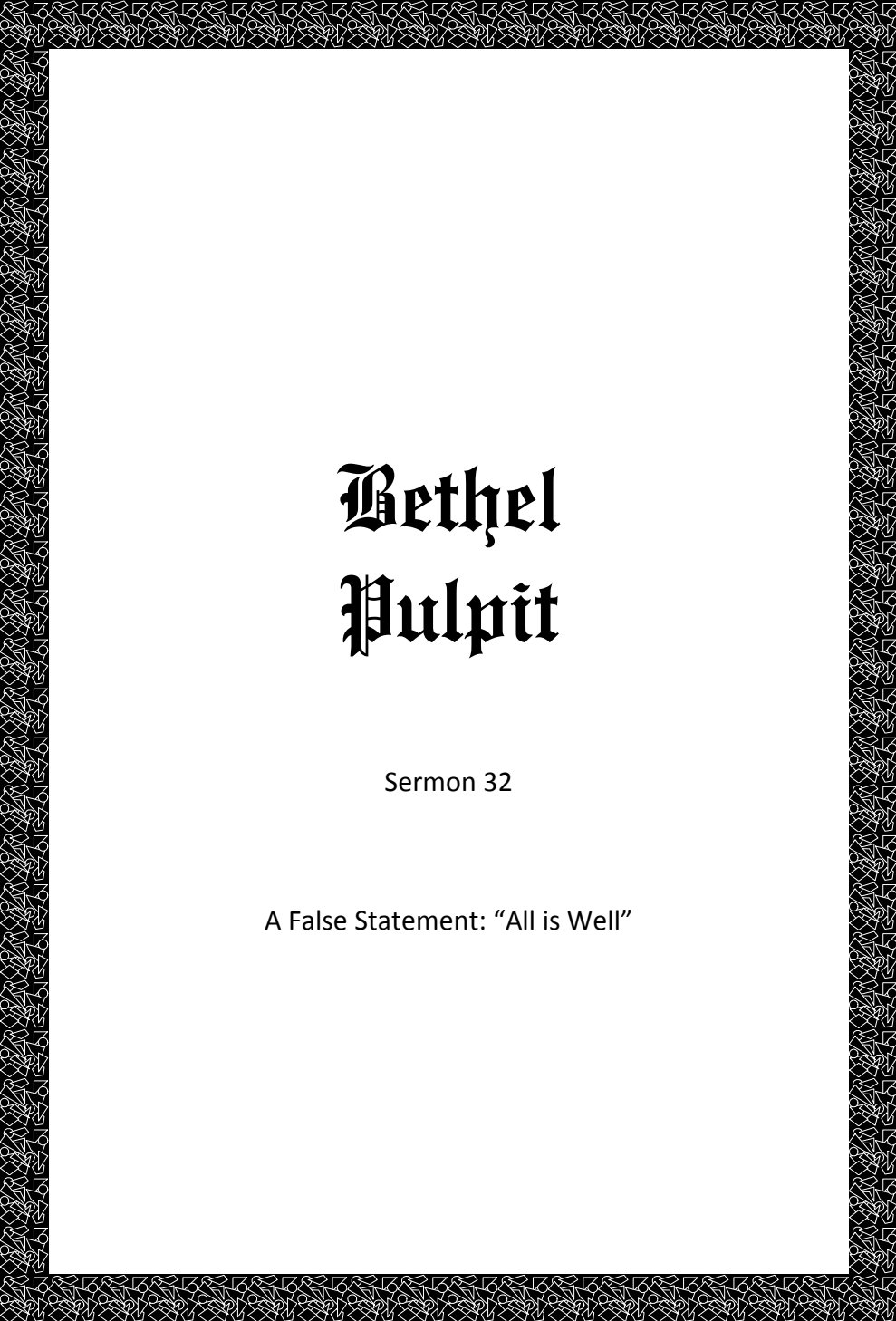




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 32

A False Statement: “All is Well”

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 11th June, 1987**

Text: “*All is well*” (2 Samuel 18. 28).

There never was a sadder day in David’s life than this. Beloved friends, the saints of God will never be allowed to sin lightly. David sinned greatly, but O how David had to suffer! And as these events of this chapter took place, David in his innermost heart knew that it was the result of his sin. Trouble is not always a punishment, not always a chastening, but we do well when we come into trouble to enquire of the Lord, is there any cause? Is there any sin to be reproved? Have I done anything to cause Thee to bring this upon me? What lessons am I to learn by this affliction?

David greatly sinned in the matter of Uriah the Hittite and Bathsheba. It seemed that also he sinned in the matter of Absalom. Absalom’s mother was not a godly woman. She was a heathen and there were those times in Absalom’s life when his father should have reproved him and dealt severely with him, but he did not. So he had this bitter trouble of Absalom rising up against him in rebellion, seeking to steal the kingdom from him. And yet the love he had for Absalom, and that command that when the battle took place between the king’s side and Absalom’s side, that they would deal gently with Absalom for David’s sake! Again, David had to feel, “These men the sons of Zeruiah (Joab and his brothers) be too hard for me.”

