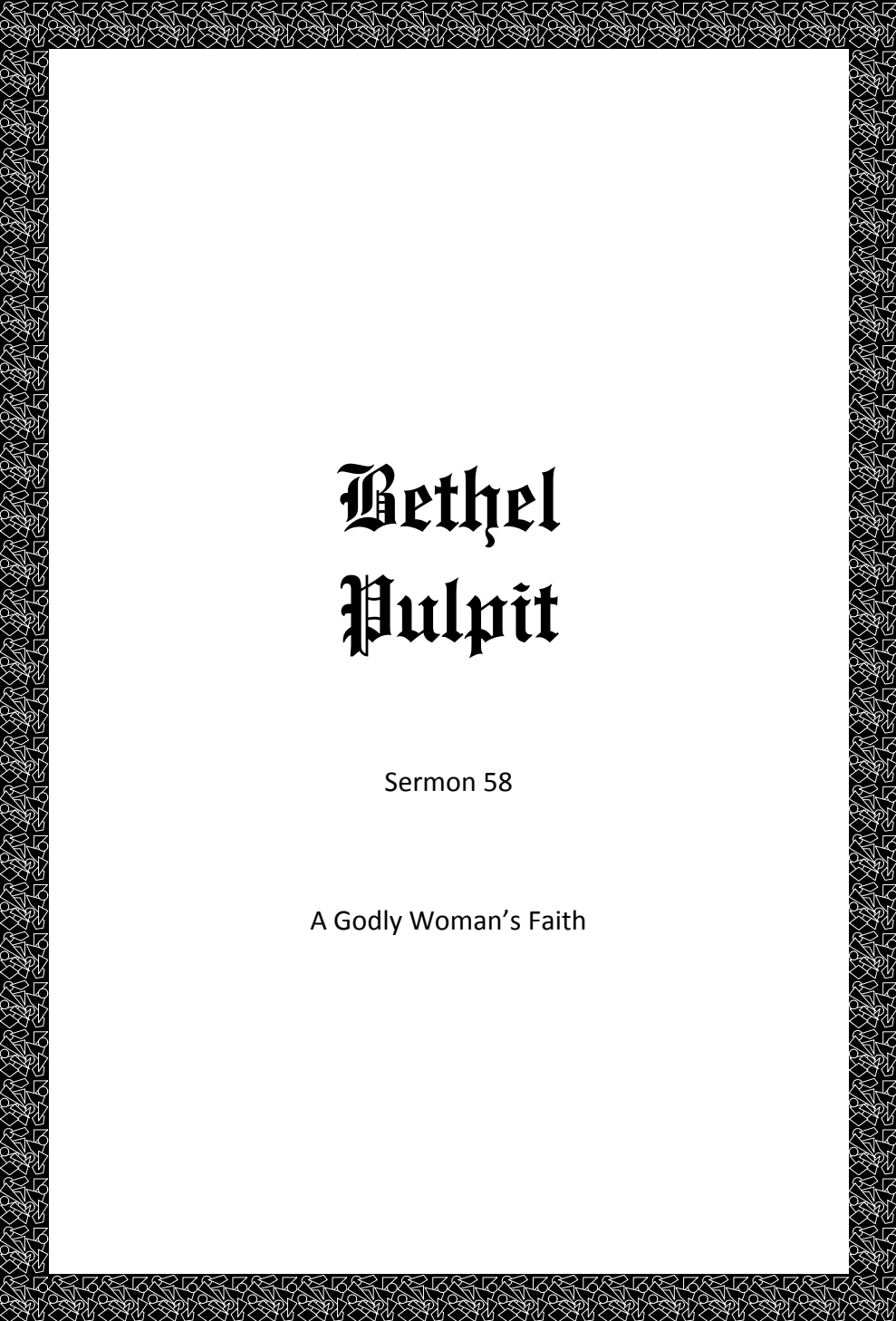




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 58

A Godly Woman's Faith

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 22nd January, 1989**

Text: *“And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these” (Judges 13. 22, 23).*

Manoah was a godly man, but he was not as well established in the truth as his wife was. It is made very clear in this chapter that he was a godly man. We find him praying, and we find him receiving answers to his prayers. That is a really important point in vital godliness: to pray and to receive answers to our prayers. We find also that he had a very tender conscience. He was very concerned that in the gift of this child from God, Samson, he might be blessed with grace to honour God. He did not want to do anything that was displeasing to the Lord. He wanted the Lord very clearly and very graciously to lead him and to direct him. Now may we each in our families have that same spirit, to seek the Lord's gracious direction and gracious help day by day.

