doves to their windows to build in Christ, to find a refuge in Him, in His merits alone! These are vital things, for God has given the whole forest over to death and the storms of divine wrath daily draw near. O to have a nest built in the cleft of the Rock!

“O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove that maketh her nest in the side of the hole’s mouth.” You see, the poor little dove has been blessed with divine wisdom to know that these clefts in the rock are safe, they are impregnable. Despite all the poor dove’s weakness, no danger can threaten there. And the heirs of bliss are blessed with divine wisdom to leave everything here below, however good, and make their nest in the clefts of the Rock, and as Krummacher quaintly says, “Before Satan can swallow a child of God, he must first swallow the rock in which that child of God hides.”

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” You remember how Noah sent forth a raven and a dove out of the ark, and we are told that the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot

until she returned to the ark and Noah reached forth his hand and pulled her in. Now when the Lord begins His solemn, saving work in the new birth, He puts a sinner forth in the way of a gracious exercise. Perhaps some of you are there tonight. You can find no rest for the sole of your foot. The waters of the flood cover it all. The things you once rested in with delight, you can rest there no longer: the pleasures of this world, your idols, your sins; or a form of godliness, the good opinion other people have of you, taking things for granted. You find there is no resting place and you find no rest for the sole of your foot. Then can you never find a rest? “There remaineth therefore now a rest for the people of God,” and it is in the cleft of the Rock and there alone; it is in the merits of a crucified Jesus. That is the rest that remaineth for the people of God, and you will find no rest, until like Noah’s dove, you return, and the Lord stretches out His almighty, loving arm, and pulls you in. There is a sweet pull, you know, in the gospel. Do you know anything of the pull of grace? “Draw me”; then you can enter into the cleft of the Rock. “Draw me, we will run after Thee.” And here the dear Saviour of sinners declares to these, to you who can find no rest for the sole of your foot: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” Now, beloved friends, it will not only be at the beginning of your spiritual life, but as long as you live here below there will be many, many occasions when you are flying again like the doves to their windows, times when you feel guilt on your conscience; times when you lack some sweet assurance; times when you feel something of the wrath of God; times of trouble, perplexity, adversity, dismay. What can the poor dove do? Fly again to the cleft of the Rock, enter into its windows. There is safety, security, peace and rest there, and there alone. And this is the mark of the saints of God in all ages: “Be Thou my strong habitation whereunto I may *continually* resort.”

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” Poor David once was overwhelmed with trouble. Everything seemed to be going wrong, everything was too much for him, too hard for him, and he said, “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.” Now that was a wrong exercise with David, and I believe he realised it because if you read that Psalm carefully, what emphasis he places here: “*And I said.*” It was *I* that said it, my old nature.

And are there not many of you who can say, “And I have said”? “And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.” O to be far away from it all, to be far away from everything. “Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.” Child of God, the Lord will never give you the wings of a dove to fly away from your troubles. He will give you the wings of a dove in your troubles to fly to Jesus’ wounded side, to fly to the cleft of the Rock and find a resting place, a hiding place there; but never to fly away from your troubles. The Lord will give you eagle’s wings to rise above your troubles, but He will never give you wings to fly away from them. David was under a wrong exercise here. He said, “Then would I fly away, and be at rest.” Do you really think, child of God, if you fly away from your troubles, leave them all behind, fly to some lonely place by yourself, that you would be at rest? Like that woman who could not get on with the church, she could not get on with the members or the pastor, she could get on with no-one, so she went all round the different places, but in the end she came back, and they said to her, “What happened?” “Well,” she said, “I could get away from all of you, but *I could not get away from myself.*” O for the wings of the dove to fly to Christ, for eagle’s wings at times to be borne up (not to *bear* up, but to *be borne* up).