Perhaps you were struck by this when the chapter was being read. There was a certain man who said, “Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak. And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground?” (2 Sam. 18. 10, 11). I thought in reading this chapter there was something very gracious about this man’s spirit, and how much more so in a higher sense when a child of God speaks it about the Lord Jesus: “Though I should receive a thousands shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king’s son” (verse 12). If this young man felt that concerning David, concerning David’s commandment and concerning the king’s son Absalom, how much more so should there be that holy longing and desire in your heart and mine to do nothing that would grieve

God's dear, eternal Son, whatever gain there might be! "Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver." There are so many people who will sacrifice conscience for the shekels of silver, so many people who will forget their religion for the shekels of silver. There was an old saying that gold will buy anything, and how many a person has sold his conscience!

Then, of course, Joab himself threw those three darts into Absalom's heart. Have you ever noticed that though Joab was captain of David's army, that though Joab had a burning love for David (who appears to have been his cousin as well as king), though Joab would do anything for David, yet he was never numbered amongst David's mighty men? He was a wicked old man really, and you remember that David's dying command to Solomon was, "Let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace." If ever a king had a loyal, faithful subject, David did in Joab, but his commandment to Solomon was that Joab should be put to death. "Let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace."

But this was a solemn, sorrowful, awful day in David's life, and really it followed him right down to the grave, and in his last days when David thought about his own son and the awful end of Absalom and all the sorrow, suffering and turmoil in the kingdom, there was only one place he could rest, and it was a good resting place. It was this: "Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure" (2 Samuel 23. 5). That is where David could die in peace. We sometimes sing of faith,

"She views the covenant sure;
Her hopes all centre there;
And on His bosom leans secure,
Whose temples bled for her."

That was David's only resting place. There have been times in our lives when everything around and within seems to be wrong and we have been shut up to that only resting place. "Although my house be not so with God" - sin, turmoil, the death of Absalom. "Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me" - even such a sinner as me - "an everlasting covenant."

"On my unworthy, favoured head,
Its blessings all unite."

“Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.” This was the only place where David could rest, and this was the only place where David could die in peace.

There was that question that David asked, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” (verse 29). Surely this should be our great, chief concern, concerning our children, concerning our young people here in the house of God and in the Sabbath school and in our homes and families, “Is the young man safe?” There is only one place of safety and that is to be found standing complete in Christ, only one place of safety as sinners, to be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. Now is the young man, is the young woman safe? Are they? And perhaps we have to ask it concerning ourselves, Are you, am I, safe?

Well, I just say these few things by way of introduction. Now let us try to come to this word I have read to you. It is a beautiful word, “All is well.” But the solemn point is that it was not true. *All was not well*. Let us just consider this for a moment. Absalom was dead, and the news of this, the tidings had to be taken to the king, and the method in those days was that a man should run, usually a man chosen out because of his fleetness of foot. Now there was this man Ahimaaz and he pleaded that he might be the one who should be allowed to run with the tidings (verse 19), and Joab forbid him. He said, “Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king’s son is dead” (verse 20). And then Joab sent another man to bear the tidings, Cushie, a black man. “Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cushie bowed himself unto Joab, and ran” (verse 21). Ahimaaz was persistent. “Let me, I pray thee, also run after Cushie. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? But howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run” (verses 22, 23).

There were two men here. They both brought tidings. With one the tidings were so clear. With the other the tidings were all confusion. With the one, the tidings were nothing but truth. With the other, the tidings were only partly the truth. With the one, he was willing to speak hard things. With the other, he left the hard things out. Now the people of God down the ages have ever viewed these two men as representative of a

minister that God has sent and a minister who has only sent himself. You older ones remember years ago in our churches how often reference was made to Ahimaaz and Cushi, and how there was earnest prayer that our churches might be delivered from these Ahimaazes. Now you know the church of God has ever been plagued with them. It is so today and it ever has been so. But these are the ones that people like, not the Cushis. And we have these Ahimaazes today and they are never any good, and they are never any profit, never any benefit, to the people of God. Ahimaaz was a good man. There is not any question concerning that. He was a priest, one of the sons of Zadok. In the chapters just before this, we find what a useful man he was and what a wonderful help to the cause of David. But he would run unsent with these tidings. It all ended in confusion and dismay, and how many a good man there has been, such a blessing to the church and so profitable in the station in which God has appointed him, but when he sought great things for himself, all ended in confusion! How many a good Sabbath school teacher has made a poor deacon, and how many a godly deacon has proved not to be a good minister.

