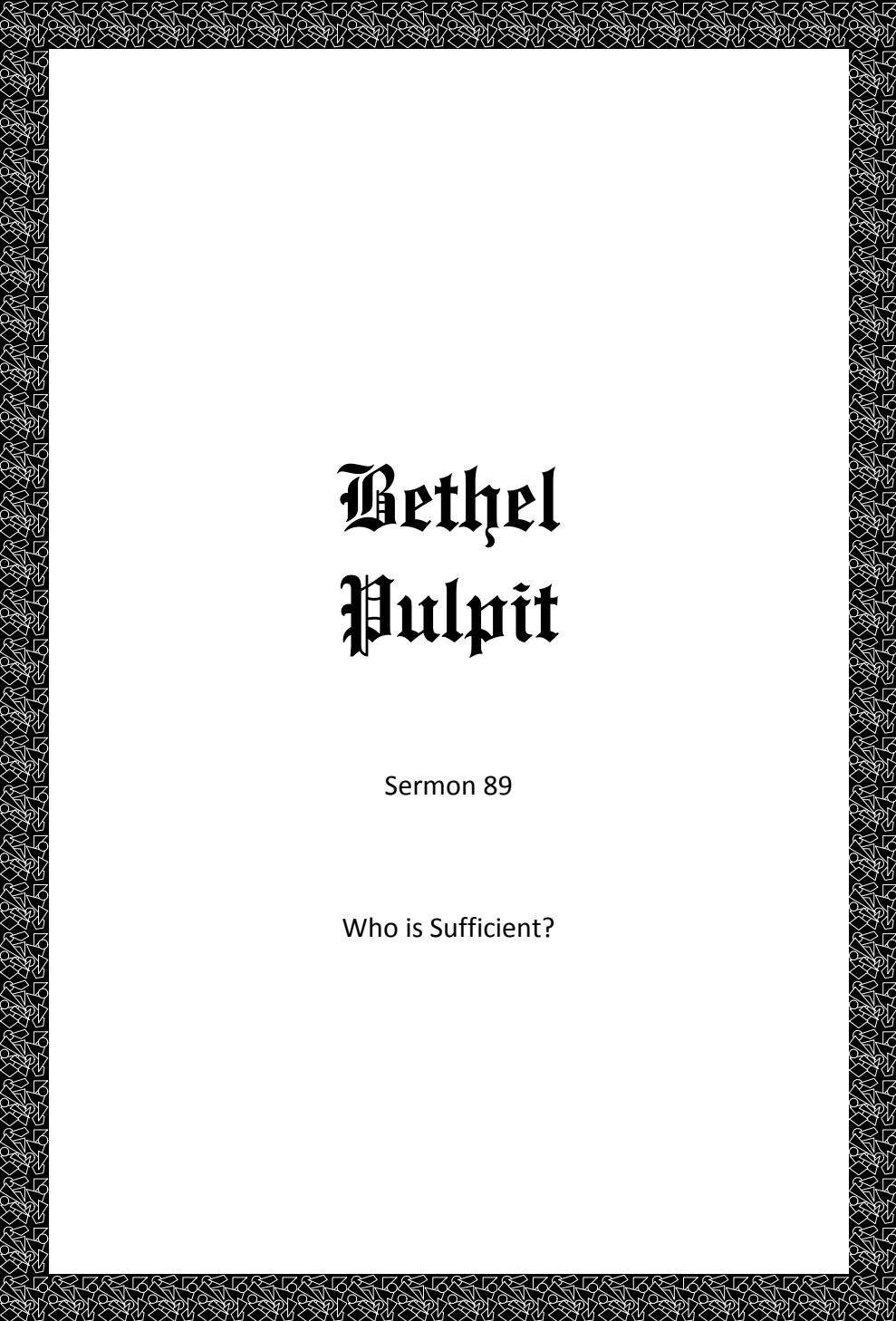




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 89

Who is Sufficient?

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

Text: *"Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2. 16.).*

The subject Paul is dealing with is the preaching of the gospel. He speaks very beautifully of it, how as he and the others sought to preach Christ and Him crucified: "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (now this is it), "and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place." Now some of you know that, don't you, the sweet savour there is in the preaching of the cross, the attraction, the preciousness, the sweet savour in the name of the Lord Jesus, the sweet savour in what He has done, the sweet savour of His atoning sacrifice, the sweet savour of His intercession in heaven? These are wonderful seasons, aren't they, when in the church of God there is that sweet savour in the gospel, when it is sweetly known and experienced in our own hearts? He "maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place."