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” The Lord once made this remarkable promise to His people: “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” It is one of those remarkable contrasts of the Word of God. Lying among the pots, amongst all the rubbish and all the dirt and dust, and then ascending on high in beauty and glory with the wings of a dove. Now the Lord has a most blessed ability to make this difference, this great exchange. Do not forget His first miracle was to change water into wine, and He still changes things into other things. He has promised to change sorrow into joy. He once said He would give “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” And what is it here? “Though ye have lien, among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” Are there any of you here tonight, lying among the pots? Everything seems dark and dead, everything seems wrong, and you say, “Well, I cannot be one of these doves. I am not ascending on high. I am not rising above either my

troubles or my sins. I am lying among the pots, of the earth earthy.” The poor dove’s wings are tarnished with all the dirt and refuse among the pots; and that is where a child of God is often found. But that is not going to be the end of your religion.

Some of you feel you have not been anywhere else but among the pots. You have this concern about your soul and about eternity, yet days and weeks pass and you still lie among the pots. Or, others may be flying high but there has been something that has brought you right down. O how weak we are! You might have been flying high, enjoying Jesus’ presence, Jesus’ love, and then you are ensnared in some sin and you come down among the pots! Some unexpected tidings, some disappointment comes, something you hear, something that tries you, that perplexes you, and down you come, lying among the pots, neither can you rise above them. A precious promise this to the poor dove with her wings tarnished and perhaps wounded, lying among the pots! The day shall come when you shall be as the wings of a dove, ascending on high, rising above your sins and your sorrows, flying for refuge to the cleft Rock, to the merits of Jesus, and then to find all sin gone, all put away in the atonement. To be clothed in the Redeemer’s precious righteousness: “covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” He gives beauty for ashes. O the blessed exchange! The liberty the Lord alone can give, the difference He can bring, and often in a moment! O the blessed exchange, rising above the pots and soaring on high! “Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.”

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” The great point that I see in this comparison of a child of God to a dove is this: helplessness, weakness. I know people bring forth all manner of comparisons; to me this is the point: weakness and helplessness. We cannot do anything. Danger threatens and we are so helpless. There is a storm and you are so helpless. Beloved friends, the great thing with the dove is this – *its weakness is its strength*. Let me explain. It has no claws to fight with, it has no teeth to tear its enemies in pieces, it has no means at all of attack. There is only one thing it can do when danger threatens, when enemies assail, and that is to flee, fly to its windows. Now its weakness is its strength, because inside those windows it is safe and nothing can touch it there. Child of God, your weakness is your strength.

When you are weak then you are strong. O beware of thinking you can manage things, you can deal with things, you can get on well. You will never be stronger than when you feel so weak, so helpless and so unworthy that you have to turn away from it all and flee away from all your guilt and helplessness to a precious Jesus. There you are safe, there you are secure.

So behold the dove's weakness, and behold the dove's strength; and in it see your own. How weak and yet how strong, as by faith, in all your troubles, your sorrows, your perplexities, your sins, you flee for refuge to Jesus! Then you are safe, you could not be safer. Nothing can touch you there, nothing can assail you there, nothing can destroy you. And this is the lesson that the heirs of bliss have to learn, that all their safety, all their salvation is in Christ, and there alone.

So you have to flee for refuge, you have to flee to Jesus continually, you have to flee by prayer, you have to flee day by day and hour by hour, you have to flee with your spiritual and with your providential concerns – you cannot flee too often, you cannot flee in vain. O it is a loving welcome that awaits the poor dove within the clefts of the Rock!

“Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?” Let me mention one of them, godly Hezekiah. There was a vast army, those cruel Assyrians, completely surrounding Jerusalem. It seemed certain death, certain destruction, not only to King Hezekiah, but to all the people of God. But who is this that flies as the dove to its window? It is Hezekiah going before the Lord and telling Him in sweet simplicity his case, his own weakness, the strength of his enemies, the awful threatenings surrounding him, the blasphemy of Sennacherib and his men. He fled to Jesus and there he was safe. There was nothing he could do. There was nothing he needed to do. Next day, around the walls of Jerusalem there were 185,000 dead bodies. Now that is the blessedness, that is the safety, that is the security of those who fly as the doves to their windows, the Lord their helper, the Lord their defence, the Lord their safety.