And then Manoah was specially favoured to see (to use the words of the hymnwriter) “the wonders God alone can do.” Most of the godly divines have believed that this angel who appeared to Manoah and his wife was the Lord Jesus, the Angel of the covenant (or Messenger of the covenant), the Lord Jesus in one of His pre-incarnation appearances. Let us be very clear, the eternal Son of God never took flesh of our flesh until His wonderful incarnation at Bethlehem. But there were various occasions in the Old Testament when He did appear and He came in the likeness, in the appearance of human form. What a word is that: “And the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on”! I am sure some of you go back to times in your life when you have known an experience like that, when the Lord has worked wondrously for you and all you could do was look on, look on in wonder and amazement, look on in humble gratitude, look on, feeling, “Why me, Lord, why me?” “The angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.”

Though Manoah was a godly man, he was not as well established in the truth as his wife, and his faith was not as strong as that of his wife. You see, there are degrees of faith. All faith looks to the Lord Jesus; all faith believes on Him, all faith hangs on Him, depends on Him, but there are degrees of faith. Some have great faith. Some have little faith. You remember it was to the apostles that the Lord Jesus said, “How is it that ye have no faith?” – to the apostles, Peter, and James, and John, and the others. Be very clear on this point, that little faith will take a sinner to heaven just as surely as great faith. It is not the degree of faith, not the amount of faith, that will take you to heaven, beloved friends; it is the glorious Object of faith. And if your faith, however weak, however fearing, however trembling, rests upon Christ and Him crucified as your Object, then that faith will take you to heaven. If you can only come here:

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

That will take you to heaven, whether it is weak or strong.

I suppose some of you will ask the question: if weak faith will take a sinner to heaven just as much as strong faith, what is the advantage of one over the other? Well, as the apostle Paul would have put it, “Much every way.” But especially this, that the person blessed with strong faith enjoys more peace, more comfort, more assurance, more blessing, while here on earth in this pilgrimage. It will not make the slightest difference between getting to heaven at last, but it will make a great difference in your enjoyment of divine favours.

It is a remarkable thing in this chapter that when the Lord appeared, it was not to Manoah: it was to Manoah’s wife. Even when Manoah so earnestly prayed that the Lord would come again, the second time also it was to Manoah’s wife, and she went and told her husband and brought him. I wonder if in the history of the church of God there have perhaps been more godly women than godly men. Now that may surprise you. Have you ever noticed, if you take our churches, almost invariably there are twice the number of lady members to men members in those churches – almost invariably – and sometimes it is a much greater proportion of godly women? And that does not just belong to the present

day. It was so in the past. Now that must be a mystery. I do not profess to be able to give you the answer, but it is a fact that in our churches, there have been many more godly women have made an open profession of faith than men have. It seems that in a special way these godly women have been honoured with a greater proportion of faith.

Well, in these two verses I have read to you, we see little faith and great faith. We see one who is sorely tried and tempted and harassed, and another who knows the answer. We find one plagued with fear and another one who can say, "Fear not." O what a wonderful thing it is when there are those who are well established in the faith, who can be a help to those who are not! There is not so much of this today as there was in former years. Manoah's wife was a mother in Israel, and she was a mother in Israel even to her own husband. Now have we got these mothers in Israel amongst us? You can speak to someone and be a help, and you can encourage them and you can confirm them, and God Himself will bless your testimony.

"And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God." You think of these amazing things that had been taking place. Manoah was a hospitable man. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." So the apostle writes in Hebrews 13, and one to whom he is referring is Manoah. But you remember that the angel would not eat of the bread or of the meat that was provided. He said, "I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the Lord." And the angel refused to give his name. "Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?" You notice your margin renders the word *wonderful*. "Why askest thou thus after My name, seeing it is *wonderful*?" "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: ... and His name shall be called Wonderful."

"Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord: and the angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on." Now just remember what took place. Suddenly that offering of the sacrifice on the rock, which was being used as a rough altar, suddenly, without any human hand, it burst into flames and there the flames ascended to heaven. But more than that, the angel Himself disappeared. He went up in that flame toward heaven and he was

received up out of their sight. “And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.”

“And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.” He was labouring under a temptation from Satan. He was plagued with fears. He felt everything was going to go wrong. He felt he was going to be left, he was going to perish. Do not be at all surprised if the Lord has specially helped you or favoured you or blessed you in any way, if the next day you almost sink in black despair. Some of the most eminent ministers have found that if they have preached even to thousands on the Lord’s day evening and abundantly experienced the blessing of the Lord, they have felt on the Monday morning that they were completely out of the secret themselves, that they must perish in their sins. They have felt the Lord was going to destroy them.