And then he goes on: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." Now what does that mean? Well it means that when the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, when Christ and Him crucified is faithfully proclaimed, then there will always be a sweet savour of Christ ascending to heaven, whether there are two people there, or whether there are two thousand people there; whether the people hear, or whether they do not hear; whether they receive it, or whether they reject it. There will always be that sweet savour of Christ ascending to God in heaven. Now may that be one part of our worship that we do not forget, what the preaching of the cross means to the eternal Father in heaven. "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish."

And then Paul begins to speak very, very solemnly. What he really says is this: the preaching of the cross will always separate; it will always divide; it will cut every congregation in two. And the preaching of Christ and Him crucified draws a dividing line in this congregation this morning, that invisible line which you and I cannot see but which God in heaven can see. "To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other

the savour of life unto life.” And that means just this, that there are some, and this sweet savour of Christ and Him crucified means nothing to them. They are oblivious to it. There is not any sweet savour, there is not any attraction. Why? Because they are dead in sin. So it is a savour of death unto death to them. They cannot smell the sweet savour because they are dead, and unless grace intervenes, it will end in eternal death.

There are some people who have not any sense of smell. We used to have an old minister who preached at Haslingden when I was a boy, and they said that dear minister just could not smell anything at all, a bad smell or a good smell, a fragrant smell or a pungent smell. He had just no sense of smell at all. Well, all of us are like that by nature, no sweet attraction in the Lord Jesus, no fragrance in His saving name. If a dead man were lying in a room, and that room were full of the most fragrant flowers, that dead man would not know anything of it. “The savour of death unto death.” But then there are others, and when the Lord Jesus is spoken of, His name, His person, His merit, His finished work, O there is such a sweet attraction in it, such a fragrance; it is so beautiful; it is so sacred; it is so attractive; it delights their hearts. Now that is the savour of life unto life. Because your soul has been quickened into newness of life, because the new birth has taken place, because you are a living soul, whatever you see or do not see, whatever you feel or do not feel, there will be this sweet attraction in the Lord Jesus.

So it comes to points. “To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.” I just pause here, beloved friends, affectionately to ask you, which is it to you and me? When the Lord Jesus is spoken of in His death and resurrection and ascension and exaltation, does it mean nothing to you, or does it mean everything to you? Is it the savour of death unto death, or is it the savour of life unto life? “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.”

It is in this context that he asks the important question: “*Who* is sufficient for these things?” What minister is sufficient? What minister can bear up under the weight of it? I do not think any except those who walk out this pathway know the terrible weight and burden of standing between the living and the dead. “Who is sufficient for these things?” –

sufficient rightly to divide the Word; sufficient rightly to point out the evil of sin; sufficient rightly to point out the glories of the Saviour; sufficient rightly to warn concerning a never-ending eternity. “Who is sufficient for these things?” Really, with the apostle it is a humble acknowledgement of that sense of complete unworthiness and guiltiness and sinfulness and insufficiency that weighs us down, which at times prostrates us.

No doubt you noticed that a few verses later Paul does answer his own question. He says, “Our sufficiency is of God.” Strangely he does not answer the question immediately. I think, beloved friends, you will find that at times in your life and in your experience. You will have these questions, and you will long for an answer, and the Lord will give you an answer, but it may be you will have to wait for it. You do not get it immediately. Here there is a little pause. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”

Well, so much then for the way in which this question comes in the context – Paul and his preaching, the work of the gospel ministry. “Who is sufficient for these things?” Well then, this will be a question, a problem, which will not just exercise the hearts of gospel preachers, but every child of God. Each true believer, will oftentimes ask this question, “Who is sufficient for these things?” – when we realise something of our weakness and helplessness and unworthiness and sin and *these things*, whatever they are, and there is a multitude of things, but they all seem too much for us, too hard for us, too great for us. We are not sufficient for them. We are not adequate. We cannot manage them. We do not know how to deal with them. Sometimes we fear they are going to fall on us and crush us. Now, “Who is sufficient for these things?” O that awful, painful, prostrating sense of unfitness and sinfulness and insufficiency! How can we go? How can we continue? How can we go on? How can we meet this danger? How can we manage this difficulty? “Who is sufficient for these things?” Perhaps some of you are here this morning, with *these things* resting on your conscience, *these things* weighing down in your life. *These things*. In your own case, beloved friends, this morning, you know what *these things* are; and who is sufficient for them?

