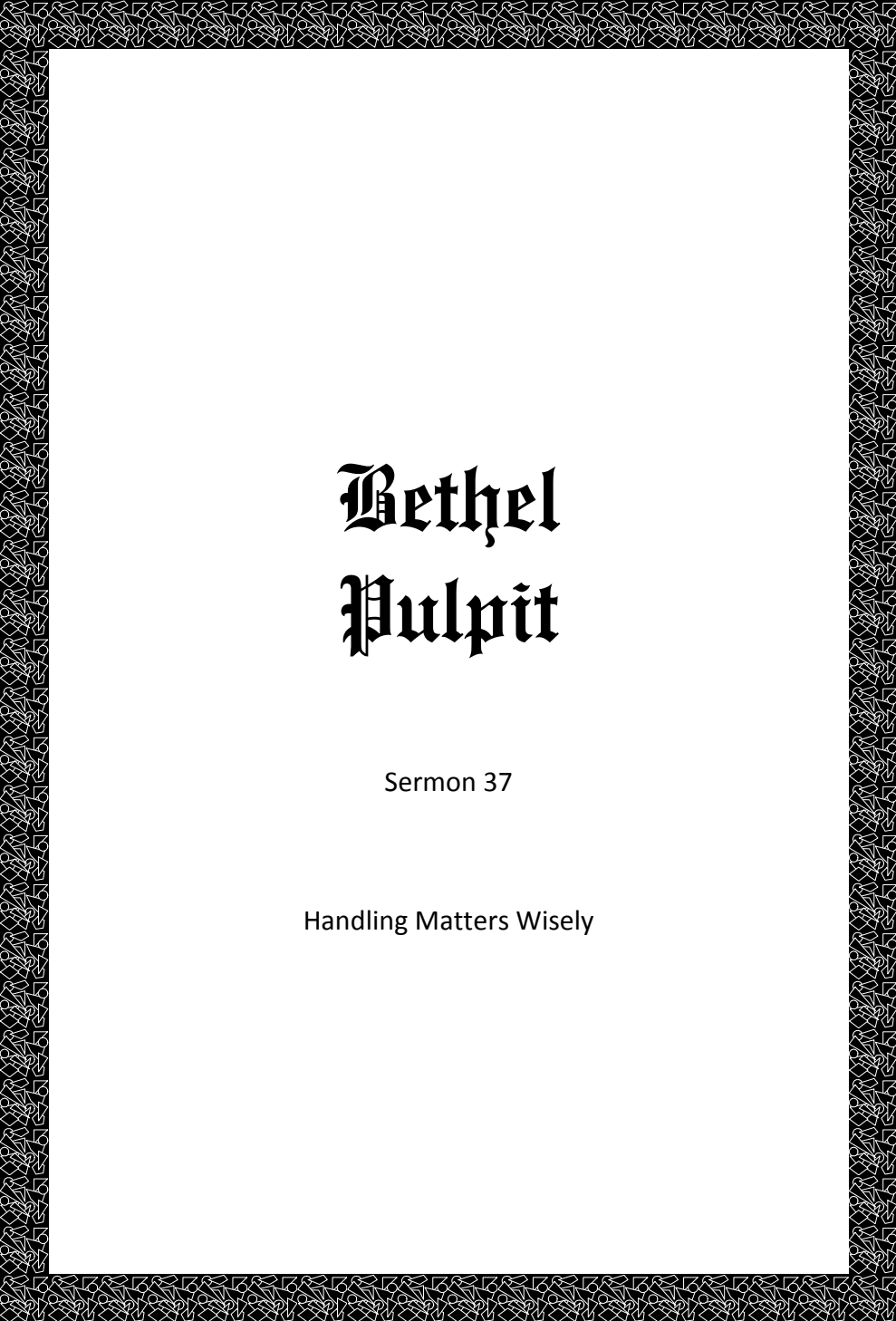




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 37

Handling Matters Wisely

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 4th September, 1988**

Text: *“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he” (Proverbs 16. 20).*

