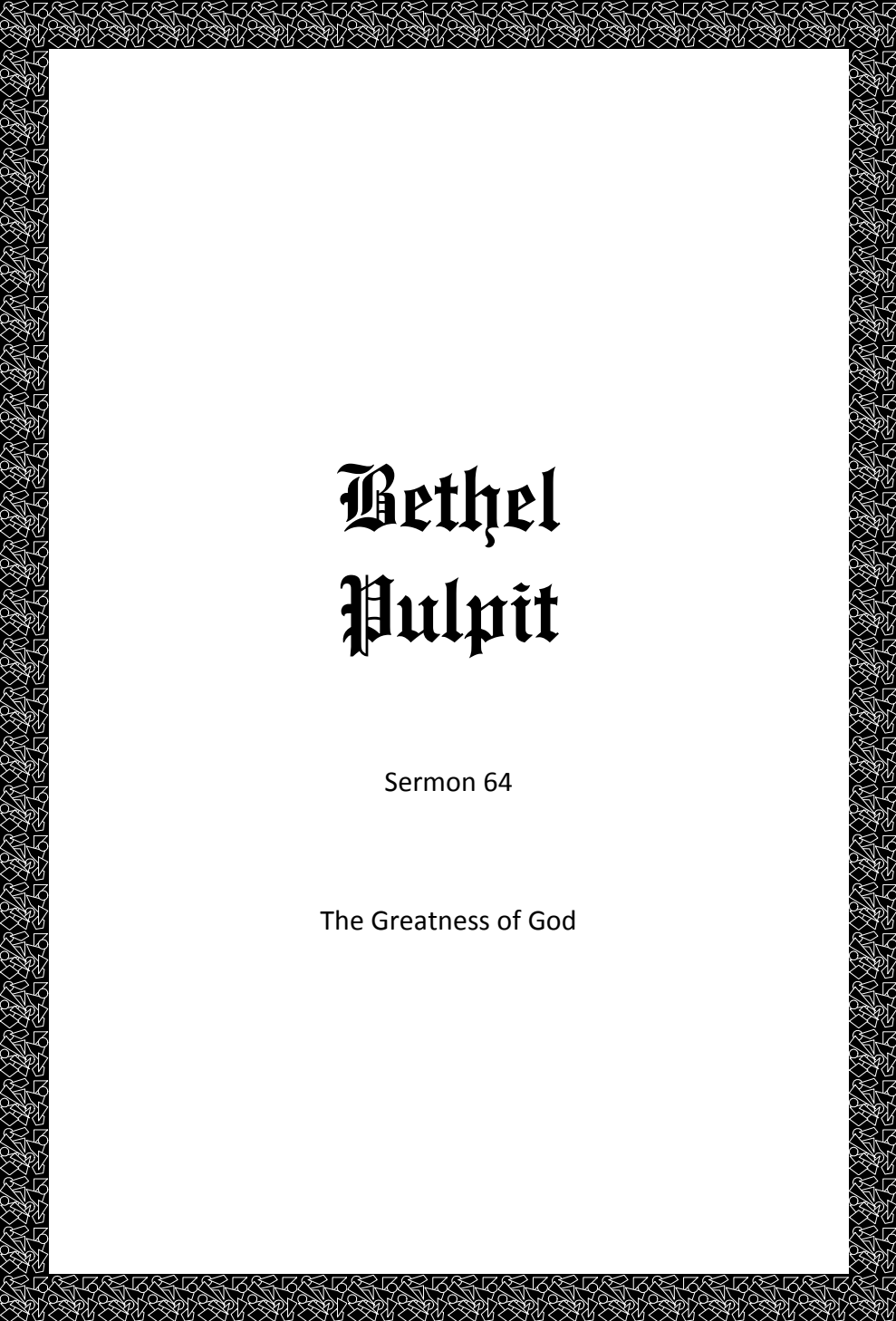




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 64

The Greatness of God

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 13th September, 1990**

Text: *“Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?” (Job 26. 14.)*

I wonder if any of you have come to chapel this evening with hard questions, things in your experience, things in your life, which you cannot understand, and you cannot find the answer to them. Well, the Book of Job is a book of hard questions. Have you noticed how many hard questions there are in the Book of Job? You have question after question. Some of these questions God asks; some of them Satan asks; some of them Job asks; some of them his three friends ask. When we come to the end of the book, some of these questions are still left unanswered. Now it is a book full of questions, hard questions, difficult questions, perplexing questions, yet you come to the end of the book, and many of those questions God has not answered. Perhaps some of you have things in your life, and you say, “Why did the Lord allow this? Why did the Lord ordain this?” And you cannot find the answer. There have been some painful things, haven’t there, over the years? We say, “Why?” We cannot find the answers to these questions.