Cushi was sent. He had a commission. He did not suggest it himself. It was not his own idea. He did not begin with the matter. He had a commission to go and bear tidings, and he bowed himself and went. But Ahimaaz was never told to go. It was his own desire. It was something he wanted, he looked for. Why, we are not told, whether he wanted to make a name for himself or whether it was popularity or whether he wanted to be honoured and rewarded by the king. But he was so insistent. Joab was a wicked old man and a cruel old man, but so often his judgment was good and he well knew that this man Ahimaaz was not the man to bear tidings on such an occasion as this. "Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready?" But he would not fall even before that rebuke of Joab, that refusal of Joab. He said, "Let me run," and he was no good, either to David or to himself. He prophesied smooth things. We read in the prophets of those who said, "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things." He prophesied smooth things and there was no clarity in the message that he brought. He cried, "Peace, peace; where there is no peace." It was a solemn message that had to be carried. It was a message of death. Of course, there were two sides to it. There was the victory, the wonderful victory that David had won, but also the dreadful tidings of the death of his son Absalom, and he only told

half the story. O how we need to be concerned that we declare the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear!

And of course there is an aspect of it that not only belongs to the preaching of the gospel; it belongs to church members in their dealings with church affairs, in their dealings with fellow members, in their dealings with the congregation. It concerns parents in their dealings with their children. It concerns each of us in our dealings one with another. Now away with this diplomacy that would conceal part of the truth! There are two sides to real religion. It is a solemn thing if we only preach one side of the truth and if we conceal the other side of the truth. How clearly does the Word of God set forth salvation entirely of free and sovereign grace! But how clearly does the Word of God set forth the requirements of that grace which sets free!

I have often told you of when Romaine in the hey-day of his ministry preached through the epistle to the Romans. His congregation was numbered in thousands on the first five chapters, and when he got to election and predestination in chapters eight and nine, his congregation fell to hundreds, and then when he got to the latter chapters on practical godliness, separation from the world, the crucifying of the flesh, the taking up of the cross, then his congregation could be numbered in tens. There are two sides. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord."

You remember how in days past it used to be commented that Ahimaaz "ran by the way of the plain." That is why he ran so quickly and that is why he got there first. He ran by the way of the plain. Now it seems that Cushie came by a more rugged, more mountainous way and it took him a lot longer to get there. But he was the one who had the tidings. There *are* tidings to declare. We sometimes sing,

"'Tis the gospel's joyful tidings,
Full salvation sweetly sounds."

There are tidings. But it was a message of death. It was a solemn message. It was a message which would wound, which would grieve the hearer, that these two men had to carry. And the one, he told it faithfully, and the other did not.

You remember how we read of that deliverer of Israel, Ehud, in the book of Judges. “I have a message from God unto thee.” It was a message of death. And the message we have to deliver is a message of death. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” “We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person.” The fact of death, the certainty of death, the inevitability of death, that death cannot be avoided, the equality of all in death. And the vital point is to be made ready, to be prepared. O that is the preaching where sinners tremble concerning the day of their death, as the word is applied by the Holy Ghost.

“What shall I do, or whither flee,
To escape the vengeance due to me?”

But Ahimaaz was unwilling to deliver that message of death. He cried, “Peace, peace,” when there was no peace. There was no peace for David when his son Absalom was dead. Now that was left out of the picture. And there is no peace for the wicked, no peace for those who are strangers to the new birth, to those who live and die without repentance, to those who love the world, to those who want to have Christ in one hand and the things of this world in the other. Now there is a peace, a peace made by the blood of the cross, but true preaching will stir up and disturb that false peace, that vain confidence. It will be a message of death, death also to all your vain hopes, death to your false foundations and eternal death to those who live and die out of Christ. There is the wrath to come.

But you see, there was no clarity in the message that Ahimaaz brought. He was clear enough on the one side. He said, “Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord” (verse 28). But concerning this point, “Is the young man safe?” have you ever heard such confusion as this? Have you ever heard anything as indistinct as this? “And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king’s servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was” (verse 29). Now that is not being faithful, is it? May we be kept from it in our preaching and may we be kept from it in the church of God and may we be kept from it in all our dealings one with another. Now away with these words which can mean either truth or error, light or darkness, which can mean either yes or no. Now may we be clear in our testimony and clear in our witness and may we be kept from such language

as this: "I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was." He did not really tell a lie. It was a half-truth, and let us be clear, he was a good man. We have it in the preceding chapters, and even king David himself said, "He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings" (verse 27) when he knew it was Ahimaaz. On the one side he spoke very graciously. He did not just speak of victory and deliverance. He ascribed it all to God. "Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king." He put the crown on the Lord's head. Now he was a good man, but he was never sent with the tidings and his message was not clear. It was all confusion. It would not satisfy David. There was one point that David had, that worm which was gnawing in his heart, that aching in his conscience, that inward burden that was weighing him down. And when Ahimaaz had spoken all his kind, loving language - "Is the young man safe?" He could not satisfy David. The king said, "Turn aside, and stand here." Living souls want faithful dealings.

