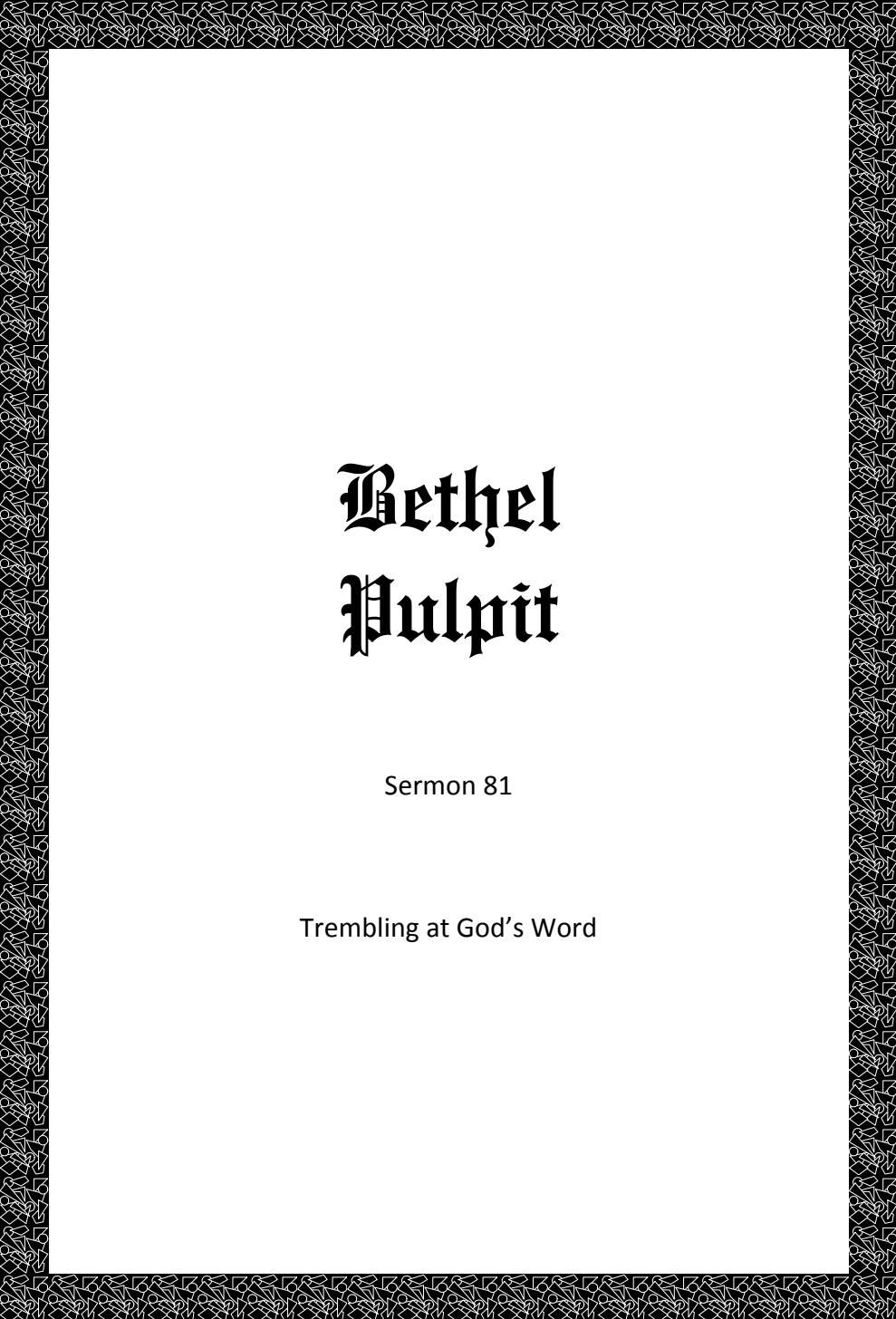




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 81

Trembling at God's Word

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 22nd March, 1992**

Text: *"And trembleth at My Word" (Isaiah 66. 2).*

This is the attitude we should each have concerning the holy Word of God, the posture in which we should be found whenever we come to God's Word. We are never to take it for granted. We are never to be careless concerning it. We have never to be heedless. We are to tremble at God's Word.

Now I take it, and I hope I am right in this, that each one here this evening does believe that the Bible is the holy, inspired, infallible Word of God. In these degenerate days we need continually to be reminded of it, the preciousness of God's gift, the Bible, His holy Word, given by divine inspiration. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." We believe in its verbal inspiration – that is, the words as well as the thoughts and ideas. We believe it is infallible, that though written by so many different people of such varying styles and abilities over so many years, yet the content is one. There is a complete unity and the Word of God is without mistake from beginning to end.

