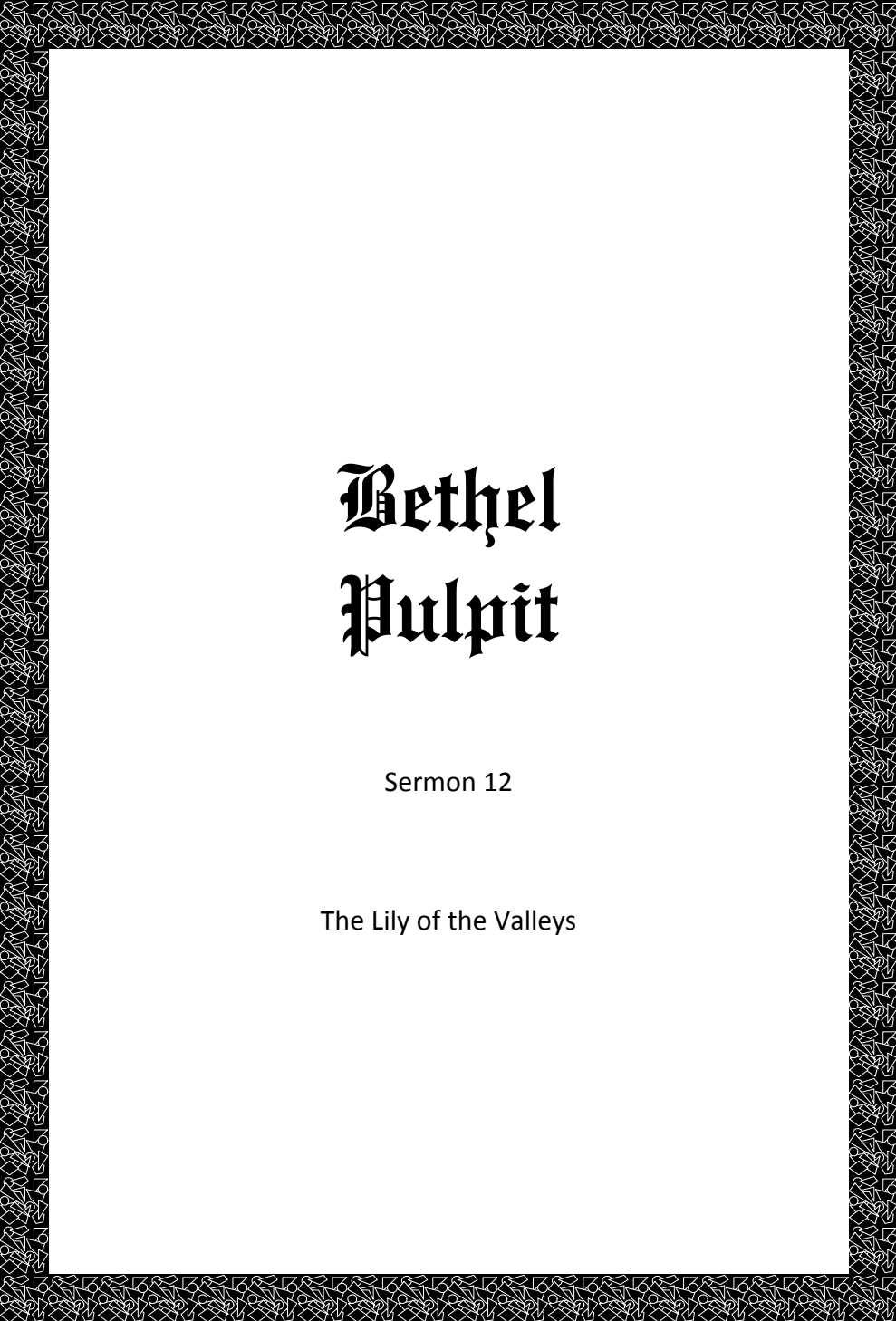




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 12

The Lily of the Valleys

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 9th September, 1971**

Text: “*The lily of the valleys*” (*Song of Solomon 2. 1*).

Here we see “no man save Jesus only.” I do not intend to spend any time by way of introduction but “begin at this same Scripture and preach unto you Jesus.” This is the Lord Himself revealing Himself to His people, standing behind our wall, looking through the windows, showing Himself through the lattice (verse 9) – and the great point with a living soul is to see Him, to have a glimpse of Him by faith. Now is it the great point with you as you come to the sanctuary? You would see Jesus.