Martin Luther said that what the church of God needs is Amen men. He meant those who would be firm, and those who would be definite. We do not want to be left to this, to be like some ministers who will be like a lion in the pulpit, denouncing every error except the one that is plaguing the congregation. It is very easy to act as a faithful man and stand before a congregation and denounce popery and Sabbath breaking and everything with which the congregation will agree. But what about those secret sins? Years ago in Scotland there was a most solemn, separating minister. He cut people off, he denounced popery with great swelling words, and the people loved him. Why? He never probed and touched their conscience and they all took it for granted that they were on the right side. He was followed by a quiet, timid preacher who spoke very quietly about indwelling sin and idolatry and the things that were in the hearts and lives of that congregation, and the people hated him as much as they loved the other. It is not these great swelling words and contending against the pope. What about the popes in our congregation and the popes in our own hearts?

Also, we do not want to be left to this, to be like a lion in preaching and then out of the pulpit to turn a blind eye. There are some people who love it if things are spoken generally from the pulpit and say it is faithful preaching. But if the minister quietly taps them on the shoulder

and says, “What about this in your own life,” they are offended. May we be kept from these Ahimaazes and may we be blessed with these Cushis. A living soul like David will never be satisfied with Ahimaaz. When Ahimaaz had told all his wonderful tale, still, “Is the young man safe?” This vital point of life and death, this thing that weighs heavily on me, this thing that concerns me so intimately. Give me a yea or a nay concerning this. And this confusion and gabbled answer, that will not satisfy. “Turn aside, and stand here.”

And then you see Cushi. He tells his tale. But still there is this anxious enquiry: “Is the young man safe?” There are two things I have admired in Cushi. One is his complete faithfulness. He dealt with this point so clearly, and yet he did it graciously. There are some people who in the pulpit and out of the pulpit call themselves faithful men, and they do not do what the preacher is commanded to do - speak “acceptable words.” Some people have a habit of being rude to other people and they pride themselves that they are faithful. There were so many things that Cushi could have said, so many ways he could have put it. He did not go into the awful, gruesome details of Absalom hanging in the tree, the darts being thrust in his heart, of his body being cast under a heap of stones. He was faithful and yet he spoke graciously and lovingly and he spoke with compassion. “The preacher sought to find out acceptable words.” “Is the young man safe? And Cushi answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is” (verse 32).

Well then, what about this word, the word that Ahimaaz brought? The king said, “He is a good man.” Well, he was. “And cometh with good tidings. And Ahimaaz called.” He did not even wait until he got there. He did not ever wait to be asked. He called and said to the king, “All is well.” Now all was not well. There was much that was wrong. On the great point, Absalom was dead, and he perished in his sin. In the prophets there is a solemn warning against those who sew pillows under armholes. You know what that means. If you had a pillow sewn under your armpit, you could lean on something and it would be comfortable. If you had a pillow sewn under your armpit, you could lean on things you should not lean on, things that otherwise would hurt you and pierce you. A living minister will never allow you to build on anything short of Christ and Him crucified. Away with these pillows sewn under armholes!

“And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well.” Now may we be kept faithful. May our last thought this evening be this. There is a sense in which a gospel minister *can* announce this word, “All is well,” but not in the way that Ahimaaz did. I suppose that in a sense even Cushie could have used this language. But he would have used it in a different sense.

“We cannot, Lord, Thy purpose see,
But all is well that’s done by Thee.”

In that sense, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

There is this sense in which we can declare, “All is well.” We have preached the Lord’s solemn demands of His law, the condemnation of the wicked, a lost eternity. But then we show the standing of the people of God in Christ, as sinners seeking His mercy, as guilty, hoping in His precious blood, clinging, cleaving only to His righteousness, building only on this foundation. Then we can in a right sense declare that all is well, come life, come death.

“In every state secure” - now this is it -
“Kept as Jehovah’s eye,
’Tis well with them while life endure,
And well when called to die.”

But not with Absalom, who died out of Christ. It is this:

“Now I see, whate’er betide,
All is well” - now this is it - “*if Christ be mine.*”

And only if Christ be mine, and not if Christ be not mine.

Now there are some vital, eternal questions here. May they be cleared up in our hearts and consciences so that in a right sense, a gracious sense, you and I might be able to say, “All is well.” Like the dear woman: “Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?” A beloved mother, a young child lying dead, a sorrowing husband. “Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.” Now may the Holy Ghost teach us to speak this language in a right way, in a gracious way. “All is well.”

Well, I have said some strange things tonight, and what the purpose of all this is, I do not know. May it be for the warning, the profit, the edification, the comfort of some of you.