We all have one great matter to handle: the matter of our sins and our souls and the judgment day and a never-ending eternity. And beloved friends, by nature we do not handle that matter wisely. The foolish virgins did not handle that matter wisely, did they? They made a profession of religion. They carried their lamps. Their lamps were identical with those of the wise. But they did not handle the matter wisely. They took no oil with them for their lamps. And when the solemn cry was heard, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him,” they were found wanting. “They that were ready” – who had handled their matter wisely – “went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.” Five eternally shut in and five eternally shut out! O for grace to handle that matter wisely, to be made ready, to be washed in the blood of Christ, to be clothed in His spotless obedience, to be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light!

The foolish builder did not handle his matter wisely, did he? He built his house on the sand, and it had all the same appearance as the other house, until the testing time came, the trying time came, when the rain fell and the storm and the flood, and the Lord Jesus said this. He said, “It beat vehemently upon that house.” And when our last day comes, the day of death, the flood and the storm will beat vehemently upon your house and mine, and unless it is built on the Rock of Ages, it will fall and great will be the fall of it. Now may the Lord bless us with much grace to handle this matter wisely, the matter of our everlasting concerns. O may we be well taught that one thing, and only one thing, is needful, a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. May we seek first the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness. May we strive to enter in at the strait gate. May our daily prayer be to be made ready, to be made right. O may we of necessity have to flee for refuge to the Lord Jesus. Whatever other matter we handle wrongly, may we ever be given grace to handle this vital, this important matter, rightly.

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” Now all through our lives there will be ten thousand matters, great and small, providence and grace, which we have to handle. Some of them we do not want to handle. Some of them we wish we had not to handle. But in the unfolding of providence, they come our way, and we have to handle them. O we do need that grace to handle our matters wisely! There is so much havoc both in the nation and in the church of God today because of this very thing, that matters are not handled wisely. Take it at the highest level in national affairs. It seems so often that our leaders’ wisdom is taken from them and so often they handle the important matters foolishly, and not only foolishly, but at times wrongly and at times wickedly.

And so much havoc has been worked in the church of God by matters not being handled wisely. Many of God’s people are gracious but they are not always wise. They do not always act wisely. They do not always behave wisely. They do not always speak wisely. In thinking about this word this morning, I notice that several times in the books of Samuel it is recorded, “and David behaved himself wisely.” He did, (didn’t he?) especially in those days when Saul hunted him like a partridge upon the mountain. One wrong step, and his reputation was ruined, the kingdom was snatched from him – that is of course speaking humanly. We know that in the mystery of God’s eternal decrees it was appointed. But we read much on several occasions how David behaved himself wisely. What a wonderful blessing these men are to the church of God, and not only men, but godly women, who behave themselves wisely, behave themselves graciously. When they have a matter to handle, they handle it so wisely, so graciously.

There are a few reasons why so often we do not handle our matters wisely. Perhaps the chief is that we trust in ourselves, trust in our own wisdom. Never forget the Lord has said that: “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.” Beware of trusting your own wisdom, your own opinion, especially in the things of God. O but you see, many do not handle their matters wisely, especially with other people, because they do not handle them graciously. We do need the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to be with us in all the difficult matters that we have to handle. We need to cease from our own wisdom. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own

understanding.” And so often we do not handle our matters wisely because we talk too much to people and not enough to the Lord. I wonder how many of you were affected by that word we read later in the chapter (verse 28): “A whisperer separateth chief friends.” That whisperer in the church of God never yet handled a matter wisely. May we be saved from whisperers. May we be saved from being whisperers ourselves. May we be saved from the great whisperer, Satan. What does he whisper in your ear? What does he whisper in my ear? If we are a whisperer, if we give heed to a whisperer, then we shall not handle our matters wisely.

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” The Lord bids us, with all these various things that are coming to us, day by day, great and small, to handle them wisely, not to handle them carelessly. Many of God’s people at times do not handle their matters wisely because they handle them carnally. They do not deal with them according to the Spirit, but according to the flesh. Now may we be saved from our carnal minds, because they are always enmity against God.