Now it is God's Word, and as such we are called to tremble at it. It is so important to have a right attitude to God's Word – not just to say, "Well, I believe it is true"; not just to say, "I believe it is inspired"; not just to say, "I believe it is infallible." The point is, does it have any effect in our heart, any effect in our life? When we come to hear, does it have an abiding effect? When we go home, does it have an abiding effect then? Does it ever put something right in our lives that was wrong? Does it ever make us go home like the old woman who had a light weight in her shop, and she ran home from chapel to throw it away? It is the *effect* of the Word, and it is a point we perhaps do not often speak about, but it is important, it is vital, because by this inspired, infallible Word, we must stand or fall eternally. So we are called to tremble at it. God Himself says, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken." And if God has spoken, then we are to tremble at His Word.

Now you see the subject, the theme, and you realise it is not one which is much spoken of today. But I am sure you realise something of the importance of it, not just to *have* the Word, to *believe* the Bible, to *believe* that it is inspired, to *believe* that it is infallible, to *believe* that it is God's Word, but what effect does it have in your life and in mine?

Of course, the Psalm from which I read tonight, Psalm 119, is the great chapter on the Word of God. David, from beginning to end, tells us just how much it meant to him, how much he valued it, how precious it was to him, the effect it had day and night. And let us just pause to remember this: David only had a little fragment of holy Scripture. He did not have that wonderful Isaiah 53; it was not yet written. He had never read that beautiful passage in Jeremiah: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." He had not any of the gospels; he had never read of the suffering Saviour and the veil rent in twain, and the epistles were not yet written. But that little fragment of Scripture that was already written, which David had, didn't he love it and value it, and didn't it have a gracious, lasting, abiding effect in his heart? So this is the point, the important point, the vital point that you and I should be so concerned about: the effect of God's Word, our attitude to it, our posture before it. And God Himself says it should be this: that we should tremble at His Word.

Well, beloved friends, you say, "What does that mean, to tremble at God's Word?" Well, it does not mean being frightened of it; it does not even mean we have to be like Felix, who, when he heard it, trembled, but it was entirely of the flesh, it was completely carnal, it was not saving, it did not do him any good. What does it mean, to tremble at God's Word? Well, if we do not read it, then we do not tremble at it. If we do not heed it, then we do not tremble at it. If we just argue about it, reason about it, we do not tremble at it. But what does this really mean, if this is God's will concerning the gift of His holy, sacred Word, that we are to tremble at it? Now very simply, I believe it means two things. Firstly, we are to have an awe and reverence for it, and secondly, we are to seek that our lives may be governed and ordered by it. Now as I understand it, that is what it means, to tremble at the Word of God, and if your religion and mine is real, if the new birth has ever taken place, then we shall know what it is to tremble at the Word of God. And while this was on my mind, hovering about my spirit continually was that word of Paul concerning how he and

Silas came and preached to the Thessalonians. He tells them that they received not the Word as the word of men, but they received it “as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” You see, they trembled at the Word.

Well then, what of this awe and reverence for the Word of God? Do we have it? Do we have it as we ought to have it? Not just when you read the Bible in secret – what about when you come to the house of God to hear it read, to hear it preached? In those days of wonderful spiritual prosperity in Scotland, in the former part of the last century at Dundee, where M’Cheyne’s ministry was so blessed, it was a known thing that when the vestry door opened on the Sunday morning, and he ascended the pulpit steps, the people began to tremble, and some began to sob. It was the awful realisation they were going to hear the Word of God, by which they were going to stand or fall eternally. That was more than man. It was the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. It would be a wonderful thing if we came more to the house of God like that, with that spirit of reverence, that spirit of awe, especially concerning God’s holy Word, that we might tremble at it.

You see, there will be a trembling at the Word of God because of the great, almighty, sovereign Lord God that it makes known. There will be the awe, there will be the reverence. “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him.” Beware of having low views about God, views of God in which there is not the awe, there is not the reverence, views of God when you do not tremble before Him. This is popular religion. God says, “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.” Never make God such an one as yourself. Tremble at His Word. God says, “They limited the Holy One of Israel.” Never limit the Holy One of Israel. Tremble at His Word. We sometimes sing (and I am not sure whether we always think about what we are singing):

“Keep silence all created things,
And wait your Maker’s nod;
My soul stands trembling while she sings
The honours of her God.”

To tremble at His Word, especially as that Word reveals the great, almighty, sovereign God in all His holiness and righteousness, and in all

the spotless purity of that law which He has given. Now do you know this spirit, to tremble at His Word? To stand in awe and reverence before the great God of heaven and earth? To feel, “What is man, that Thou art mindful of him”?

