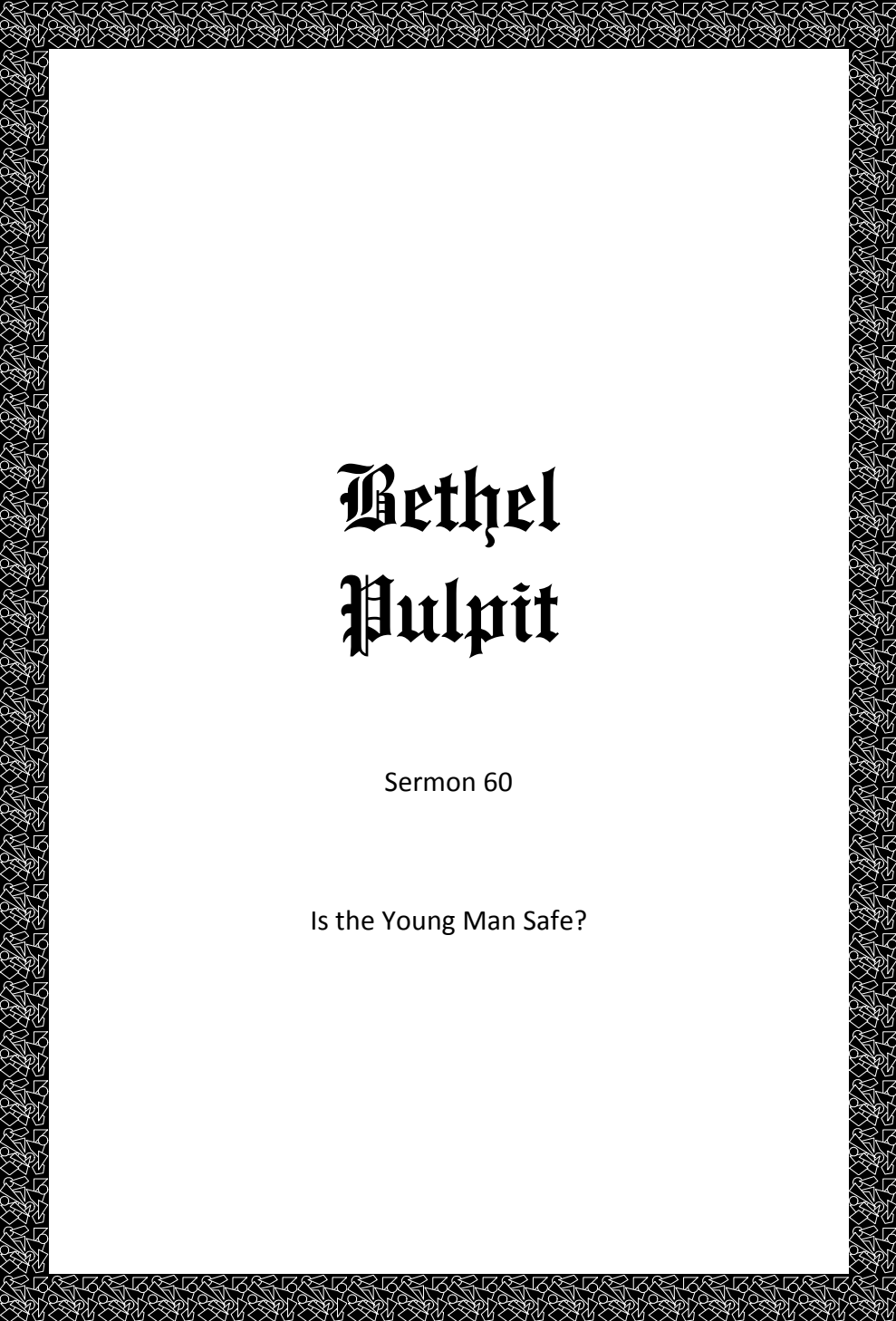




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 60

Is the Young Man Safe?

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday evening, 8th May, 1969**

Text: *“Is the young man Absalom safe?” (2 Samuel 18. 29).*

This was perhaps the saddest, the most solemn day in all the life of David, the man of God. O the grief that filled his heart when his beloved Absalom was slain! This was a real grief. There are no more pathetic words in Scripture than these: “O my son Absalom; my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” It was not just that Absalom had turned against his father, rewarded his father’s love with bitter hatred and opposition, but this was the deepest grief – David knew that Absalom was eternally lost. He died without hope. He died without mercy. Perhaps when you read it through, you thought David was using extravagant language, but this was his deepest grief – he sees his own beloved Absalom perished in his sins.

