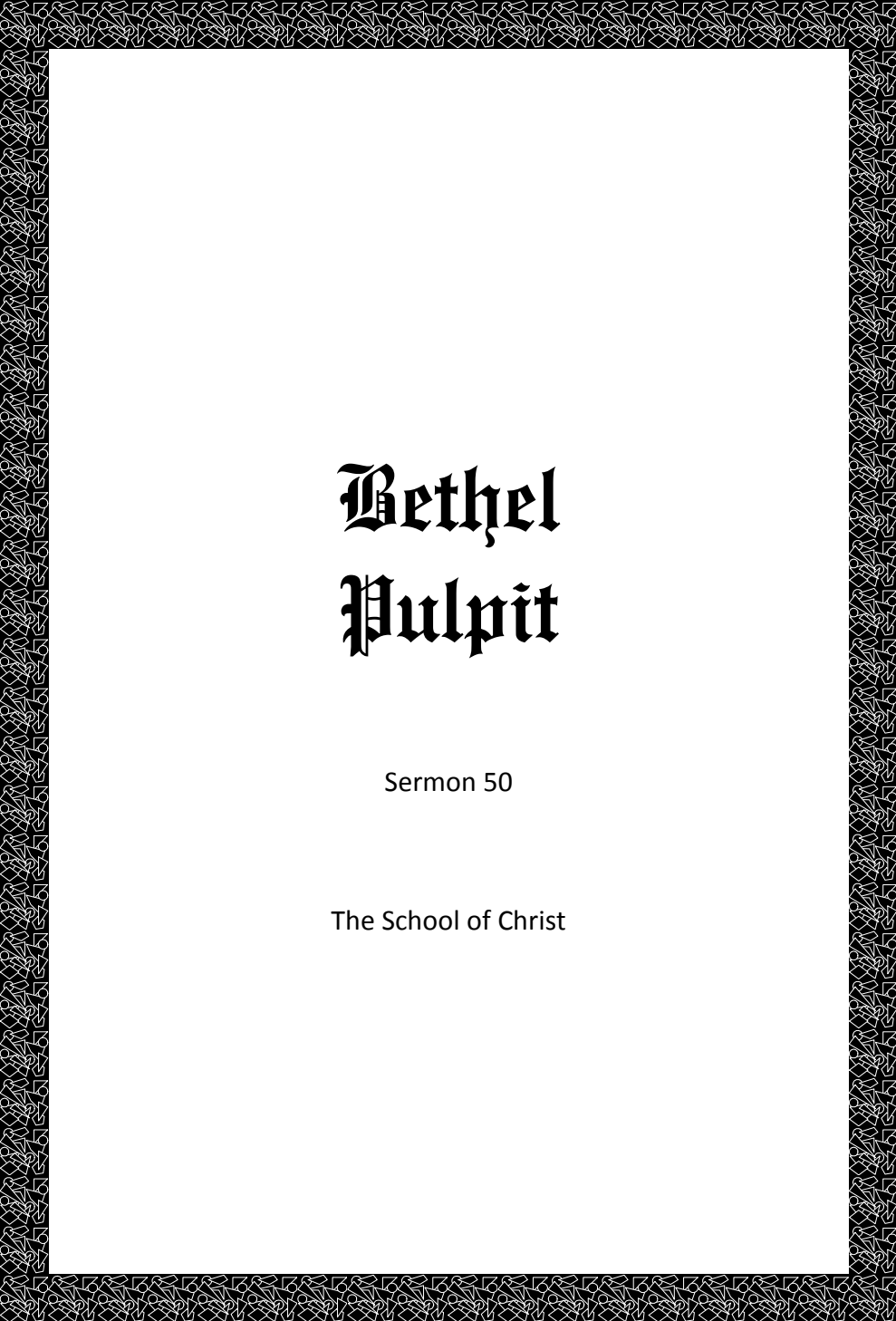




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 50

The School of Christ

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 6th August, 1989**

Text: *“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11. 29).*

This is a vital point in real religion: learning of the Lord Jesus. And that is the part of this scripture which rests particularly on my spirit, that the Lord Jesus says, “Learn of Me.” Beloved friends, all of us, if the fear of God is in our hearts, all of us are learners and we shall be learners until that last day when we step down into the swelling of Jordan. It is a solemn thing if a person thinks he has attained, if he thinks he has learned all the lessons in the school of Christ. Was there ever a man so graciously taught as the Apostle Paul? “No,” he says, “not as though I had already attained.” He felt as though he was still a learner. There were so many lesson he still had to learn. There was a desire still to be graciously taught. “I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

The vital mark of grace is to give you a teachable spirit, to show you that you need to be taught. I find this very attractive, this aspect of the work of the dear Lord Jesus, the way He takes His people so kindly and lovingly by the hand and the way He teaches them and the way in which He leads them. He is an infallible Teacher. He never makes a mistake. The lessons He teaches are well-learned. You and I are so slow to learn, and yet the Lord Jesus is so patient, so gracious. It is a wonderful thing if we are learners in the school of Christ.

