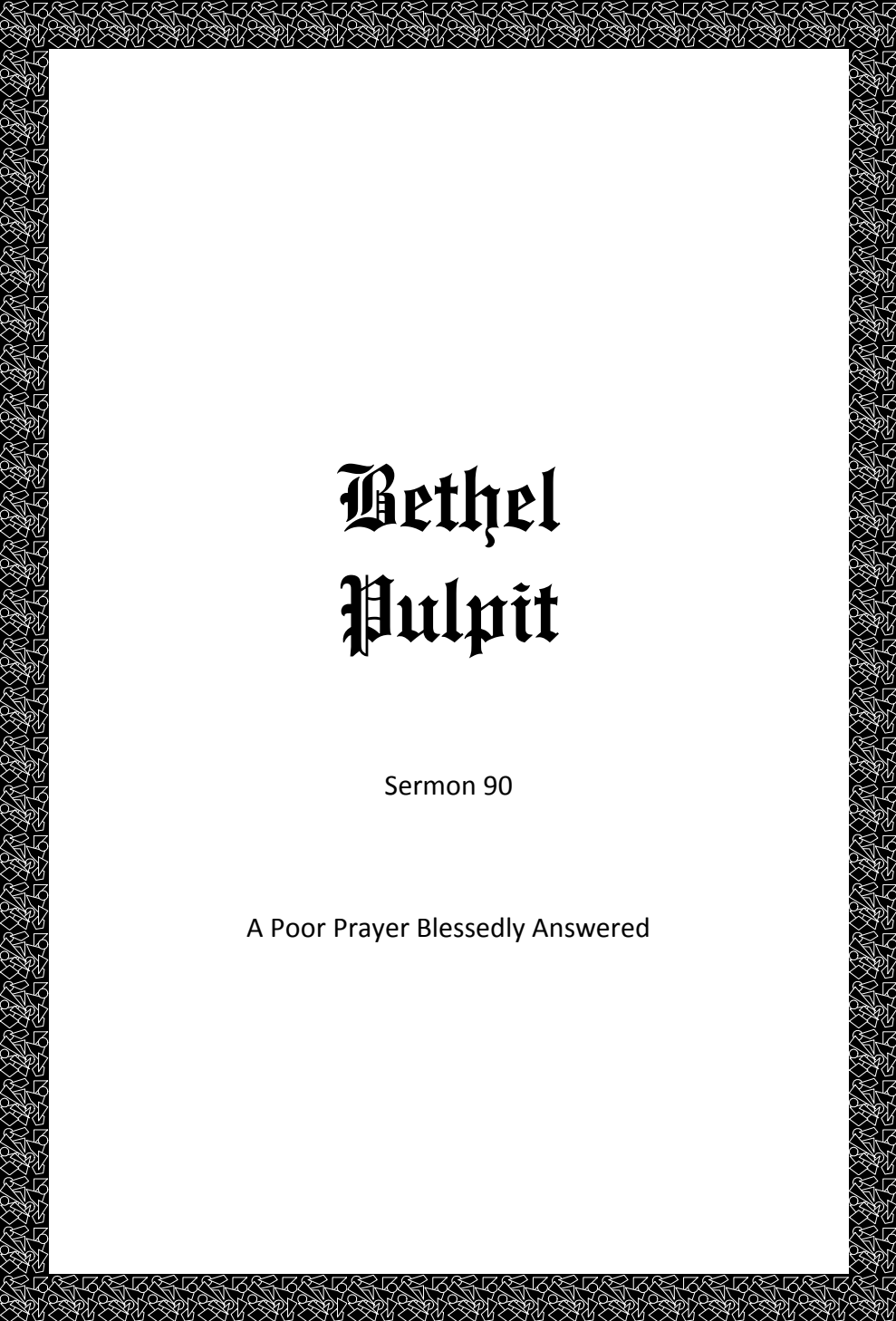




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 90

A Poor Prayer Blessedly Answered

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 15th November, 1992**

Text: *"But if Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us (Mark 9. 22).*

The Lord Jesus had just come down from the Mount of Transfiguration. There He had revealed Himself to His favoured disciples in all His glory. But now He was coming down from the mount, and we read that straightway all the people came running to Him. Now what a difference from when Moses had been up to the top of Mount Sinai! He too had been in the presence of God. When he came down his face shone, but the people dared not come near. They were afraid to venture nigh. Now you see Moses coming down from the mount and the people fleeing away from him; the Lord Jesus coming down from the mount and the people fleeing to Him. And beloved friends, that is the difference between Moses and Christ, between the law and the gospel. The law of God is holy and righteous and just and true. The law of God says, "Do this, and thou shalt live." The law of God says, "Do it not, and dying thou shalt surely die." Now there is no attraction to a guilty sinner in Sinai, in the law. There is the glory in it. Moses' face shone, but how dare any draw near because of the glory of the law? What a difference in the glory of the gospel, to see the Lord Jesus in the glory of His Person and the glory of His grace! And you see, if the law repels, the gospel sweetly draws; the Lord Jesus sweetly draws. Dr. Watts, contrasting the two, says,

"Thus Sinai roars, and round the earth
Thunder, and fire, and vengeance flings;
But Jesus, Thy dear gasping breath
And Calvary, say gentler things."