Let us be clear on one point, my friends; this was the Lord’s chastising hand upon David. David grievously sinned in that matter of adultery with Bathsheba and the death of Uriah the Hittite. He grievously sinned. The Lord most graciously pardoned him: “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Yet there was to be the rod, there was to be the chastisement, and it is here David comes into it. When Nathan spoke that word of sweet assurance to David that his sin was put away, he also as the Lord’s messenger clearly testified to David of the awful sorrows there would be upon the kingdom and in all his family, and now David has to walk it out. Let us be very clear on this point, that as a man sows so he shall also reap. We need to watch, my friends. We cannot sin carelessly, we cannot sin lightly. If we are the children of God, it will not keep us out of heaven, but there will be the rod: “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” And David here is under the scourging hand of his God, and he knows it.

I want to say first of all this evening *one or two things concerning “the young man Absalom.”* Absalom is one of the solemn characters of the Word of God. You know there are some most blessed characters in Scripture and there are some most solemn characters, and Absalom is one

of the latter. I just want to pause to make one observation here. I do not want to follow it up; I just want to drop it for your consideration. You know David, among his wives, married Maacah, the daughter of a heathen king, an ungodly king, and she was the mother of Absalom. You have to walk carefully on these points. How often there have been those who have gone astray, and as they have sown so they have reaped!

But I want to say one or two things concerning the young man Absalom. First of all this: *from a natural point of view really he had everything*. He had beauty, he was a most handsome man. He had popularity, he won the hearts of the people. He had ambitions and he achieved them. But what of Absalom's end? What did all his beauty, and all his popularity, and all his ambitions avail for him, when as a young man he was cut off in the midst of his days? Solemn thing, this! My friends, the world teems with Absaloms today, those who are only concerned about their own popularity and ambitions. And let us be clear on this – we all have this spirit of Absalom in our carnal hearts by nature, every one of us. If grace prevent not, the thing we are after is the fulfilment of our own ambitions, popularity or fame or riches or possessions or honour. And these Absaloms are not just found in the world; some of them sit under the sound of the gospel. Now I say this in love, but beware of being found an Absalom. Naturally he had so much, he gained so much. He was a prince, he was handsome, he was honoured, he fulfilled his ambitions, he stole the hearts of the people. “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” O beware of the spirit of Absalom! It is in us all by nature, in our carnal hearts, but beware of it! It can never bring you to heaven. The Lord grant us more of this spirit:

“Were I possessor of the earth,
And called the stars my own,
Without Thy graces and Thyself,
I were a wretch undone!”

Another thing concerning the young man Absalom: *he had a most godly father*. David, with all his faults, was a most godly man. He was eminent in godliness and in grace. The Holy Spirit has recorded that he was a man after God's own heart. And Absalom was David's son, yet he never possessed David's grace. Grace does not run in families. Now I know that the Lord in much mercy has ordained that many of the elect

shall be the children of His children, and we can see the love and the compassion and the mercy in it. The Lord has ordained that so many shall be the answer to their godly parents' prayers. But I want to say this: you may have godly parents, but the prayers of those godly parents will not save you if you are never taught to pray for yourself. What did even godly David's prayers avail for sinful Absalom? Real religion is so personal. The Lord, speaking of His dear children, says, "Born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Grace does not run in families. Beware of having this lurking in your heart, that because your parents and grandparents had grace, you will have grace. You know, Satan is very subtle with this suggestion, and we drift along and take it for granted that the time will come, and can happily sing, "The appointed time rolls on apace." But does it roll on apace, and has it rolled on apace in your heart? Real religion is personal. To have a godly father, a godly mother, will not take you to heaven. Absalom was David's son but he perished in his sins.