I begin here. By this sacred figure, this blessed title, “the Lily of the valleys,” *the preciousness of Christ* is set forth. It is a figure of preciousness. This is not something that does not matter, something of no value; the point here is preciousness. The great evidence of divine life in your soul and mine is this: “Unto you therefore which believe, He is precious.” It is the great mark. I know that there are many evidences of life laid down in Scripture, but this is *the* mark, the preciousness of Christ, the Lily of the valleys. If your religion is real, Christ is precious to you; either precious in your soul’s possession of Him, or precious in your soul’s desire after Him. Either precious as you have Him, or precious as you want Him. If He is not precious in either of these ways, then you lack the vital mark of grace. So that is a good prayer:

“Be precious to us, all beside is as dross
Compared to the love and the blood of Thy cross.”

Now, was Christ ever made precious to your soul by faith? “The Lily of the valleys” – it is a sweet emblem, a figure of a precious Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit is to make Christ precious to your soul in fulfilment of that wonderful promise: “I will make a Man more precious than fine gold; even a Man than the golden wedge of Ophir.”

The Lord Jesus often used this emblem of the lily, and once He said, as He pointed His hearers to the lily, “that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Well, if there is glory and preciousness

in the lily of the field, how much more so in Himself as the Lily of the valley. “Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

Now this part of the subject is inexhaustible, the preciousness of the Lord Jesus, so I can only hint at a few things concerning the dear Lily of the valleys. He is precious in His most precious blood. That is vital. There is no salvation without it. “Not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ.” He is precious in His glorious righteousness in which a poor, guilty sinner stands for ever complete, righteousness wrought out by His obedience unto death. He is precious in His righteousness to those who feel their awful guilt. He is precious in His blood to take it away. To those who feel they have no righteousness of their own He is precious in His righteousness imputed to them. He is precious in His intercession, presenting the merits of His death, interceding for sinners, standing between as the dear Mediator in garments dyed in blood.

Now this is the Lily of the valleys, Christ in all His preciousness in His great love to sinners. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” And in all His precious attributes He is precious, in His mercy and in His faithfulness, in His power to save, in His tender compassion. He is precious as the Mercy Seat where prayer is heard and answered; it is a precious, blood-sprinkled mercy seat.

In all His offices He is precious, as Prophet, Priest and King; a Prophet to teach, a Priest to atone, a King to reign. In all the relationships He bears, in all His characters, He is precious as all in all to His people and especially in His blessed suitability to meet their need. The point is this: whatever you need, whatever your soul desires, is to be found in Christ, for time and for eternity. The Lily of the valleys, a figure of preciousness, a precious Christ. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” Now I pass on.

There is *the fragrance of the lily of the valley*. We sing:

“Or if the Lily He assume,
The valleys bless the rich perfume.”

There is a sweet fragrance in the lily. Now I wonder how you stand concerning the Lord Jesus. The preaching of the cross is to God a sweet savour of Christ (2 Cor. 2. 15). There is that sweet fragrance of the Lily of

the valleys to God in heaven whenever Christ is preached, whether the people receive it or reject it. There is a sweet savour ascends to heaven, that sweet savour of the Lily of the valleys. Now this is where the separation comes in: to the one we are the savour of life unto life, to the other we are the savour of death unto death. There are some who hear Christ preached and there is no sweet fragrance, there is no sweet savour, and the reason is because they are dead in sin. They never felt their need of Christ, and so there is no sweet savour in Him. But there are others who delight to hear of Christ because they feel their need and because they see such a blessed suitability in Him, and this character the Lily of the valleys is very attractive to them. The Lord Jesus is revealed here and there is that sweet fragrance. Now how do you hear Christ and Him crucified preached? Is there a sweet savour of Christ in it? I understand that the lily sends forth the sweetest fragrance when it is crushed, bruised and broken, and so it is with Christ in His sin-atoning sufferings especially. O did you ever go to Calvary, and was there ever a sweet savour, a fragrance of Christ there?

We often speak of “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” Well, friends, what is it that refreshes a weary soul, a heavy-laden soul, but this sweet fragrance, when the north wind awakes and the south wind blows, blows upon the garden and the spices flow? The church under a sense of the sweetness of it says, “His name is as ointment poured forth”; this sweet fragrance in all His names, especially in His name as Jesus: “His name as Jesus suits them well.” Because of the savour of thy good ointment, Thy name is as ointment poured forth.” The sweet fragrance of the Lily of the valleys.