The question is often asked, “What is a real Christian?” Well, if we come to Scripture, we read that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” The disciples. Then the Holy Ghost tells us that a real Christian is a disciple. And what is a disciple? One who through mercy sits at Jesus’ feet, one who seeks to learn of Him. O that together we might be found at Jesus’ feet, even today, to learn of Him, that we might know something of Christ’s easy yoke.

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” One vital point is this, that the Lord Jesus is our Lord and our Master. You remember that

occasion: “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end,” and then He took a towel and girded Himself and began to wash His disciples’ feet. There were many lessons they had to learn, many things they did not know, that they had to be taught. And the Lord Jesus said this, “Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.” That was right. They called Him their Master and their Lord, and He said, “For so I am.” But notice how He rephrases it: “If I then, your Lord and Master.” You see, beloved friends, first of all through grace He must be our Lord, that is, to have the dominion, the sovereignty in our lives and rule of His love, and then if He is our Lord, so He will be our Master.

And He says, “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” I believe the Lord Jesus was speaking of things like this. The yoke of Moses’ law was not easy, that burden was not light. The yoke of the ceremonial law was not easy, that burden was not light. The yoke of the Roman government over them at that time was not easy, that burden was not light. There was no love in it. But the Lord Jesus assures them that all His dealings with them will be in a way of love, even if they cannot understand them. If they seem strange, if there is bereavement, sorrow, disappointment, loneliness, it is all in love. It is all part of this divine teaching, and He will bring them to the sacred, sweet realisation of this: “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” I do feel this desire for us as a congregation, that it might be our desire to be learners, that we might learn at the feet of Christ, and that an exhortation like this might turn into a prayer, and that our earnest desire might be that the Lord Jesus Himself might teach us, that we might learn those lessons we need to learn from His gracious hand. It will be a mercy if there is one person goes home from chapel this morning with this prayer in your heart, that the Lord Jesus might teach you and that you might be a disciple at His feet, that you might be a learner.

There are various ways in which the Lord Jesus teaches, and various ways in which His beloved people are to learn of Him, but essentially there are three. The first is this: the Lord Jesus teaches by His Word, by His Spirit. As you are led in quiet meditation in the Word of God, He will teach you there by His Spirit. There will be a passage

impressed upon your heart. It will have a sacred, gracious influence. There will be another word which will come and it will touch some point in your life. It will reprove you, it will correct you. But it will be by His Word that the Lord Jesus by His Spirit will teach you. Now may you ever seek this. As you come to God's holy Word in secret, as you hear it read in public, as you listen to the preaching of the gospel, may you ever come with a desire that you might learn at the feet of the Lord Jesus. It is not just coming to chapel. It is not just meeting friends. It is not just singing hymns. It is not just hearing sermons. Is there any gracious teaching? Do you go home with any lesson learned? Do you desire to come to the feet of the Lord Jesus? Now may there be that burden, may there be that exercise, that through His holy Word by the Holy Spirit the Lord Jesus might teach us.

I remember in my early days spiritually the realisation of this point was something so sacred and so sweet and so simple, yet it was a divine revelation to me. I felt the Lord had begun with me, and yet I felt to know so little. I felt there was so much I needed to learn, and so much I had to learn. I suppose in my ignorance there was a feeling that somehow I must do it. O but that word, so simple: "They shall be all taught of God" – that it was not left to me to learn these lessons myself, that He who had begun with me would graciously teach me, teach me these lessons, teach me what I wanted to know. At that time it was especially this: I felt to know a little of Christ, and it was so attractive, so precious, but I longed to know more; and that sweet revelation that it was the Lord's own work: "And they shall be all taught of God."

There are so many of you here and the Lord has graciously begun with you, and this is the work of faith before you. This is what you need in your pilgrimage. You need the Lord Jesus to take you by the hand now and you need Him to lead you and you need Him to teach you. Beware of thinking that you know, that you have attained. It is a very sweet, attractive subject for beginners, but those who are right at the end of their pilgrimage, they still need this divine teaching, this gracious leading. We are so slow to learn, and also we need the same lessons to be taught to us again and again. It is not learning the truth like studying for an examination, or taking a book and beginning to peruse it. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord." It is that gracious teaching, that divine teaching in your heart, and there are these lessons that need to be

learned; whatever stage of experience we are at this morning, we need to be learners. “Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand; and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words.” This is the learning. This is the divine teaching.