Now just one more thing concerning the young man Absalom: Absalom was *a young man who did think about death*. There are so many girls and boys, young men and young women, who never think about death. If it comes to them, they thrust the thought from them. You know, we hate to be reminded that we must die, and left to ourselves we would make our nest and live here as if we were here for ever. But Absalom was different. He had thoughts concerning death, he had thoughts concerning his end. But what effect did they have? Did they bring him to seek mercy? Did they bring him to cry, "Teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart unto wisdom"? No, my friends, they brought him only to this – to seek that when he was dead his name should still be honoured. For we read that in his lifetime he took and reared up for himself a pillar. He was going to have some wonderful monument, "a pillar, which is in the king's dale, for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance; and he called the pillar after his own name, and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place." Well, Absalom had his monument, and years after it was still called by Absalom's name, and still Absalom was remembered by it. But what good did it do him? What did it profit him?

I want to make two points here: the first is this – when we come to our end, *it is not what men think about us*. I remember some years ago, a

dear young lady was dying and she asked me to bury her, and then she said, “What will you say about me? Will you say at the grave, ‘in sure and certain hope’?” And I said, “Yes, I believe I shall.” And then she said this: “It is not what you think about me; it is what the Lord thinks about me.” You know, there are many things spoken of people when they come to the end, but is our witness in heaven, and is our record on high? Solemn thing to have a name written in the earth! Where do you want your name to be written? If there is grace in your heart, this is where you will want your unworthy name to be written:

“My name from the palms of His hands,
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains,
In marks of indelible grace.”

Have you got a sweet hope that your unworthy name is written there?

The other point is this. When you think of death, when you hear of death from this pulpit, when you are reminded, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,” what effect does it have? With Absalom it had an effect, but it had the wrong effect. If the Holy Spirit uses it and sanctifies it, it will have this effect – *it will bring you to long to be prepared*, to seek to be made ready, to pray to be made right, to have an interest in Christ and in His most precious blood. Have you come so far in your religion that, as you hear of a solemn eternity, the great thing is to be made ready, to be made right, to be fitted, to be prepared? Now I say these few things concerning this solemn character Absalom. May the Lord save us from being Absaloms.

Now this question, “*Is the young man safe?*” This was the point which exercised David’s heart: “Is the young man safe?” I want to bring a few aspects of this before you this evening as the Lord shall help me. There are so many young men and young women in our midst, so many here tonight, and this word has been on my heart since last Sabbath, when I noticed how many young men and young women, how many boys and girls we have in our midst. Then this is the great question, the great point – *eternal safety*: “Is the young man safe?” It is a vital question.

First of all I would bring it before those of you who are members of the church, and those of you who are not but who fear the Lord. I want

to press this point on you, I want you to answer it before the Lord. *The young men, the young women, are they a concern to you?* Do you ever have to pray for them? Are they ever a burden to you? You know, my friends, in the church of God when the Lord blesses, when He brings out, when He brings forth, it is usually preceded by a spirit of real prayer flowing from the heart, Spirit-indited prayer. Now I know the Lord is a sovereign in the way in which He blesses, but this is the usual way. But let me ask you this question, Is there this exercise? How long is it since you had to fall before the Lord and lay down before the Lord those who are a burden to you, and plead with the Lord for their soul's eternal welfare? A father in Israel, a mother in Israel, is one who wrestles before the Lord in this way. You know in the last century, when there was much real spiritual prosperity, one great secret of it was the deep and weighty exercise of the godly as cases were laid on their hearts and they had to bear them continually before the Lord.

I remember in my early days of preaching, I often used to meet with some of the very aged saints in Manchester, some over 90 years of age, who in the days of their youth sat under the ministry of Gadsby's successor, A. B. Taylor. And in those days he numbered his church by hundreds; not his congregation, his church! And those godly old souls told me this – that the ministry of some of the men of the last century was no different from the ministry of our godly men today; and if you read A. B. Taylor's sermons you will find that they are very simple. But it was the *power*, it was the *authority* that attended it. What I am after is this – there were so many godly, deeply-exercised hearers with cases laid upon their heart, and this was their concern for one and another: “Is the young man safe?” And they had to travail in birth until Christ was formed in them. O that the Lord might grant something of this spirit amongst us! “Is the young man safe?” And do not limit this just to older people. You might be very young and the Lord might have richly blessed you. You know, a person can be a father in Israel or a mother in Israel, and yet be very young in years. And I believe sometimes, especially in the time of your first love, there is this spirit, this exercise before the Lord, that the Lord will command His blessing, even life for evermore. “Is the young man safe?”