Now do not sit in judgment on Manoah. None of us know how we may feel if the Lord does not bless us with faith, if the Lord does not uphold us and support us. Really you would say, if there was a man in the Bible who had no cause to fear, it was Manoah after the Lord had so wondrously appeared and blessed him and his wife so much. If you will, these were groundless fears, fears without any foundation. We sometimes sing, “Creatures of fear, we fear where no fear is.” But one thing you will prove, that a groundless fear will be just as painful as a real fear. But a person who has these fears, however groundless they are, those fears are terribly real. I remember years ago a person coming to see me, and she was prostrated with fear. When she told me what it was, it was so ridiculous that I could have laughed, if I had not realised that this person was prostrated by it, it was so real. Now groundless fears, however foolish they may be, to the person who is troubled with those fears, they are terribly real. All that Manoah could see facing him was darkness and death and destruction.

“And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God. But his wife said unto him.” You see, it was good divinity, wasn’t it? She was very well established in the truth and she was able to speak so graciously. “If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands.” She did not just laugh at his fears. She did not just tell him to cheer up. She did not just tell him to stop fearing. She most graciously

answered him, and that is the mercy of Scripture, and that is the mercy of the gospel. It does not take this poor, trembling, fearing sinner and tell him to cheer up, or that he should not have these fears. It comes right where he is, just like the good Samaritan, and deals with his case and lifts him right up out of all those fears that trouble him.

“Christ has blessings to impart,
Grace to save thee from thy fears.”

“But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.” This is very gracious reasoning, and it is very good divinity. This is the way Manoah’s wife spoke: “This angel of God has spoken most graciously to us, most kindly to us, and given us such precious promises. Now this would never have taken place if it were God’s intention afterwards to destroy us. This angel has done such wonderful things for us. We have looked on with wonder and amazement. He has revealed things to us that ten thousand in the world never see. Now is it possible the Lord would deal with us in this way, and then cut us off and cast us away and destroy us? You remember that we offered the burnt offering and the meat offering to the Lord, and very clearly, very graciously He accepted it. He performed a miracle to accept it, that flame of fire and the angel ascending to heaven. Now surely the Lord would not have done this for us if He were against us, if He did not love us, if He were going to cut us off, going to destroy us.”

That is good divinity, isn’t it? She had very clear views of the faithfulness of God, that the Lord would not give a kind word and then not fulfil it, that the Lord would not give a promise and then break it. And certainly the Lord would not deal so kindly and graciously with anyone and then turn against that person. She was very well grounded in the faithfulness of God. May we as a congregation be well established in this truth: “He is faithful that promised” – the faithful God. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it?”

She was also well grounded in the truth of divine immutability, that God does not change, that God cannot change, that the Lord would not be so kind and gracious to them yesterday and then turn against them today, favour them yesterday and forsake them today, be such a help to

them in the past and then in the future leave them. She knew more of God than this. She knew the wonders of divine immutability.

“And can He have taught me to trust in His name,
And thus far have brought me to put me to shame?”

She could have sung those words if they had been written then, and wouldn't she have rejoiced in the closing part of Hebrews 6: “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us”? You see, she was well established in the faithfulness of God, in the immutability of God, and in the loving, merciful character of God.

I once heard a preacher say many years ago that God never tantalises a sinner. That was a good word to me. Satan will tantalise you and the world will tantalise you. The world will hold something out before you, the world will promise you pleasures, and you will go after those pleasures, and they will tantalise you. We get the word from the old Greek story of Tantalus. He suffered from a raging thirst and spent his life seeking after cooling streams, and when he bent down to drink of the stream, it flowed away from him. The world, with all its pleasures, is just like this. You bend down to drink of its streams and they disappear. The Lord will never give you a little taste and dash it to the ground. Beloved, “There is an end, and thine expectation shall not be cut off.”

“Shall the foretaste Thou hast wrought,
Be to disappointment brought.
(Though Thy promise calls it sure,)
Of the life that shall endure?”

The Lord will not raise up a little hope and then disappoint it, promise something, then dash it all to the ground. That is not the way in which God works.

“His wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.” Well, with the Lord's help let us just

look at one or two aspects of it. Have you got a sweet hope that the Lord has ever begun His work of grace in your heart, taught you your need, shown you the solemnity of eternity, the vanity of the world, that this is not your rest, it is polluted? Has He ever given you that real concern about your sin and your soul and eternity? Has He ever taught you to pray, compelled you to pray, that you might be made right, made ready, fitted and prepared for heaven, washed in the Saviour's blood? Then if the Lord were pleased to destroy you, He would never have shown you such things as these. The Lord never begins and then does not finish. O what a word is that in Zechariah 4: "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; His hands shall also finish it"! There is no unfinished work with God.

"The work which His goodness began,
The arm of His strength will complete;
His promise is *Yea* and *Amen*,
And never was forfeited yet."