That will draw you as a sinner. That will attract you. There is mercy there, that He may be feared. There is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. There is a loving welcome for the chief of sinners.

"Come just as thou art, with thy woe,
Fall down at the feet of the Lamb,

He will not, He cannot say, Go,
But surely will take out thy stain.

A fountain is opened for sin,
And thousands its virtues have proved;
He'll take thee, and plunge thee therein,
And wash thee from filth in His blood."

That is the attraction of the gospel. If the face of Moses shines in the law, then "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That is where it shines, the glory of the gospel. That is the attraction. That is the welcome.

When He was come down, straightway all the people came running to Him. But you see, "One of the multitude" – there was one man and he was different. He had a hard case. He had a lunatic son. His heart was full of grief and sorrow. They all came running to the Lord Jesus and saluted Him, but this man fell prostrate before Him. That is the difference. One man, "one of the multitude." I wonder if that one is here tonight. In a sense, when a congregation assembles for worship, all the people come running unto Him. But behold, "one of the multitude." Is that one here tonight, the one with a hard case to be met, the one who feels to be different, the one seeking Jesus, the one with a soul to be saved, the one with a prayer to be answered, the one seeking divine compassion, divine help?

"One of the multitude." Now it seems originally he brought that child, hoping to bring him to the Lord Jesus, and because the Lord Jesus was in the mount and he had heard the disciples could perform miracles, he brought him to the disciples. He says, "I spake to Thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not." You will sometimes find things when the best of men cannot help you, when the work exceeds all nature's power. You will have things at times that only the Lord Jesus can deal with, no one else. It must be "none but Jesus."

Let me just pause a moment here. Right at the end, after the miracle had been performed, when He was come into the house, His disciples asked Him in private, "Why could we not cast him out?" He said to them, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting."

What does that mean? I find this a very hard, mysterious scripture, a very hard, mysterious word the Lord Jesus spoke. “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.” The nearest I can come to it is this. We have some hard things in our lives at times. It is no use coming lightheartedly, casually, to the Lord and saying, “Lord, undertake for me,” and then going away and forgetting all about it. It is a rebuke to us. We need to be importunate in prayer, to keep on knocking, to go like old Jacob, “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.” Perhaps we have been going on, and then something comes, and so we pray, and then forget all about it, and expect everything will be all right the next day. “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.” What about that word: “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force”? “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

Well, there you have the disciples in all their helplessness, and there you have the poor man in all his sorrow. And then you have that wonderful, sublime, majestic word, “Bring him unto Me.” It might be too hard for the disciples; it is not too hard for the disciples’ Saviour and God. “Bring him unto Me” – that word of divine majesty. The Lord Jesus knew He was going to cure him, the Lord Jesus knew He was going to heal him. “Bring him unto Me.” Well then, beloved friends, how many of you are there this evening, with something to bring to the Lord Jesus? Now what is it you have which weighs you down, which burdens you, which concerns you, which distresses you? It does not matter how hard. It does not matter how impossible. “Bring him unto Me.” It does not matter how great. It does not matter how small. “Bring him unto Me.” It does not matter whether it is a *him* or a *her* or an *it*. “Bring him unto *Me*.” May the emphasis be on the *Me*, the dear Lord Jesus, the almighty Saviour, the incarnate Son of God, once crucified, now risen, exalted, glorified; His wonderful sympathy and compassion, His tender understanding, His wisdom, His divine, almighty power. Do you believe it, that His power is the same tonight as when He performed this miracle here, and that He still says, “Bring him unto Me”?

What is it that is burdening you tonight? All those sins? Bring them hither unto Me. A soul to be saved or lost? Bring it hither unto Me. Or that trouble you are in, that hard case, that providence, that thing you cannot manage? Bring it unto Me. “The cause that is too hard for you,

bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” There were so many hard cases brought to the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh. There was none too hard for Him, none He could not manage, none He could not deal with.