Let me try to speak of some of *these things*. Let us begin with the vital things: our sins, our souls, a never-ending eternity. “Who is sufficient for these things?” Who can pay that dreadful debt we owe? Who can

satisfy divine justice? Who can make a way whereby we can come to heaven? If you and I are born again of the Spirit, graciously led and taught, we shall know our utter, complete insufficiency, unable to do anything to save ourselves. And the Holy Spirit will lead us in this pathway, in love, in mercy, so that we might have no hope whatsoever in self, but not so that we might perish, sink to rise no more, but rather that He might lead us and reveal to us an all-sufficient Saviour. That is the witness of the gospel, an all-sufficient Saviour, the all-sufficiency of His blood to wash away the vilest sins.

One of our beautiful hymns over the top is headed: “Sufficiency of Pardon.” O but the sufficiency of His mercy, the sufficiency of His grace! “Deep calleth unto deep,” says the psalmist. The deep of our utter insufficiency, unworthiness and guilt. But that great deep, the all-sufficiency of mercy in Jesus! “Who is sufficient for these things?” But see the blessed answer to this vital question in the gospel. But it will be personal to you, not just a general, doctrinal point. It will be personal. Who is sufficient to save me, to prepare me for heaven, to make me right, to take me to glory at last? “Who is sufficient for these, things?” For sure I am, that I am not sufficient.

There is a story told from the last century of the Tsarist empire in Russia. There was a Russian soldier who was so dreadfully in debt he felt the only thing was to take his life. In front of him was a long list of all these debts he owed. At the bottom of it he had written: “Whoever can pay such debts as these?” He took a gun to shoot himself, but he fainted and there he lay collapsed over the table. It happened at that time the Tsar Alexander was conducting an inspection. As he came through the barrack room, he saw the soldier slumped over the table with a gun in his hand. He slipped aside to see what it was, and there he saw this catalogue of debts in the man’s handwriting on the table, and the awful question at the end, “Whoever can pay such debts as these?” He wrote just a few words at the bottom. Who can pay such debts as these? He wrote, “The Tsar Alexander.” And he meant what he had written. Can you think of the feelings of that poor man when he came to his senses and realised what had taken place? My mind went to that word:

“What mighty sum paid all my debt,
When I a bondman stood,

And has my soul at freedom set?
'Tis Jesus' precious blood."

"Who is sufficient for these things?" And then we have the pilgrimage to walk out. It is not an easy way to heaven; it is a hard way. And we are not sufficient to walk out that way to heaven. When you think of the opposition of sin and Satan and the world and your own unbelieving heart, how is it possible to continue? How is it possible to endure to the end? "Who is sufficient for these things?" And then at times there will be those special dangers you may face and at times there will be those special trials you have to walk through. Perhaps some of you this morning in your pilgrimage pathway have come into the place of trouble, and perhaps you feel it to be a fiery trial. You sink before it. "Who is sufficient for these things?" How can I stand this trying day? I hardly know what to do. I hardly know how to bear it. "Who is sufficient for these things?" You remember the Apostle Paul when he came there. He was ready to sink. He was ready to perish. There was the thorn in his flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him, and the thrice-repeated prayer that the Lord would take away the thorn. Now this is it: "Who is sufficient for these things?" "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Well, may some of you sweetly experience that, sweetly walk it out. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee: I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

"Who is sufficient for these things?" With some of you it may be more the end of the pilgrimage that concerns you, as you think of the swellings of Jordan, as you think of that deep, dark, cold river, and as you hear the question, "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Perhaps you shrink from it and perhaps you tremble before it. "Who is sufficient for these things?" – to step down into the swellings of Jordan, to launch forth into eternity, to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. "Who is

sufficient for these things?” O may you see it all in the Lord Jesus, He who has gone before, taken the sting out of death, the victory from the grave. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?”

What about the Israel of God coming to Jordan after forty years in the wilderness? Who was sufficient for these things? Was Joshua? Were any of the Israelites? Was Caleb? There was no way across, no way through. “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” “Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan,” representing the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. “Who is sufficient for these things?” Israel did not need to do anything; Israel’s God did it all. Jordan divided, the whole of Israel passed safely as on dry ground into the promised land. So shall it be at last with every believer, whatever the fears. “Who is sufficient for these things?”

“In that dread moment, O to hide
Beneath His sheltering blood!”

That will divide Jordan. That will make a way into the promised land – everything in Christ, nothing in the sinner.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” Some of you may be concerned about the unknown way, what lies before you, tomorrow, or next week, or this coming winter, or in the new year. You notice Paul says, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” But you know, these things which concern you, these things which are before you, “Who is sufficient for these things?” There is a very wonderful promise: “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” I believe in the covenant of grace the eternal Father viewed all the needs of all His people in all ages, great or small, in providence and in grace, and “it pleased the Father that in Him” – His beloved Son – “should all fulness dwell.” And that fulness is an all-sufficiency. Whatever you need, it is there for you in the Lord Jesus, but when you need it, not before. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.”