There is another point which is inseparably connected with it, and that is, *the Lily of the valleys attracts*. There is something specially attractive in the Lily of the valleys. I take the figure to be this. There is a person going through the woods and fields. He sees all kinds of trees, all kinds of shrubs and flowers. Suddenly he sees this beautiful lily. It arrests him. He pauses. He may be in a hurry but he cannot pass this hastily. He turns aside. He goes where it is growing. He looks at it, admires it, admires its beauty, smells its sweet fragrance. He is loath to leave it. He lingers. There is an attraction. “I am the Lily of the valleys.” Was Christ ever made attractive to you?

“Here Jesus in ten thousand ways,
His soul-attracting charms displays.”

There is an attraction in Christ, and I want to be very clear on one thing: this is not sentimentality. There is such a thing as a sentimental religion, and people who are out of the secret may think that some of these precious things spoken of in the Song of Solomon are sentimental, just beautiful words and pictures. But this is not sentimentality, speaking of the preciousness and the sweet fragrance and the attractions in the Lily of the valleys. You say, “Where is the difference?” Now, I will tell you. Sentimentality never affected a person’s life; the sweet attraction of the Lily of the valleys does. There is the vital point, the vital difference. You may be very moved by a wonderful epic poem, some deed of valour and bravery, and it may move you; it may move your innermost feelings, but it does not affect your life at all. You may hear a most beautiful piece of music and, if you have a musical ear, you find that sometimes it almost melts you to tears and perhaps for a few moments you hardly know where you are. But when it is ended there is not any difference; your life goes on just the same. For a short time you were very moved, your emotions were touched, but that was just emotion, just sentiment.

But what of the sweet attraction of Christ in His preciousness and in His sweet fragrance? Well, it has an effect. Whenever Christ is made precious to a sinner, that sinner is never the same again. It has an effect. Look at the dear martyrs. Why did they go to the stake? They had smelt the sweet savour of the Lily of the valleys. There was something attracted them. They counted not their lives dear. Christ was so precious and so fragrant and so attractive, they would rather suffer and die than dishonour Him. *Now that is not sentimentality.*

Well, it is not our lot to suffer as martyrs in this outward way, but the sweet attractions of Christ have an effect, and that effect is a gracious separation from the world. Why do professing Christians have so much of the world? Because they have never smelt this sweet fragrance of the Lily of the valleys. There would be no fragrance and no attraction in earthly things if you knew something of the Lily of the valleys. This attraction is to know Christ by faith, and it will bring you out of the world. You will give up the world for Christ’s sake. You will cast your idols “to the moles and bats” – the things you once loved, you sought, you highly esteemed.

Now that is not emotion; it is not sentimentality. It affects your life. It will bring you to die to sin and to live to God. It will bring you to live that crucified life by the faith of the Son of God. It will cause your affections to flow heavenwards, to be set on things above. It has a gracious effect. "The Lily of the valleys."

Now perhaps some of you see this from afar off and you long for the Lord to manifest Himself. Well, that is a beautiful prayer: "Draw me, we will run after Thee." O you will want to feel this attraction, the sweet drawing of Christ Himself. "Draw me." The Lord Jesus, not long before He suffered, said this: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." There is a sweet attraction, a drawing power, a constraining power in the love of Christ as crucified for sinners. Now Jesus draws His people to Himself. The law drives, Satan drives, the world drives. Jesus draws.

But how little we know of this by vital experience! You know, Israel possessed Canaan by promise, but step by step they had to go in and possess the land. They had to tread it out, and it seems to me that rather sadly Joshua had to say: "There is still very much land to be possessed," and this is the complaint of a living soul. Come to points, child of God, the whole of the Song of Solomon is yours by promise. How much of it is yours by possession? It is a wonderful thing when the house of Jacob "possess their possessions" (Obad. 17). But sadly we have to say, "There is very much land still to be possessed." But O to go in as led by the heavenly Joshua to possess it!

"Larger communion let me prove,
With Thee, blest Object of my love."

This is real religion, vital godliness.