Sometimes there are perplexities in our lives, things which we just cannot understand. Perhaps many, many years ago we felt so clearly that the Lord was leading us in a pathway. We even felt to have a clear word, and it never did come to pass. The years have rolled away, and at last we have to think, “Well, we must have been quite mistaken, mistaken in that exercise; it must have been completely false.” We say, “Why, Lord? Why was I mistaken in this exercise? I felt so clear on this point, and it never did come to pass.” We wonder why there are those words we thought the Lord had given us, and the Lord cannot have given them to us.

All these questionings! Sometimes, why it is that God’s people can disagree? There is this dear child of God, and that dear child of God, and yet there is complete disagreement. Perhaps you feel a union with this one, and a union with that one, yet there does not seem to be the slightest union between the two of them. Perhaps with some of God’s

people, you have not any doubt that they are the Lord's people, yet you yourself have come into disagreement with them. You say, "Why, Lord? Was I wrong or were they wrong?" Things come into your life and you look at that word, "We *know* that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." We *know* it, (don't we?) but we do not always see it, and we do not always feel it. There are things which happen to us, things in our congregation, things we see, things we witness, things which come into our lives, and we look at them and say, "How ever can this work together for the honour and glory of God, and for the real, lasting, eternal, good of His people?"

Now these questions! Job knew most of these questions, if not all. Job had some terrible things happen to him. Really he lost everything. You think of it, he lost all his possessions. He was the wealthiest man in the east, and he became a bankrupt. He lost everything. Not many sink as low as that. Then all his children were killed, suddenly, unexpectedly; what you would call accidents, tragedies. Not many come to that, losing all their children. He lost his reputation. Those who once honoured him, now mocked him, scorned him and despised him. He lost his friends, and he lost his health. You think of him, covered from head to foot with boils. Have you ever had a boil, a really painful boil? Job was plagued with them from head to foot. He sat down on a dunghill and he scraped himself. Not many have sunk as low as that. Perhaps worst of all, he lost the love and support and sympathy of his own wife. There he was in Satan's hand, apart from that divine decree, "Touch not his life." If ever a man knew devastation, sorrow, grief, tragedy, it was Job. So it is no wonder there were all these questions he kept asking. Yet when we come right to the end of the Book of Job, right to the end of the forty-second chapter, many of these questions are not answered, and it seems that Job lived and died with many of his questions unanswered.

He had to prove that there were two reasons why many of his questions were never answered. Both of them are suggested in this scripture we have before us. One was this, that God gave him more and yet more a revelation of Himself – God in all His greatness, and all His glory, and all His majesty, and all His power. So we have some of these very remarkable chapters in the Book of Job which deal with the wonders and the glories of creation, and the greatness of God as an almighty Creator. Then, you see, really that *was* the answer to Job's questions, and

was *not* the answer to Job's questions. At the very end, he realised this. How could he, a poor unworthy sinful creature expect God to give him an answer to all his questions? He realised that he had no claim on God.

That is how the Book of Job ends – not with these hard questions being answered. One great question, perhaps *the* great question of the Book of Job is: why did the Lord permit evil? Why did He allow sin to come into this world, and why does God allow godly people to suffer, and at times suffer such awful trials? Now that was a great point with Job: why these terrible sufferings? His three friends gave a multitude of answers. They did not satisfy Job, neither did they satisfy God. At the end of it, Job is brought face to face with this: that if God is so mighty, so powerful, so glorious, so full of majesty, how is it possible that a sinful creature can ever understand His ways, or expect an answer, demand an answer, have a right to an answer? Now Job was left there.