That is the first thing. The Lord will teach you by His holy Word and by His Spirit, and it will be a good thing if often we are found like David, saying, “Lord, teach me; Lord show me; Lord, tell me.”

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” Now the second way in which the Lord Jesus teaches His people is by His example. In God’s holy Word we have the beautiful example of Christ, that holy, sacred life He lived, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” It is there for our example, and we are to learn from it. Now you and I can never be perfect as Christ was perfect, but we are called to follow His steps, to seek His honour and glory, to desire that we might be blessed with the Spirit of Christ. As He set that wonderful example of love and humility and prayer and so many other things, so we are to seek grace to learn of Him, to follow Him. That is the best way of learning. There may be a person who tells you and talks to you and explains to you. But then he does it himself, he shows it to you. It is that wonderful example of the Lord Jesus.

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” And then the third way in which the Lord teaches His people is by correction. You and I do not like correction, do we? We do not like it if the Lord shows us where we are wrong, and we do not like it if He lays the rod upon us. I believe there is much in that word the Lord Jesus spoke: “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” What does He mean? You take a little child. His mother is so often correcting him; the little child is not offended. When a little child goes to school, he expects to be taught. He goes there to learn. He is making mistakes all the time, and the teacher is telling him, “No, that is wrong.” Now, “Except ye be converted, and become as little children.” We need that tender heart in God’s fear. We need to be made teachable.

Tell me, beloved friends, how long is it since the Lord corrected you on any point? How long is it since the Lord showed you on any matter you were wrong? It is one thing to say we are sinners, but it is the walking it out day by day as the Lord Jesus comes and lays His hand upon

you, kindly, but lovingly, firmly, and shows you your spirit was wrong there. You have to come and plead for mercy and forgiveness through His precious blood. There is something you have said, and the Lord Jesus comes and teaches you in your conscience and shows you it would have been better if you had not said it. You have to say, “Lord, set a watch over the door of my lips. O do forgive me. Have mercy. Touch my lips with that live coal from off the altar. Wash away my sin.”

It tries me if people speak of having so many words from the Lord and those words always tell them that what they want to do is right. I find so often if the Lord speaks to me, it is to show me that what I want to do is not right, or the way I am taking is wrong. Sometimes it will be by a clear word. I remember a few years ago I was going to do something, and it was not anything which in any way seemed to be wrong. But it was as if the Lord nailed me down in a moment with that word: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.” Do you know what it is for your way to be nailed down by the Lord, and you dare not take a single step further?

If we are true Christians, true disciples, there will be the correction, and often it will be by a word. Sometimes it will just be a frown. It will be something in your conscience. Then sometimes the rod is needed. The various disappointments, sorrows, trials, temptations, bereavements, hard things, all these are part of the Lord’s gracious teaching. I have said this many times, and I repeat it, beloved friends. Do not seek for trouble. Do not ask for it. Do not pray for it. But if it comes in any measure, never fail to ask the Lord what you have to learn by it. Seek that you might not come out of it unprofited. Seek that the Lord will graciously teach you lessons in your trials. And where it is correction, and if it seems severe, and if it perhaps seems too hard for you, and if this thing through which you are passing really grieves you, and you know it is a stroke from the Lord, beloved, may it be this:

“For this correction render praise;
’Tis given thee for thy good.
The lash is steeped He on thee lays,
And softened in His blood.”

Then you will say, “Yes, Lord Jesus, Thy yoke is easy and Thy burden is light.”

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” I want to speak to you of some of the lessons we need to learn, some of the things that the Lord Jesus will teach us, the lessons that all His people need to learn, that all of them need to be taught. First of all, we need to learn the lesson of dependence. Perhaps more than anything else throughout our lives, this is the lesson that we have to learn, and we are so slow to learn. It seems we are learning it over and over again, learning it all the days of our lives, the need to be completely dependent. The Lord will have His people fix their whole dependence on Him. Yet our old flesh is so independent. We like to be able to do things ourselves. We like to be able to manage things ourselves, but the Lord will not allow this. So as He takes us by the hand to teach us, this is the vital lesson He would have us to learn, that we are to be completely dependent. Now of course, right in the beginning of the work of grace, this is one of the first lessons we have to learn, to be brought to that place of complete dependence on Christ as our only hope, as all our salvation. But that is not as easy a lesson to learn as it sounds. It is like tearing the flesh off our bones, because by nature we have so many things on which we depend, so many things on which we rely, so many false foundations, so many refuges of lies. And so the Lord very lovingly, very kindly, one by one takes away your false foundations and refuges of lies. I go back to the days when I had to learn this lesson, and it was painful:

“Every prop will, first or last
Sink or fail, but Jesus Christ.”