"The Lily of the valleys," Christ in His sweet attractions. The great point in real religion is attraction to Christ. Hold it fast: those times, those seasons in secret, in prayer, reading the Word of God, in the sanctuary when you find your soul drawn heavenwards, drawn Christwards; when you feel a compulsion, when you feel you cannot do without Him; when you feel you must have Him; when your affections flow towards Him. Attraction to Christ is the great point. You may have imaginary experiences, visionary things, imaginary words, a religion that

came from your own heart. You may walk in the sparks of your own kindling. You may have a faith that only emanates from Satan, have all these things and at last be weighed in the balances and found wanting. O but a sinner whose very religion is attraction to Christ was never deceived! That sinner who says,

“Jesus is the One thing needful,
I without Him perish must,”

that sinner will be on the right hand at last. Satan never attracted a sinner to Christ, neither did his own heart draw him to Christ, but it is the blessed office of the Holy Ghost to make Christ attractive and to draw your soul and your desires and your affections towards Him. “The Lily of the valleys.” Do you know what it is to be drawn to Christ, to be attracted to Christ, attracted to Him as the Lily of the valleys?

There are two things I want to say concerning “the Lily of the valleys.” First of all, it speaks of Christ’s matchless condescension. He is the Lily of the valley, and by faith you see Him descend into the valley, even into the valley of the shadow of death. If you want the sweetest commentary on this, you will find it in Philippians 2: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” That is the dear Lily of the valley in His matchless condescension, in His humility. How low He stooped and how low He sank! “The Lily of the valleys.” “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” Now that is where He is attractive, as the Lily of the valleys, as you see Him in His matchless condescension, as He stoops so low, to death, even the death of the cross. O friends, do you view a sweet attraction in Christ as you see Him as the Lily of the valleys, stooping so low, that you might be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, that a way to heaven might be opened, that we might be blessed with true repentance and faith in Jesus and found in glory at last?

“The Lily of the valleys.” The other thing is this. As an heir of bliss you too will have to descend into the valleys. There are many valleys in the way to heaven, and you will have to come down into these valleys,

and there you will find Christ, the Lily of the valleys. That is where you will find Christ attractive. When the Holy Ghost begins a work of grace He brings you down into the valleys: the valley of felt need, conviction of sin, concern about eternity. You will not seek the Lily or find the Lily when you are on the mount of your own self-righteousness and unconcern. O but to be brought down! Solemn convictions, feeling your need, and there as the Holy Spirit brings you low and teaches you your helplessness, there you find this precious Lily of the valley, Christ, able and willing to save you eternally. Christ in His promises: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Christ in His sweet invitations: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

"The Lily of the valleys." There is the valley of trouble. The Lord brings you there. Some of you are found there tonight; perhaps many, perhaps most of you are found there tonight. May you find the Lily in the valley; then you will feel it is worthwhile. But I believe this, those of you who fear God, if you look back over your life to the times when you were most blessed, when Christ was made most precious, was it not in times of real need and times of real trouble? How often the Lord brings one of His dear children right down into the valley, and the valley is so dark and so frightening, there is so much trouble, so much sorrow; but you find Christ there and finding Christ there you have Him eternally. You are brought into union with Him as a broken-hearted sinner finds a broken-hearted Saviour; and you consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.

"The Lily of the valleys." There are many valleys. There is the valley of humility. There is the valley of disappointment. There is the valley of bitterness of soul. But one valley we must all walk through is the valley of the shadow of death, and the child of God finds Christ there, that He has gone before, and in the valley finds this precious Lily blooming, .and that precious fragrance refreshes his soul in death.

"The Lily of the valley." Another point: this is *a figure of beauty*, the beauty of Christ. His preciousness, and His sweet fragrance, and the blessed attraction of Him, and His beauty. Tell me, have you at times had a glimpse of this beauty, and did you sing,

"O why did Jesus show to me
The beauties of His face?"

O the beauty of Christ to a believer! I have long admired what godly Sibbes says: that Christ is never more beautiful *to* His church than when He was most deformed *for* His church, for “His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form than the sons of men.” It is at Calvary where you see His beauty, and in Gethsemane – His love, His sufferings.

“So fair a face bedewed with tears;
What beauty e’en in grief appears!”

This is the “Lily of the valley,” and there is a precious promise: “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.” There is a beauty in Christ that you should desire Him, and what will make you long to see this beauty in Christ, this beauty in the dear Lily of the valleys? I will tell you: when you see ugliness in yourself. It is a great mercy to have seeing eyes. It is a clear mark of the new birth. Born again of the Spirit, you will have seeing eyes, and you will see things in your heart which dismay you: your vileness, your guilt, your unworthiness, your unbelief, your hardness of heart, your unfitness for heaven. You will not see any beauty in yourself, and you will not see any beauty in the world or the creature, but you will look for it in “the Lily of the valleys,” you will be seeking for that beauty which is in Christ. You will have David’s religion: “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord.” That was David’s religion. He wanted the Lily of the valleys. He wanted to see the King in His beauty.