With this poor father, it was one of his children. Are you concerned about any of your children? “Bring him hither to me.” Bring her hither to me. Is it something in your family, or someone outside your family who is perhaps against you, worrying you, opposing you? “Bring him hither to me.” The hearts of all men are in the Lord’s hand. Is it something in the church of God? Is it something in your circumstances? Is it something concerning tomorrow, the unknown way? It does not matter who it is, what it is, bring it hither unto Me in humble prayer, to the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, to the throne of grace appointed for mercy and grace to help in time of need.

“Bring him hither to Me.” Now those of you who have come seeking a word in season tonight, may this be it. May this be the way you have to walk. That thing, that person, that circumstance, that burden, all that weighs so heavily upon you – and you know what it is – bring them hither unto Me. The kind invitation, the loving welcome. You cannot say which is the greater here, the mercy or the power.

O but “bring him hither to Me.” And the poor father did. O but what an impossible case! He was possessed by the devil. There was evil. There was sin. There was wickedness. He had a dumb spirit. He could not speak. It was a wasting disease, he was pining away. He had suicidal tendencies. “And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters.” It was his only child. He had a deep-seated malady. He had had it from the days of his infancy. The manifestations of it were terrible. He foamed and he gnashed with his teeth. It does not matter. “Bring him hither to Me.”

You remember how the centurion spoke to the Lord Jesus, and the Lord Jesus said, “I will come and heal him” – not have a look at him; not investigate and examine him; not see if anything can be done. “I will come and heal him.” And that is implied here. “Bring him unto Me.” However great, however terrible the case, “bring him hither to Me,” and I will heal him.

It seems when they were bringing him, the devil had a last fling, and you know, he will. If you are seeking in prayer to bring anyone or anything to the Lord Jesus, the devil will have a fling at you. Or if you yourself are bringing your case, the devil will have a fling at you. Bunyan's Christian at the wicket gate, the porter pulled him in, and just as he entered the gate an arrow sped past the place where before he was standing. Satan will have his fling. That is why you young people, if the Lord begins to deal with you, and you begin to seek after the Lord Jesus, you will have temptations you have never known before. You have lived quietly, lived a moral life, and suddenly you will have these temptations to do things you have never known before. That is because when you belonged to Satan he left you alone. But now he is losing you, doesn't he fire his arrows at you? I never had a shadow of doubt concerning the points of truth we hold until I believe the Lord quickened my soul into life, and then I was tried and tempted on the whole lot of them. I think I can honestly say, I do not believe our doctrines because I was brought up to believe them, or because they are in the hymn book, or articles of faith. I think I have been tempted on most of them, and I have had to learn them personally from Scripture and from the Lord Himself. But I was never tempted on one point of truth in the days of unregeneracy.

It was when he was coming to Jesus that the devil had his last fling, and "tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming." And so the poor father in distress, almost in despair, poured out his heart to the Lord Jesus. You can never perish there. He ends his woeful tale with this: "If Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." Now I was talking to our young people this afternoon, and I did mention for their encouragement one or two of the poor prayers of Scripture which the Lord very graciously answered. This one did not cross my mind at the time, but this is one of the poor prayers of Scripture. It was not a good prayer. It was a bad prayer, but it received a most blessed answer. It received a perfect answer. But look at this prayer, the unbelief in it. Why, this poor man, he almost casts doubt – he does cast doubt on the Lord's omnipotence. He says to the almighty Son of God, "*If* Thou canst do any thing." He puts an if on it. He is not even sure that the Lord Jesus can do anything about it. Now these things are for our encouragement, beloved friends, not to justify us in our poor prayers, but to encourage us when our prayers are poor, that they are answered on mercy's ground. The Lord

Jesus turned it right round. Really the Lord Jesus said, It is not, *if I* can do anything. The *if* belongs to you. It is, *if you* can believe. That is the *if*. Are you able to trust me for it? Are you able to commit it into My hands? Are you able to leave it with me? That is where the *if* is, not with the almighty Saviour. “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” And then that answer with tears: “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”

O but this prayer, “*If* Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.” It was not the best of prayers. It was a poor prayer. There was a lot of unbelief in it. And yet you see it received a blessed answer, because there was a grain of living faith there, and the grain of living faith did this: it caused this poor man, sink or swim, to commit his dreadful case right into the hands of the Lord Jesus. You can never perish there, despite you sin, despite your unbelief. There was a measure of faith in it, and there was reality in it. It obtained the answer. It obtained the blessing. So try what your poor prayers can do. When you get home, before you go to bed tonight, try what your poor prayers can do; try what your hard-hearted prayers can do; try what your unbelieving prayers can do, and perhaps the Lord in His love and mercy will answer them on mercy’s ground, through the Redeemer’s blood.