We need also to tremble at the Word of God when it speaks solemn warnings, solemn threatenings; when it speaks of eternity to come, of a judgment day, of the everlasting sentence; when it speaks of the blessedness of heaven, the misery of hell; when it speaks, “Come in, ye blessed”; it speaks, “Depart ye cursed.” Now do you hear it with a hard neck? “He, that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” O for grace to tremble at His Word, to tremble at that word of judgment, to tremble at that word of condemnation!

In former days, better days, there was much of this under the powerful application of the Holy Spirit. I just happened to glance at an old magazine during this week – a most ungodly, wicked and cruel man who happened in the mysterious providence of God to be found in John Warburton’s chapel, and all through the service he was meditating his evil and wickedness and cruelty, especially the way he was going to beat his godly wife. He was not even listening to the sermon. Suddenly he heard a word from John Warburton, “Sinner, be sure your sin will find you out, either in this world or the next.” He trembled, he went out a different man. We hear and read much of that in past years, past generations, that trembling at the Word of God as the solemn warnings were applied with power by the Holy Spirit. O but may you have a heart softened, and grace be given to tremble at God’s Word!

Now another thing is this. The doctrine of God’s eternal choice, the doctrine of election, have you ever trembled before it? As in eternity past God’s choice was made, and there that everlasting gulf was fixed between the saved and the lost, as He set His sovereign love upon the objects of His choice, and as He left the rest to perish in their sin, O did you ever tremble before it? “Can I bear the piercing thought: what if my name should be left out?” I go back to when I was a teenager. I could go to the spot where I trembled concerning God’s eternal decree. What if it had passed me by? And what if it had left me out? Now are these things

any concern to you? O beware of a spirit of fatalism (it never came from God), either concerning yourself or concerning those you love.

Now the new birth, the work of grace, will bring you to tremble at the Word. There will be trembling in this, that as you are brought to true repentance, repentance before a holy, heart-searching God, repentance acknowledging your sin, repentance confessing it, forsaking it, repentance leaving the world, you will tremble at the Word of God. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” But you will tremble at the Word. These will be vital, solemn, eternal realities, and as a repenting sinner, you will be brought to tremble at the Word, to forsake your sin, to flee from your sin, and to flee from condemnation to the hope set before you, What about your attitude to the Word of God? What about your posture?

But we come to the work of the Lord Jesus. If you are taught by the Spirit of God, if ever you tremble, if ever there is that holy awe and reverence, it will be when by faith you have a little glimpse of Gethsemane, and you see the incarnate Son of God sweating great drops of blood, falling to the ground. And there you will tremble at His Word. As you see Him in the judgment hall, the scourging, the smiting, the spitting, the mocking; and then as you go to Calvary and you see that matchless love of the Saviour, and you see the cruel spear, the nails, the crown of thorns, and more than that, the hiding of His Father’s face, the pouring out of divine wrath, the bearing of the sins of all His people, the cries and the groans, you will tremble before it. You will. It is a solemn, eternally solemn thing if you can go to Calvary and there retain a heart of steel. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger.” When the Lord Jesus suffered and bled and died, even the very rocks trembled, inanimate rocks trembled.

“The rocks could feel Thy powerful death,
And tremble, and asunder part;
O rend with Thy expiring breath,
The harder marble of my heart.”

Do you know what it is to tremble at the foot of the cross?

Sometimes there will be a trembling in this – as to whether your religion is right, as to whether you have ever been born again, as to whether you are on the way to heaven, as to whether you are in the secret or out of it, whether God has ever put you among the children. O there will be that trembling before His Word! With fear and trembling you will seek “to make your calling and election sure.” You will say, “If it be so, Lord, tell me, and if it be not so, tell me.” Now do you know what it is to be brought to that place of awe and reverence, that right posture, that right attitude before the Word of God? How do you read it? How do you hear it? Do you read it, do you hear it, in the light of eternity? For by this Word we shall stand, or by it we shall fall.

Sometimes God speaks His Word personally to the heart, He sends it home, seals it home with power, and the effect will always be this: it will humble you; you will tremble at His Word. There will be the awe, the reverence upon your spirit. You will not speak lightly about it. You will not boast about it. Those who tremble at the Word of God, it can be seen in their life and in their conversation. Their hearts are solemnised, made tender; they are humble, in the fear of God, with sacred reverence, with holy awe; it may be seen resting upon their spirit. “And trembleth at My Word.” This is the right way, the right attitude, the right posture, to tremble at God’s Word.