Really at the end he would have been able to say with Abraham, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” He had such views of God's greatness, and His majesty, and His power; and also of divine wisdom intermingled with it all. He knew it, that God could not make a mistake. He never has, He never will. Yet he did not receive an answer. “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.” You cannot trace them. If a person walks in the sea, you cannot see any trace of his goings. There are not any footmarks, any prints. “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.” He giveth no account of His matters. But O to say with Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord.” Or to say with Job, “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”

Now perhaps you too have these questions tonight. May you be able to leave them all in the hands of God, who is “too wise to err, too good to be unkind.” And “what thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter.”

“Hereafter He will make me know,
And I shall surely find,
He was too wise to err, and O,
Too good to be unkind.”

So in these chapters I read to you (25 and 26), we have the greatness, the majesty of God. “Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?” Didn’t Job have some views of God’s majesty and glory! “Hell is naked before Him, and destruction hath no covering. He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in His thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them” – the glory and the majesty of God. And Job is silent before Him. “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” He is silent in the dust. He feels he cannot speak one word. O to be like Aaron: “and Aaron held his peace”! Both his sons (and they were priests) were cut off even while performing their priestly office. They died without mercy in their sins. Aaron was forbidden even to weep for them. “And Aaron held his peace.” We think of the dear Lord Jesus standing in the sinner’s place. “But Jesus held His peace.” That is the first thing.

The second thing is this. At the end of this amazing account of God’s greatness and glory and sovereignty, Job makes an almost startling statement. He says, “Lo, these are parts of His ways.” In other words, Job says: when I have seen all that I have of the greatness and glory of God in creation, and His divine almighty power, it is only just a little part of His ways. Perhaps if any man had a revelation of the glory of God, His power in nature, it was Job, but he realised he only had a glimpse. He could only see a little of it. The original is something like this: Lo, this is only the fringe of His ways – just the edge of it. Job realised this, and I wonder if we have ever realised it, that however much we have seen of the greatness and glory and majesty and sovereignty of our God, we have only just seen the tip of it, the fringe of it. “Lo, these are parts of His ways.”

So Job realised that because he could only see *part* of God’s ways, then his hard questions would never really be answered. He never would fully understand the mysterious providence of God, and God’s wisdom. In creation he only saw part of His ways, in providence he saw only part of His ways. That is the reason why you and I are so often bewildered. We see the Lord’s hand, but we do not realise that it is only part of His ways that we see, that the greater part of His way is hidden from our sight. I believe if we had more of a gracious realisation of that, it would put things

in their right place. When we have seen everything that we can see, it is only just a little. We do not see all the purposes of God; we do not see all the mysteries of His providence; we do not see all His wisdom. So much of it is hidden from our sight. Yet we rest here:

“He must, and will at all times keep in view,
His glory and His people’s welfare too;
Bright days, dark nights, the furnace and the flood,
He overrules for Zion’s real good.”

Beloved friends, do you believe it? “Lo, these are parts of His ways.” It is only a little of His way that He shows us, only a little is revealed to us; only a little that we see. Then how can we understand? “Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?” What does all this mean, “How little a portion is heard of Him”? It really means that all we know of the Lord’s power, of His glory, of His greatness, His doings in nature, in creation, in providence, in grace, it is just like a murmur, it is just like a whisper. “How little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power, who can understand?” Now do not misunderstand this. It does not just mean a thunderstorm – the display of God’s power there – who can understand it? Though (in passing) have you noticed in the Bible we have so much concerning thunderstorms? It seems as if God’s ancient people were fascinated by them. The twenty-ninth Psalm deals with a thunderstorm. But it doesn’t mean that here. All that you and I know of the greatness of God, the greatness of His works, is just like a murmur, a tiny whisper. To view it all, to hear it all, would be like those mighty claps of deafening thunder. That is something we cannot understand, and we never will understand.

“Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him, but the thunder of His power who can understand.” Amidst it all, on a few occasions, Job found a resting place. On one occasion he found this resting place: “But he knoweth the way that I take.” *He knoweth*. Now there is a resting place there. With all your questions, there is a resting place. He knows. He understands. He cares. “He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” That was a resting place. He did not know the answer to all his questions, but he found that resting place.