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” There is a very wonderful promise: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” It is such a beautiful word, and it is so simple. The only qualification for you is this: if you lack wisdom. “If any of you lack wisdom” – whether old or young, whether it is a spiritual matter or a providential matter. That is the only qualification the Lord makes. Sadly, most of us fulfil that qualification. We do lack wisdom. “If any of you lack wisdom.” The wisest of men at times come to some matter that is too hard for them. They may be so wise. Solomon was wise. At times he came to matters that he had not the wisdom to handle wisely. It is then that the Lord kindly says, “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.”

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.” There is never any lack of wisdom with God. There is never a time when He does not know how to handle a matter. That has been a wonderful word to some of us over the years in John 6, the feeding of the five thousand: “He Himself knew what He would do.” Philip did not know what to do. Andrew did not know what to do. They started counting, reckoning the people,

counting up how much money they had. None of the disciples knew what to do. “He Himself knew what He would do,” and He did it.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally.” He does not give it in a grudging way. He “giveth to all men liberally.” Now this is the part I like: “and upbraideth not.” Sometimes you may go to friends to help you and they may very kindly help you, but they may just upbraid you. They may say, “You should have been able to do it yourself,” or, “You should have known what to do; you should not need me to do it for you.” They help you, but they upbraid you. The Lord Jesus will never upbraid you. He will never say, “You should have understood this; you have done it before.” He never says, “You should not have got into this state.”

“Though He thy transgressions hate,
Jesus feels for thy distress.”

“Let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” And then the promise: “And it shall be given him.”

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” In the Word of God we have so many godly, gracious examples of people handling matters wisely, and they did find good. That is, they prospered in the way that they went and they were blessed with God’s approbation. Let me limit myself to two instances. In the Old Testament, Abraham’s servant. He was given a most difficult matter to handle. He was told to go to a far country and bring back a wife for his master’s son, Isaac. It was a hard matter and a matter of such extreme importance. But he handled it wisely. He prayed his way along. He did not take anything for granted. He prayed his way step by step. He committed every step to the Lord. He sought the Lord’s help and direction in every word that he spoke, in every action he took. And the Lord blessed him. “I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master’s brethren.” O for more like Abraham’s servant!

In the New Testament I do not limit myself just to one person, but the apostles throughout the whole book of the Acts. They had so many difficult matters to handle. It was the early days of the church. There was matter after matter so difficult, so impossible. O but they handled those matters so wisely. I think of that time when they heard that Antioch

had a revival. They were a little bit suspicious. What did they do? They sent Barnabas to investigate. “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” There was that difficult matter of circumcision which was continually coming up. Didn’t they handle that graciously and wisely? They were blessed with such a measure of the Spirit. And then that matter of the first election of deacons in Scripture. You see the peace of the church of God was threatened. It was the first trouble that there had ever been in the infant church. There were so many people. The apostles could not manage things themselves. Some felt they were being neglected. Some felt there was partiality. Some felt something should be done, and there was the murmuring, the complaining. The apostles dealt with that most graciously. They handled the matter most wisely. They were holy apostles, appointed directly by Christ, but they laid it before the Lord, and they did not think they possessed grace themselves. They directed the church to seek out godly men, honourable men, men of an honest reputation who would be a help to them in the matter. They said, “You choose them and we will appoint them for this thing.” The apostles handled the matter wisely and the infant church handled the matter wisely. They chose seven godly men, and you read in the next verse or two that the breach was completely healed, the trouble ended, the murmuring stopped. But not only so: there was such a sense of the Lord’s approbation that the church increased and the Lord’s blessing was bestowed.

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” As long as we live, we shall have matters to handle. When tomorrow comes, you will have your matters to handle. Day by day you will have your matters to handle, and to your dying day you will have your matters to handle. The emphasis is this one word: *wisely*. O may we be delivered from handling our matters foolishly. We may not always act wrongly and it may not be sinful. But often it certainly is not wisely. Now the Lord bless us with much grace to handle our matters wisely.