Our old nature will lean on anything: the good opinion other people have of us, or because we come out to all the services, or because there is plenty of time, or we take it for granted we are right. “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” You have to learn this lesson of complete dependence on Christ in the beginning. Perhaps with some, the Lord is beginning with you. He has quickened you into life. You are learning this lesson, and perhaps you are not finding it easy to learn. But when the Lord Jesus shows us something of the solemnity of a never-ending eternity, makes it to be a tremendous sound, shows us something of our sin and unworthiness, “my best is stained and dyed with sin; my all is nothing worth,” then all these things we depend on give way and prove to be nothing but broken reeds and sinking sand. And then that

question: “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” And then brought face to face with the judgment day. So the Lord will bring you to this point of dependence upon Himself, upon His merit, upon His precious blood, upon His righteousness, upon His finished work. And this is where faith will bring you, this will be faith’s resting place, this will be your only hope: none but Jesus. So by faith you will be brought to depend upon Him.

“Thy whole dependence on Me fix;
Nor entertain a thought
Thy worthless schemes with Mine to mix,
But venture to be nought.”

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” When Christ’s easy yoke is first laid on a sinner, this is the lesson you have to learn by faith, to renounce your own works, bad or good, and to rest only on Christ. “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” We think that we have learned that lesson, but as we go on, so often we try to do things ourselves, we try to manage things ourselves. So the Lord Jesus will teach us our weakness. Painfully we will have to learn it, that we can no more keep ourselves than save ourselves. We will have to realise we still have a wicked heart. We are still plagued by Satan, sin and the world. There is a pilgrimage to walk out. There is a fight we must fight, a race we must run. In all these many ways the Lord Jesus will show us how weak and helpless and incapable we are.

Perhaps some of you are being brought there this morning. You are saying, “Lord, wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?” The Lord is not teaching you these lessons that you might sink and be destroyed, but so you might lean more heavily upon Him, so your whole dependence may be fixed on Him. “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” It is a view of the beloved bride of Christ, loved with an everlasting love. You see in herself she is

“a weakling, more than strong;
Vents in His bosom all her woes,
And leaning moves along.”

So the Lord teaches you more and more your weakness and helplessness, but He will encourage you, He will bring you to depend

completely on Him. I wonder if this is the Lord's word to you this morning in your weakness and helplessness and in your need, that you are to lean completely on Him, lean upon His mercy, as we sing in the beautiful hymn: "Leaning on all-sufficient grace," leaning on that tried, almighty arm that will never let you down, never let you go. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" You cannot lean too hard. You cannot lean too often. You will never lean in vain.

"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." Another thing which we have to learn which is inseparably bound up with the lesson of dependence: we need to learn just how complete a Saviour the Lord Jesus is and just how complete is His salvation. We read of Him in the Word as a great Saviour: "He shall send them a Saviour, and a great One." And we read of His salvation as a great salvation: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Now when we begin in the things of God, we do not realise just how great a Saviour He is and we do not realise just how great His salvation is. But as we go on, we realise that we never knew just how great sinners we were or just how great our foolishness is, or just how great our weakness is. So the Lord Jesus will have us learn more and yet more of His greatness as a Saviour. He does not put these beautiful promises, these beautiful words in Scripture for nothing. You are going to be led into them. You are going to be brought to feel your need of them. I mean words like these: "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Now, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." You are going to learn increasingly what a great Saviour He is. He will teach you that He saved you from a lost eternity, and He will show you something of what you would have been and where you would have gone but for sovereign grace and undeserved mercy. At the beginning we thought we knew this, but we have to learn it more and yet more. One thing we need to be confirmed in is that it is an everlasting salvation, that,

"They who once His kindness prove,
Find it everlasting love."