There are two scriptures. One is this: "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of Thine own hands." And the other: "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

"If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these." Some of you will look back in your life and you can go to those spots and places where the Lord has been with you. Some of you can lay hold of that promise you believe God has given; you have had to rest upon it. Some of you can remember that time when you felt the Lord Jesus so attractive to your soul. And some of you, even in the seat you are sitting in now, can remember the time when the Lord came and favoured your spirit. Some of you have your little spots and places in your own home, or in a busy street, or when you were out in the country, and you cannot deny it, that the Lord visited you there, helped you there, blessed you there. Now if the Lord were going to destroy you, would He have ever done such things for you? Would He ever have shown you such things as these?

Now there are some of you, you have not got what you want, but you know you are not what you once were. The world no longer attracts you. You can say, “One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.” You no longer envy the world. Its pleasures can no longer please. Now you just want to be identified with the people of God. “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” If the Lord were pleased to destroy you, if He were going to cut you off and cast you away at last, would He ever have made this difference in your life? Was it Satan who brought you out of the world? Was it Satan who taught you to pray? Was it Satan who made the Lord Jesus so attractive, so precious in your desires after Him?

“If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.” Now there are some of you who cannot deny that you have an urgent, pressing case, that you feel within an aching void the world can never fill, that it is the things of God you want more than anything else, His blessing. But some of you say and painfully feel that you have waited long and the blessing you have long sought, you have never received, and because of this, Satan reasons very closely with you; and at times when your fears prevail, you think like this, that you will never find peace at last, that in the great day it will be eternal destruction. But if the Lord were going to cast you off, if the Lord were going to destroy you, would He ever have brought you to seek after His name, ever have brought you to seek His forgiveness, have given those desires and then disappoint them, those longings and then crush them, those hungerings and then mock them? There was hymn that the godly used to sing a lot years ago:

“My fears sometimes say I never shall find,
In death’s awful day true peace in my mind;
But though thus surrounded, yet, when I come there” – not

before –

when I come there –

“I can’t be confounded, The Lord will appear.”

“If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have

shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.” Well, beloved friends, what is it that is worrying, you, concerning you this morning, filling your heart with fear? What day is this? What trying day is it when you are tempted the Lord will leave you, that He will cast you off, He will not be with you, He will forsake you and it will end in destruction, and it will end in death? Is it the day of trouble that you are in this morning and you wonder where the scene is going to end? You fear at times it is going to end in confusion, that the Lord is no more going to hear your prayers, smile upon you, but He is going to cast you off. Is it this day of trouble that you fear is going to be the day of destruction to you? Well what about those former troubles when you felt you were going to sink, and yet the Lord upheld you? He did not destroy you, did He?

“His love in time past forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last, in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.”

If the Lord were going to destroy you in this trouble, He would never have helped you, been with you, as He has in days past.

But then with some of you you look to the unknown way and you see a day before you and you fear that day, you shrink from that day. You think you cannot face it. How can I stand then? And Satan tells you you will be put to confusion and it will be the day of your destruction. Do you believe what we sing, “He who hath helped me hitherto, will help me all my journey through”? Do you believe what we do believe, that what the Lord has been to His people, He ever will be? Do you believe that rock foundation, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday” – and now you have got your yesterday – “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever”?

“If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.” And then, you see, there is the day of your death and, “We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person.” Now that day is certain and that will be a terrible day. O to have one grain of real religion when you and I come there, as come there we must! It is one thing to sing

about it and read about it, but it is to come there. “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” At times you fear that that will be your death and that will be your destruction. But do you think that the Lord has done so much for you, and you cannot deny it, that He has helped you in times past, He has never failed you, never forsaken you, and then at last in that great day His promise will fail for ever more? Do you think that? “He who has helped you hitherto, will help you all your journey through” – and at the end of your journey.

But faith sometimes does sink low. There is that seventy-seventh psalm: “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” Six impossible things, and yet this godly man Asaph thought they were going to happen to him. And then the Lord intervened. Do you know what he said then? He said, “This is my infirmity; *but*” – O one of those blessed *buts* – “*but* I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember Thy wonders of old.”

“If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.” At the beginning, the early part of last year, we had abundant blessing in the church here, (didn’t we?) and we cannot deny it. The Lord in a wonderful way appeared for us and worked amongst us. Then there were some very dark days that followed. There were some sore trials and there were some very deep waters so that some of us sank very low and almost despaired of life. I remember one occasion when ready to sink and the Lord mercifully broke through with this word, that if the Lord were going to destroy us as a church, if He were going to leave us, if He were going to forsake us, is it possible that He would have done all these things for us and shown us such things as these and blessed us in the way that He did? Beloved friends, “He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth.” He says, “According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.”

“But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these.”