Another: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." You say, Job, do you know why all these things are happening to you? Job would say, No. You say, Job, do you know the reason for the mystery of all the evil in the world? Job would say, No. You say, Job, do you know why you have to endure all these sorrows? Job would say, No. But Job was brought to this: one thing I do know. It was better than the answer to all these questions. Job said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." It may be that the Lord will never give you an answer to all your questions and perplexities, but it will be a thousand mercies, if you do not know the answer to those, but you do know this: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Seek that, and may the Lord make it over to you. Then three things. You look on the Lord Jesus and say, "I know that He is the Redeemer." That is the first thing. I know He is the Redeemer, He shed His precious blood to redeem His people. I know He is the Redeemer. And secondly, I know that He liveth. He once died, was once buried, but I know He liveth. And this is it, the third thing: and I know He is mine. May the Lord make these things over to you. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me."

"Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?" The thunder of His power was displayed in creation, when He spake and it was done, when by a word of omnipotence He created all things out of nothing, and everything very good. You can look on the wonder of creation. Someone once said he could not understand how anyone could look up into the heavens on a starry night and still be an atheist. You look at the wonders of creation, and then to think that these are only part of His ways; how little a portion is heard of Him, even in His revelation of Himself in creation. "But the thunder of His power who can understand?" There was no-one there to witness it but Himself, the Three-One God, when He said, "Let there be . . ." and there was. May we ever remember that God is our Creator, and we are His creatures. He is an almighty Creator. This is the One before whom we stand, whose laws are given for us to obey, whose laws we have broken, this great Creator against whom we have rebelled, against whom we have sinned, whom we have disobeyed, this

great Creator who is angry with the wicked every day, this great Creator to whom we must one day give an account. Yet this great Creator has made Himself knowable, made Himself approachable in His dear Son, that sinners can know Him personally and savingly, and love Him and know His love toward them, and feel and believe that He is theirs. “This God is our God for ever and ever.” Dear child of God, it is this almighty Creator who keeps you from falling, who upholds you, who “with heaven and earth at His command, waits to answer prayer.”

“Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?” We have a few glimpses. The flood, that terrible flood was a display of omnipotence. “Lo, these are parts of His ways.” The dividing of the waters of the Red Sea, that wonderful miracle that the Children of Israel might go over dry-shod, and the swallowing up of all the Egyptians. “Lo, these are parts of His ways.” We have these little glimpses right through the Old Testament, these displays of divine power. No doubt you can think of many, but they are only parts of His ways. One day this world will come to an end, and then it will be the thunder of His power, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll. The thunder of His power in that day; there is only one comment here: “But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?” If we tremble before these little parts of His ways that we see, the little portion that we hear of Him, what about the thunder of omnipotent power in that last great day, when the very rocks shall shake, and the wicked shall call on the rocks and mountains to cover them, and hide them from the wrath of God and the Lamb?

“Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?” Then you see the resurrection morning. That was the thunder of His power; that wonderful display of omnipotence. The blessed Redeemer laid in the grave, but God raised Him from the dead.

“Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids His rise;
Christ has opened Paradise.”

That is the thunder of His power, and it will be that thunder of His power which will open every grave in the last great day. And they shall come forth, “some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

“Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?” But I believe the most awful, solemn, glorious display of this was at Calvary. It was in the cross of Christ – the thunder of His power, that divine vengeance, that outpouring of divine wrath which must have rested on God’s people to all eternity, and sunk them into hell to rise no more.

“On Him almighty vengeance fell,
That must have sunk a world to hell;
He bore it for a chosen race,
And thus became their Hiding-place.”

“The thunder of His power who can understand?” Can you understand that divine wrath which was poured out on the dear, harmless Lamb of God as He hung bleeding, dying on the cross, His people’s substitute and Saviour, and how His divinity upheld His sacred humanity?

“That wrath would have kindled a hell
Of never-abating despair,
In millions of creatures, which fell
On Jesus, and spent itself there.”

Some of you have had a glimpse of that by faith, haven’t you? That divine vengeance, when it fell on Christ, it spent itself there.

“The thunder of His power, who can understand?” Well, that was well-nigh two thousand years ago, but O, the power of that finished work, the power of that atonement; power to save the vilest of sinners from sinking into hell; power to snatch them as brands from the burning; power to change the most hard-hearted, rebellious heart and life; power in that precious sin-atonement blood to wash away the vilest of sins; power upon earth to pronounce forgiveness; and the whole of that power conveyed in that triumphant dying cry, “It is finished.” “Treasure up that sacred word, whole and undiminished.”

Well, may we know something of divine power, and may we view it in Jesus, flowing in the channel of mercy. May we view it for us and not

against us. “Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?”