Who was sufficient to bring that great multitude forty years through the wilderness to Canaan? Was Moses? Was Aaron? The manna never ceased until they ate of the old corn of the land. There was sufficient for their journey, but they did not have it in hand: it was day by

day. We would like to have tomorrow's grace today, and the strength for next week now. But the Lord did not deliver Daniel from being thrown into the den of lions. He could have done; easily He could have done, but He did not. Daniel had to be thrown right into the lions' den, and then he found their mouths were closed. That is how the Lord works. "Who is sufficient for these things?" The Lord could easily have stopped the three Hebrew children being thrown into the furnace, but He did not. "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." With Elijah, the ravens must come morning and evening. They did not bring a month's supply. The barrel of meal did not waste, the cruse of oil did not fail; but it was not full to overflowing. "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure."

"The sure provisions of my God
Attend me all my days."

But you and I are not going to have a stock in hand so we are independent, we can manage things ourselves. We have to pray. We have to walk out that way of dependence, begging mercy, begging help, hour by hour. "Who is sufficient for these things?" But your unknown way is in the hands of the Lord, and everything is planned, everything supplied: the trials and the deliverances, the needs and the supplies.

"Who is sufficient for these things?" Now we have our little profession of the Lord's name to walk out. How can we live to the honour and glory of God? How can we keep alive our own soul? How can we live so that we do not dishonour Him? How can we walk and not fall? "Who is sufficient for these things?" Don't we feel our insufficiency concerning walking out our profession? My mind went to Abraham. The Lord appeared to him when he was ninety years old and nine and said, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." Of course, that did not mean he had to be free from sin. But it was a close, solemn commandment. "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." But He did not just say that bluntly, nakedly. The Lord said this: "I am the Almighty God" or as the margin gives it, I am God all-sufficient. "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." So beloved, this morning He tells you to walk out this way, this narrow way which leads to heaven, this way of your profession, this way of going forth without the camp bearing His reproach. But you say, "Who is

sufficient for these things?” Behold, “I am the Almighty God – God all-sufficient – walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” Those who are tried about making a profession of the Lord’s name, those who are tried because they have, those who are tried about how they can walk worthy, those who are tried how they can endure to the end: Behold, “I am the Almighty God – God all-sufficient – walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” We think of that beautiful verse in the new year hymn:

“He will never leave us, He will not forsake;
His eternal covenant He will never break.
Resting on His promise, what have we to fear?
God is all-sufficient for the coming year.”

“Who is sufficient for these things?” “I am the Almighty God” – God all-sufficient – “walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” But Abraham did not know some of the places he would have to walk, did he? I have thought of that day when the Lord said to him, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” “Walk before Me.” You and I can read it, perhaps we can read it carelessly. We know what happened at the end; Abraham did not. O but the trial of faith! But if ever Abraham found his God to be all-sufficient, he did when he went up Mount Moriah. O what an abundant view of the all-sufficiency of his God he received before he came down! He called the name of the place Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide. “In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” “Who is sufficient for these things?” – when you have a mountain like Abraham. “In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” Jehovah-jireh, the Lord will provide.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” Beloved friends, this morning may we together see something by faith of the all-sufficiency of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the all-sufficiency of His grace, the all-sufficiency of His mercy, the all-sufficiency of His divine power, the all-sufficiency of His compassion, the all-sufficiency of that almighty strength, the all-sufficiency of an almighty Saviour. You see, that is the answer to this question. It is not the kind of question you have in an examination. That is not the way we learn the answer to this question. It is in the place of trial and bewilderment and perplexity and sorrow. How can I manage? How can I continue? “Who is sufficient for these things?”

There is that beautiful word: “God is able to make all grace abound toward you: that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things.” I do not think I know a verse like that, so emphatic and so many *all*’s in it. You know the question, you know the problem, you know the difficulty. This is the answer: “God is able.” You know that, don’t you? You have proved it; you believe it. “God is able.” “God is able, to make *all* grace abound toward you; that ye, *always* having *all* sufficiency in *all* things.” Now may the Holy Spirit apply it, for “What more can He say than to you He hath said?”

“Who is sufficient for these things?” Whatever these things are, great or small, providence or grace, present or future, in your life this morning, who is sufficient for them? In a word it is this, that beautiful prayer of good Dr. Fawcett, so much in it. May we be able to pray it, and may we also know the answer. “Who is sufficient for these things?”

“Be Thou my all-sufficient Friend,
Till all my wanderings cease;
Guard me through life, and let my end
Be everlasting peace.”