I want to *speak now to parents*. What are your ambitions for your children? What are your chief desires, your chief concerns for them? Is it this – their souls' eternal safety? Or are you satisfied to see them going the

way of the world, to see them satisfied with earthly happiness, earthly pleasures, earthly possessions? Or is this the great point you long for – their souls’ eternal welfare? Then how often are you led forth in earnest prayer on their behalf, and how often are you able to speak a word in season to them? A word of restraint, a word of reproof, a word of warning? O the blessings with which the Lord has attended such words over the years! May there be this vital exercise: “Is the young man safe?”

I just mention this *concerning the Sabbath School*, those of you who labour there. Is this your concern? Not just that there might be something of interest or even profit, but you know, however young, each one has a never-dying soul. My friends, I do not feel that any of us really realise the awful weight, the solemnity of it, what it is to possess a soul which must endure eternally either in hell or in heaven. When there is some little view of it, then there is this exercise, there is this concern: “Is the young man safe?”

Now I want to come to this question in a different way. I want to *speak to you dear young friends*, and I want the question to be in this sense: “Is the young man safe?” – not someone else, but YOU; how it touches you personally, how it touches your eternal welfare. You each have a soul, you each must die. How soon we know not. Then there is the judgment day. But are you safe? Have you got that sweet assurance that it will be well with you when you come to die? And is that assurance built on solid ground, or is it just something that you take for granted? “Is the young man safe?” As you go home tonight, may this be an exercise the Lord fixes and fastens in your heart, and may you find no peace until the Lord grants you that sweet peace which is to be found in Jesus.

It may be that the Lord will bring this solemn persuasion on your spirit that you are not safe, that all is not well. O this will try you! This will make you sad; this will grieve you. But it will be the most blessed day in your life if the Lord for the first time brings you into real concern for your soul’s eternal welfare. “Is the young man safe?” Well, *are* you safe?

“Am I ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer’s blood?”

I just want to touch it with you personally in two other senses. One is *the way you have to walk*. The only way which is safe is the Lord's way. Beware of departing from it! Especially those of you who fear God, as you seek to walk, as you seek to live day by day, may this be the great point: Am I safe? You are only safe as you walk in the Lord's way. You know, there are many slippery ways, and really the great exercise with a young believer will be this – to be kept. There are so many slippery ways. But may it often be the exercise with you: "Is the young man safe?" in this sense: that the Lord might keep you, that the prayer might often be yours: "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." We are only safe as we walk out our pilgrimage as the Lord holds us up. We have not any power, any ability to stand: "Hold Thou me up and I shall be safe." "Is the young man safe?"

And then in this other sense. There will be *times when you have to make a decision*, when you have to make a choice. May this be the great question: "Is the way safe, and am I safe in walking in this way?" Not, will it profit me? Will it please me? Will it satisfy my carnal desires? Is it safe? And may there be this written upon your heart:

"The way I walk cannot be wrong,
If Jesus be but there."

And if Jesus is not there, then the way must be wrong, the way cannot be safe.

"Is the young man safe?" Now my dear young friends, I say it in love, *do not take it for granted*. You know, David asked this question, "Is the young man safe?" Ahimaaz was the first to answer, and he did not deal with this point faithfully, he did not deal with it clearly. The answer he gave was very indistinct. There was no certain sound. He thought he was being kind to David. Now David asks this point concerning Absalom, "Is he safe?" and he does not get a clear answer. The question was not really dealt with. He was not really told whether Absalom was safe or not. All he says is, he saw a great tumult but he knew not what it was. But another messenger came, Cushai, and the question is put to Cushai, and he is faithful. In love he tells David the truth, and he tells him clearly what has happened to Absalom: "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is."

Now I want to say this very affectionately to you, my dear young friends. When a gospel minister probes you and searches you, it is in love. It is Cushi that will profit you, not Ahimaaz. There are those like Ahimaaz about, and as you have this exercise, “Is my soul safe?” they will not give you a distinct answer. They leave it in abeyance, they leave you with a “Who can tell?” You come to the house of God, and you keep the Sabbath, and you like being with the Lord’s people, so perhaps everything is all right. You know, Joab did not want to send Ahimaaz. He ran unsent. He was not a sent messenger, and he came the easy way. He ran by the way of the plain and he got there smoothly, and it was smooth tidings. He did not speak the truth; he was not faithful. But Cushi was the one appointed, the one who was sent. He came the rugged way by the mountains, and he clearly spoke the truth. Do not be offended if you find me to be a Cushi, because it is in love. Those like Ahimaaz will never profit your soul.