Then there is the other side of it, not just to have the awe and the reverence for God’s Word, but for our lives to be completely ordered and directed by it. Now in that sense we are called to tremble at God’s Word. The pre-eminent example of this in all Scripture is Moses, the man of God. You can read through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and there you see a man who is a servant to God’s Word, if you will, a slave to God’s Word. Now let us be clear, Moses was a man of great natural ability. He was a prince. He was educated in all the arts of the land of Egypt. Yet in constructing the tabernacle, and also in leading the children of Israel through the wilderness, he was not to have any mind of his own. It must have been very humbling to the flesh, very crucifying to the flesh. But you have this expression innumerable times over, that as the Lord commanded Moses, so did he. In building the tabernacle, he was not to choose the size or shape of any nail or hinge or pin. “See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.” We too, like Moses, have a pattern given to us in the mount, a pattern in

God's holy Word, a pattern affecting the whole of our behaviour, a pattern affecting every child of God here upon earth, a pattern affecting our lives, our families, our relationships one with another. We have a pattern of what true religion is, and what it is not. We have a pattern concerning the way we behave, in everything. There was an old minister, and when he preached he used to say this: "Have we a religion according to the heavenly pattern?" It is a good point. There is that pattern laid down. Moses had it; we have it. But pride, unbelief, self-will – we want to do our own way, our own thing. We want to do that which is pleasing to us, pleasing to the flesh.

O but tremble at God's Word in this sense: we want to walk in loving obedience to the Lord Jesus and His commandments as made known in His holy Word. This trembling at His Word is not something legal; it is the obedience of love; it is the walk of love; it is obedience to the Saviour; it is following the Saviour; it is seeing it all in the Lord Jesus, seeing it all bound up with His death, with His love. O that obedience of faith to the revealed will of God in His holy Word! It is not what you think, it is not what I think; it is what the Lord Himself has commanded. And, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

Years ago, I read a little story of a woman who had a book given to her. It was supposed to be a good book. She tried to read it but she did not like it at all. She found it so boring, so uninteresting, so unprofitable, that in the end she put it away on top of a cupboard out of sight, and she forgot all about it. Some time later, she went on holiday and met a most charming gentleman, and spent a lot of time with him. It was the best part of the holiday to her. To her amazement, she found out this delightful gentleman was the author of that book. Well, you know what happened. As soon as she got back home at the end of the holiday, she went straight to the top of the cupboard and took the old book down, and started reading it. It was a delightful book to her now. She thought, Surely this is not that book I found so boring, so uninteresting. It was a real delight to her to read it through. What had happened? What was the difference? Simply it was this: she now knew and admired the author, and that made all the difference.

This is the vital point here this evening concerning trembling at God's Word, the vital point concerning the obedience of faith, walking in

love, obedience to gospel precepts. “Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, even as Christ also hath loved us.” You look at these things. Perhaps they are of no interest. You look at them. Perhaps they are irksome. But if through precious faith you are brought to know and love the Author, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, then this blessed Book will become a new Book to you. It will be the Lord Jesus in it, His glory in it, His beauty in it, His salvation in it, His commandments in it, “and His commandments are not grievous.”

O but beloved friends, may you and I be found in this right posture. May we go home and be burdened, be exercised about it. We have God’s holy, inspired, infallible Word. We believe it. We contend for it. O but do we tremble at the Word of God? Are we blessed with that true awe and reverence for it, and do we seek that the whole of our lives might be lived in obedience to it?

Now just one or two things in closing. The Lord has made such precious promises to those who tremble at His Word. It is not that we deserve it. God has a sovereign right to command us to tremble at His Word. O but the mercy, the love of it, that He has made such kind, precious promises to those who do. I think of the fifth verse: “Hear the Word of the Lord, ye that tremble at His Word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My name’s sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.” I could tell you about the power of that word over thirty years, when the minister stopped in his sermon. He said he had something to say – but he could not find it. He turned over the pages until in the end he found this. O the power, the weight, the authority! The people went out of chapel that night saying, “Who has been talking to him?” And then to see the amazing way in which the Lord fulfilled it. “He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.” It was fulfilled very quickly. O but these precious promises to those that tremble at His Word!

And then here in this verse, the Lord says, “To this man will I look, that trembleth at My Word.” What does it mean for the Lord to look on him? Well, to look on him in love and mercy, forgiveness, compassion, tenderness; to look on him as He looked on Peter when He broke Peter’s heart, and yet He forgave him; to look on the sinner as He looked down from His cross: “Father forgive, them, they know not what they do”

“Hark! how He prays, (the charming sound
Dwells on His dying lips,) ‘Forgive!’
And every groan and gaping wound
Cries, ‘Father, let the rebels live!’“

We read in the Psalms, “Look Thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as Thou usest to do unto those that love Thy Name.” Here is the promise, and here is the answer to that prayer, poor soul, that the Lord *will* look upon you in love and in mercy, eternally. “To him that trembleth at My Word.”