Let me just speak of a few things. That matter will come up at various times in your life when you have a decision to take; it must be taken; when you have a choice to make; it must be made. Now seek grace to handle that matter wisely. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” O seek much grace to be much in

prayer, to be much in dependence on the Lord that you might handle that matter, all your choices, your decisions, wisely. The Lord always knows best. He sees the end from the beginning.

“Leave God to order all thy ways,
And trust in Him whate’er betide.”

“He that handleth a matter wisely.” You young people, girls and boys, you will have so many matters in your life that need handling wisely. Some of the most important choices, some of the most important decisions in all your life, are those that have to be taken when you are young, and a life of sadness, a life of misery, can result from wrong decisions, wrong choices, when you are young. I mean, as you seek what you are going to do in your life, what your work is going to be, what your occupation is going to be, be much in prayer that you might handle that matter wisely, that the Lord will order your ways, that He will open right doors, that He will close wrong doors. “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” Often so much hangs on so little. Some here no doubt look back on your early days, what the world would call a chance meeting, or chance comment, an observation someone made to you, or a letter that came through the post, and you see as you look back how it altered the very course of your life. What a mercy you were enabled to handle that matter in the way you did. You said, “Yes,” instead of, “No,” or you said, “No,” instead of, “Yes.” The Lord gave you grace not to say, “Yes,” when it should be, “No,” and not to say, “No,” when it should be, “Yes.”

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” You young people, you girls and boys, in the choice of your friends and those of you who are hoping to find a friend for life, one to whom you can be married, seek grace to handle that matter wisely. They used to say years ago that God always gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him. Well, we have tried it and we have proved it. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.”

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” Then there are three pairs of you here this morning who are very soon to be married. I remember one wedding I took a few years ago and the Lord laid this upon my spirit to speak to the two who were being married: “He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.” Now all of you will find quite early in your married life that you

have matters to handle. There are sure to be hard things and difficulties; it must be so. There will be days of difficulty and days of darkness. Then the Lord bless you with grace to handle your matters wisely, to handle them wisely together, to be as one; one mind, one heart in handling those matters wisely; to “be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” There is nothing too great to pray about. There is nothing too small to pray about.

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” Then with our families, there are so many matters that need handling. There in a special way, seek grace to handle matters wisely, in the holy fear of God. Parents, in your attitude to children, and children in your attitude to parents, and brothers and sisters towards one another, now handle your matters wisely. It is a sad thing, (isn’t it?) when family matters are not handled in the fear of God, when even gracious people handle matters carnally. Now if you handle matters carnally, it will bring the frown of God upon you instead of His smile. The Lord has promised to bless the habitation of the just. It was God Himself who said of Abraham, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.” God Himself bore that witness of a poor, sinful man who called himself dust and ashes.

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” There are quite a lot of you who have got your business concerns and I know that some of you in a special way try to handle them wisely. But is it carnal wisdom, or is it the wisdom that cometh from above, which is pure, then peaceable? How are you handling your business? In the fear of God, putting Him first, seeking His honour, trembling lest you dishonour Him? Or is it just to seek money and wealth and prosperity? Remember the rich man in the gospels. He was a very wise man according to the world. The world thought if ever a man was handling his matters wisely, this man was. He said, “I will pull down my barns and build greater.” He was so increased with goods he did not know where to store them. He said, “I will pull down my barns and build greater.” Where did he go wrong? God was not in all his thoughts. And the Lord said to him, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” In all your business concerns, may it not be the wisdom of the world, but may it be that wisdom which is from above.

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” And then there are troubles and sorrows and perplexities and disappointments. There is the pathway of affliction and you have got to handle it, beloved friends. It is hard to handle our trials wisely. “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him.” There are two opposite ways there of handling the matter foolishly. The Lord lays His chastening hand on this one, and he presents a brave face to it. He hardens his neck against it. He steels himself and goes on and despises the chastening of the Lord. This other one goes to the opposite extreme. He sinks beneath it and says, “If this is it, I give up.” Most people according to their natural temperament lean one way or the other when the Lord lays His chastening hand upon them. We are either prone to despise it or sink beneath it. “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.”