“Is the young man safe?” Then you come with this enquiry: “*What is it that makes a young man, a young woman safe?*” Well, it is only one thing: *the new birth*. The Lord Jesus insisted upon it: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye must be born again.” And none are safe, none are secure, but those who are born again by the Holy Spirit of God. But you say: “What is it that I have to look for in my own experience before I know that I am safe?” May you never be set down short. You may have feelings and exercises and desires and concerns and prayers, but do not be satisfied with these. I believe an exercised sinner can only know that he is safe, eternally safe, when he is blessed with a *personal saving knowledge of Jesus*. Let me be clear. I do not say that that sinner is not safe until he comes there. A child of God is eternally safe in the covenant of grace, and a child of God is safe in the purposes of God from the moment the Lord begins to work in his heart by the Holy Spirit. But you cannot rest in any sweet assurance that you are safe until you are brought to that personal saving knowledge of Jesus. “They shall all know Me, saith the Lord,” *all of them*, “from the least to the greatest.” It is in a knowledge of Jesus that eternal life is found.

“To know my Jesus crucified,
By far excels all things beside.”

O may this be the great point you are after! Not just to be well thought of by others, not just to have some experience, but: “That I may know Him.” And it sweetly joins up with that word: “That which I see not, teach Thou me.” Perhaps there are a few dear young friends who are concerned, but you say, “I do not see my safety. There are many things a child of God possesses and I cannot see them in myself. There are many things I do not know. That which I see not, teach Thou me, especially to know myself in my helplessness, sin and ruin, and to know Jesus in His great salvation.” This is to be safe, eternally safe. But “*Is the young man safe?*”

I just want to come now to say a few things on this sweet truth, *the safety of the people of God*. O there is no sweeter truth in the whole of the gospel than this – the safety of God’s dear people! My mind goes back to my spiritual beginnings. I felt I knew nothing and had nothing, and one Sabbath we sang the 667th hymn, and over the top it said, “Safety in Christ”; and O the weight, the preciousness of that line, “Safety in Christ”! Such a view of the eternal blessedness of the people of God as saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation! Such a concern as to whether this blessedness was mine! Such a desire that it might be! “Safety in Christ.” It is one of the sweetest themes in the gospel. The people of God are safe. They were safe in Christ before the world had any being, as safe in the covenant of grace as when they are put down in heaven at last. “Safety in Christ.” They are safe as built on a sure Foundation, the Rock of Ages. They are safe as “kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation”; safe as they are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; safe as they shelter under the Redeemer’s most precious blood. “Safety in Christ.”

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” “Safety in Christ.” No sweeter theme than this – the safety of the people of God in the Lord Jesus! O may there be this sweet assurance in many a heart that, whatever else, I know that I am safe in Jesus. And those who are unconcerned, you who drift along, may you be brought to this, “Am I safe? What do I know of this blessed safety, and what sweet assurance, what solid assurance have I that when I come to my end I shall be safe eternally?” “*Is the young man Absalom safe?*”

Now in closing, I just want to speak a word on a different point; that is, *concerning David in this dreadful grief that he endured*. There may be times when in measure you have to walk as David did. Perhaps not in this same particular but something weighing upon you, resting on your heart, and it fills you with grief, and you cannot find any resting place. Well, David came to his last end, and upon his dying-bed there was one thing which sorely grieved him. That was that his own family were not as he desired. He looks around in his own family. O so much sin, so many failures, that wicked Amnon, this ungodly Absalom, perishing in their sins! So many things to grieve David in his own family, but now he is on his dying-bed he finds a resting place. He views the covenant sure, his hope all centres there; he views that there is an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure. My friends, if you are brought in measure into David's grief, may you know David's resting place. And when you come to your last end (and there will be many things in your life which are not as you would desire them, especially as you consider your own failures, your own shortcomings and sins) may you have this blessed resting place – the covenant of grace confirmed by an oath and sealed with the blood of Jesus. May you, like David, be able to die in peace: "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath He made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. This is all my salvation and all my desire." The Lord add His blessing. Amen.