It has for a long time struck me as a remarkable word. David, a man eminent in the earth, and eminent in godliness, and he says, There is one thing I desire, *one thing*. What is it? “That I may dwell in the house of the Lord ... to behold the beauty of the Lord.” Dare you say it, can you say it? This is the one thing with you, the one thing in your life; other things do not matter? “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord.” Tell me, friends, how do you come to the house of the Lord? Out of custom? Because it is your habit? To meet your friends? Or do you ever come that you might behold the beauty of the Lord, the beauty of Jesus as “the Lily of the valleys”? You want to see Him, to catch a glimpse of Him in His beauty. It is a solemn thing to dwell

in the house of the Lord all the days of your life and never to see the beauty of the Lord. Some of you have been coming to the house of God Sabbath by Sabbath fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty years and have you ever in all those many years beheld the beauty of the Lord as the Lily of the valleys? “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.”

But you know, by nature, Christ is not the Lily of the valleys to us. He is as a root out of a dry ground; there is no form nor comeliness, and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. Now that is every sinner in his unregeneracy. There may be a natural admiration for Christ but there is no beauty that we should desire Him. We do not want to give up our sins, our idols, our pleasures. We do not want to give up ourselves. We do not want this Man to reign over us. No beauty! One of the most solemn words in Scripture: “No beauty that we should desire Him”! But wherever there is a change wrought by grace, there is always this: a desire to see Christ in His beauty. He will be made the Lily of the valley; He is no longer a root out of a dry ground. Count it a mercy if you can trace this transformation in your soul, that Christ is made the Lily of the valleys in His beauty to you.

There is one special emphasis concerning the Lily and that is *its spotless purity*. A lily has ever been an emblem of purity, and so in the dear Lily of the valleys, as you see Christ in all His beauty, you view the beauty of spotless innocence, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heavens.” O the beauty that you see in the spotless perfections of Christ, as He is fair as the lily, no stain, no taint of sin, original or actual – the Lily of the valleys in all His glorious perfection! Now do you ever see it, and do you ever admire it? You see, there is something comes with it, and that is this. You see all these blessed things in Jesus and you look in your own heart and you see the very reverse. In my early days spiritually it seemed as if I saw my guilt and sin as silhouetted against the spotless perfections of the dear Lamb of God. You know what I mean. Sometimes you have something which is very dark and if you hold it up against a background that is spotlessly white, then how the darkness stands out, how clearly you see its darkness. Now have you ever seen your sin as contrasted with the spotless perfections of Jesus? Then where is your hope? You see Christ in all His spotless perfection, His sacred humanity, and yourself defiled by sin. Then it will bring you to seek after Jesus.

There are two things will make *you* fair as the Lily: His precious blood to blot out all your sin, and His glorious righteousness to cover you. So you will have to pray, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” You know, there is an answer to that prayer if you have to pray it under a sense of your guilt; the answer is this, and it comes from the Lord Himself: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” O to be washed in the Redeemer’s blood and to be clothed in His righteousness! Blessed covering for a naked soul, the spotless purity and righteousness of Jesus!

“This sacred robe the same appears,
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.”

“The Lily of the valleys.”

Now, friends, we approach a great mystery and see the key to it. Not only does the Lord Jesus say, “I am the Lily of the valleys,” but He calls His poor, guilty, ruined people a lily. “I am the Lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters.” Amazing words these! Can you believe it, child of God, that a precious Jesus looks upon you and views you as a lily? You look into your own heart and “had you not His blood to plead, each sight would sink you to despair,” yet a precious Jesus looks upon you and sees you as a lily. If Christ is precious to His people, His people are precious to Him. Can you receive it? “I am the Lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters.” Christ and His church here bear an identical name. Christ says, “I am the Lily”; Christ says, “She is the lily.” As Gadsby quaintly used to say, “Christ and His church were never two!” There is a oneness here, there is an identity. Christ is the Lily; He sees His church as the lily. They are one. There is a blessed identity. The Father looks on the sinner but He does not see the sinner; He sees His own beloved Son. “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” “I am the Lily of the valleys.” Well, friends, what think ye of Christ? This precious Jesus, the dear Lily of the valley, in His preciousness, in the sweet fragrance that dwells in

Him, in all His attractions, in His beauty, and in the wonder of wonders that He puts His beauty upon a poor, guilty sinner and makes that sinner perfect through His comeliness which is upon him. “What think ye of Christ?” “I am the Lily of the valleys.”