How can you handle your matters wisely, that matter of sorrow and affliction and illness and bereavement and disappointment and distress? Well, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” Do not let it keep you from prayer. O but seek that grace of submission, that grace of acquiescence, even that you might say, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities.” What an awful thing, what a solemn thing it is, when a person has a sore, bitter trial come upon him and he is left to himself and does not handle it wisely, when there is the rebellion and the hardness and the hatred and the refusal to submit and the turning back to the ways of the world. Then there is the barrenness and then the darkness and then the withering and then the death.

O this matter of affliction, whatever it is! What is a trial to one is not a trial to another. “The heart knoweth his own bitterness.” But what grace is needed to handle such a matter wisely in the fear of God, in a way of humble submission. “It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.” O did not old Eli handle that matter wisely? In his family, with his sons, with his children, he wrought havoc by failing to handle matters wisely and O the scourging, the bitterness that that man received! When he had to deal with Hannah, he did not handle that matter wisely. He completely misunderstood her case. He completely failed. But when it

came to the matter of the Lord's judgment and the awful affliction upon him, when the Lord sent him a direct, personal word and chose a little boy to deliver it, a word that God would most solemnly judge him and his family, Eli handled that matter wisely. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth Him good." Only God could make a sinner speak language like that. But He says, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

"He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good." And then the church of God. O what can we say about the solemn, weighty matters that we have to handle in the church of God? How can a pastor handle his matters rightly? How can deacons, how can church members, handle their matters rightly? The Lord most solemnly bids us do so. He places this awful accountability on us to handle our matters wisely. But we have one advantage here over all our other matters. "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." He is the Head of the church and He has a special love to Zion. The church of God is His mystical body and sometimes in seeking to handle these matters we can say, "Lord, it is not me. It is not my will, not my wish, not my concern. The one thing is Thine honour and glory. We long that Thy will might be done, that Thy name might be glorified, that the Lord Jesus might see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." When it is like that, we shall find good, we must find good.

Over the years I have been shut up to this a thousand times over. There has been some matter in the church of God and it has been vital that it should be handled wisely. I have felt I have not any wisdom to deal with it. Do you know what I have had to do? Put it into the Lord's hands to handle it for me. I have had to go to the Lord and say, "Lord, I realise this matter needs handling wisely and I just have not any wisdom to deal with it. Do in love and mercy Thyself handle it for me." And He does not fail. "There are the rocks and the quicksands. How can I steer between them? Hold the helm and guide the ship." Prayers like this can never fail. O seek grace to handle your matters in the fear of God, with much prayer. "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you."

"And whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." It is not the man who trusts in his own heart, not the man who trusts his own understanding, but "whoso trusteth in the Lord" – especially in the great matter of our sins

and souls and eternity, blessed with faith to trust only in the Lord Jesus. If this morning you are trusting in the Lord Jesus, however you feel, you are truly happy. “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” It does not mean he is always glad, that he never feels sad. But this is the happy man. This is the blessed man.

“Trust Him, He will not deceive us,
Though we hardly of Him deem;
He will never, never leave us,
Nor will let us quite leave Him.”

“Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.”

And then in all the other matters, all the other concerns, you cannot trust yourself to handle them wisely. But you can trust the Lord, can't you? Then all your concerns, all your matters, all these things which lie so heavily, may you be able to venture to the blood-sprinkled mercyseat and put them all into His gracious hands, and leave them there. Trust Him with them, just like Ruth the Moabitess. She had this great matter. She could not handle it. But she did handle it and handled it wisely. She went softly by night and trusted Boaz completely with it. She left it in his hands. “Go, and do thou likewise.” And may you hear that word: “Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall.” May you hear your heavenly Boaz saying, “Now my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest.”

“He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.”