It is a salvation, a covenant salvation that is “ordered in all things, and sure.” Let me explain it like this. Good Samuel Rutherford in one of his beautiful letters talks of the little cabin boy who goes to sea for the first time. When his ship begins to move away from the quay, he thinks it is the land that is moving. Rutherford says, “Never. The land does not move. It is only your little bark.” With a young believer, the Lord blesses you, you have the favour of the Lord in your soul, and then you begin to change. Darkness comes over you. Your heart becomes hard. Perhaps there is a little carelessness, a little prayerlessness, and you think the Lord has changed, and Satan will try to seal it home and say, “Your God is gracious no more.” But the Lord Jesus little by little will confirm you in this and teach you this, that though you change, He changes not; though your love is sometimes weak and poor and faint, His love flows eternally the same; that though there is fresh-contracted guilt upon your conscience, yet His precious blood still cleanses from all sin. So these precious truths you see in the Bible concerning the Lord Jesus as a Saviour – “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins” – you will have to learn them by painful yet blessed experience, painful because of what you find in yourself, blessed because of what you see in the Lord Jesus. You have to be taught that He is a complete Saviour. Gadsby says, “He saves from death, destruction and despair.”

We need Him as a daily Saviour. That prayer of Peter when he began to sink: “Lord, save me,” you will have to pray that, for we need Him to save us from sinking. We need Him to save us day by day from falling. We need Him to save us finally. We not only need saving from sin’s guilt, but from its power, the power of indwelling sin. We need to be saved from endless ruin at last. Then sometimes we need saving providentially. This dear Saviour, as He saves you from hell, so He saves you from trouble. In it there is not only divine keeping, divine preservation, but there is divine upholding. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

You will have to prove Him as a complete Saviour. This is a lesson that you are going to learn day by day and year by year, what a great Saviour He is and what a great salvation He has accomplished. This will make Him precious to you. This will endear Him to you. Now it is in this way that you are to grow in grace. Perhaps that tries some of you.

The Word of God says, “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” You say, “I do not feel to grow. I feel to grow backwards.” It does not mean growing better, but growing in your dependence on Christ, growing in the realisation of what a great Saviour He is. O the preciousness of that blood that can wash away the vilest of sins! O the preciousness of that righteousness which is a complete covering! O the preciousness of that intercession at God’s right hand! And then the revelation of the preciousness of His unchanging love. You felt it at the beginning. You look back to your yesterday, the day when He first blessed you, but you have to learn this: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

“Did Jesus once upon me shine?
Then Jesus is for ever mine.”

It is to learn these lessons in the school of Christ, by painful experience, from the Lord Jesus Himself.

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.” Just one other thing that the Lord Jesus will show you, one thing that you will have to learn, and that is just how great His power is, just how great His ability is – that, consistent with His holy, righteous character, He can do anything, He can do everything. This is one thing you will learn and this is one of the most wonderful things when we are led into it in the school of Christ. I go back to painful days, and yet this happy lesson learned concerning the Lord’s ability “to do exceeding abundantly” above all we can ask or even think. God is greater than all your fears. God is greater than all your troubles.

The first lesson a tiny child learns about God is something like this, that He is almighty, that He can do everything. So concerning the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, a little child learns He can do anything, He can do everything. We have those wonderful miracles which He performed in the days of His flesh. But the Lord Jesus is going to show you and me this personally. We are going to learn it, that He does hold the waters in His hand, He does mete out the heavens with a span, He does sit upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants before Him are as grasshoppers.

It is usually like this. The Lord Jesus will see to it that there is something in your life that you cannot manage. It is too hard for you.

Not only that – the Lord Jesus will bring you into things in your life which are not only hard but they are completely impossible, no way through, no way out, no way of escape, no way of deliverance. Then you will have to learn this lesson, and it will be written upon the fleshy tables of your heart: “With God nothing shall be impossible.” There is not any trial in which He cannot uphold you. There is not any fear He cannot quell. There is not any sorrow He cannot sanctify. There is not any trouble He cannot deliver you from. “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me?” And you will stand amazed at the wonderful ability of the dear Lord Jesus, He who is meek and lowly in heart, a real Man, but true, almighty God. You will know that it was He in creation who “spoke, and it was done.” You will know that by His own power He rose triumphant from the dead. And you will feel you need nothing short of omnipotence. You will feel at times like Israel at the Red Sea. “When thou canst no deliverance see.” But the Israelites learnt lessons at the Red Sea that they never forgot. “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.”

O what lessons, and what a Teacher! I have just tried to speak of three of the many, many lessons the Lord Jesus will teach you. But O to be learners in the school of Christ, more and more to learn that complete dependence on Him, and more and more to learn what a complete Saviour He is, and what a complete salvation it is, and more and more to learn His blessed ability “to do exceeding abundantly” above all that we can ask or even think.

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

(The evening sermon on the same text will be published next month.)