“If Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us.” Now there were two things he wanted. They are two things that the Lord Jesus has to give, and He delights to give them. They are two things that you and I so often need: divine compassion, divine help. O, “have compassion on us.” It is a beautiful theme, this, the compassion of the Lord Jesus! That is, that He knows, He understands, He cares. That is, that He sympathises. He will not break the bruised reed; the smoking flax will He not quench. He is the great High Priest of our profession, touched with the feeling of our infirmities. “Have compassion on us.” It is a wonderful thing, the compassion of the Lord Jesus, viewed in all its fulness at Calvary. That little hymn, we do not seem to sing it nowadays, but years ago I used to love that hymn:

“This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
He pity ne’er withdrew.”

“Have compassion on us.” O that wonderful, tender heart of the Saviour, that wonderful, tender compassion! “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness.” Then, “have compassion on us.” But it is divine compassion. It is almighty compassion. There is nothing helpless about it. It is so kind and tender and loving. But there is nothing feeble about it. This compassion is divine; this compassion is almighty. You see the two sides of it. Israel in Egypt: “I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt.” That is the compassion. “I have heard their cry . . . I know their sorrows.” That is the compassion. Here is almighty compassion, divine compassion. “And I am come down to deliver them.” O the wonder of the Lord looking upon a sinner in all his need, that wonderful compassion to pity, and that divine, almighty power to hear and answer and deliver!

“Have compassion on us.” Then you see the other thing, divine help. That is another attractive thing, isn’t it? He is not the only one in the gospels to pray for the help of the Lord Jesus, and he is not the last one to pray for the help of the Lord Jesus. Some of us have to pray for it every day. “Have compassion on us, and help us.” Like the dear woman, “Lord, help me.” O that help! We feel our complete helplessness. O Jesus, Thou almighty Saviour, have compassion on us then, and help us, in all our helplessness. For, “other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on Thee.” Is there one helpless soul here this evening who has to hang on an almighty Saviour? “Have compassion on us, and help us.” May it be so in the last great day. “Have compassion on us, and help us.” May it be so now, tonight, and may it be so tomorrow and in all the things in the unknown way.

We need this help in so many ways – help laid upon One that is mighty – but we need it especially in the way of salvation, for the Lord to come to us like the good Samaritan, that kind of help, that suitable help, that help in which we do not have to do anything, we cannot do anything, we do not need to do anything; that help, the pouring in of the oil and the wine, the binding up of all our wounds. “Have compassion on us, and help us.” A helpless soul and an almighty Saviour! The blessed suitability of the one for the other.

“To Christ for help I flee,
The Friend of sinners lost,
A refuge sweet, and sure, and nigh,
And there is all my trust.”

“Have compassion on us, and help us.” Now is there something in which you specially want the Lord to help you, some problem you have, or some choice you have to make, or some decision you have to take, or some uncertainty before you, or some new step in providence, or some door you want opening, or some deliverance you long for, or something you badly need, and you do not know how you are going to get it?

“Have compassion on us, and help us.” Really, you could read through the Bible from Genesis and read through in the light of this word, and page after page you can see the Lord having compassion on a sinner, having compassion on a nation, and helping them, You can trace it right along. You can look at old Jacob in all his difficult trials, how the Lord had compassion on him and helped him. You can look at Joseph in all the mysterious unfoldings of providence, how the Lord had compassion on him and helped him. You can look at the Israel of God, the banks of the Red Sea, no hope, no way of escape, no way of deliverance, but the Lord came right down and had compassion and helped them. You can think of Elijah, the brook Cherith, the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil, the ravens and the widow woman. You can think of Daniel in the lions’ den, the three Hebrew children in the burning, fiery furnace – divine compassion, divine help. You can do the same in the New Testament. You can think of all these needy people, poor Bartimaeus, and the leper, and the woman who pressed through the crowd, right to the very last, the dying thief: “Lord, remember me.” And it is this, the Lord having compassion on them, the Lord helping them. You say, what about the psalmist? So often there there is a cry for divine compassion and help and the testimony that the Lord has given it. You say, what about the prophets? Well, there is the precious prophecy that the Lord will do it. How many times does He say, “I will help thee”?

So the whole Bible is an account of this, the Lord showing compassion and divine help. But it did not end when the canon of Scripture closed. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” Beloved friends, with your case tonight, may you see this miracle

of love and mercy. May you see it is this same Jesus, the same in His mercy, His compassion, His power, the same in His divine help. Perhaps as you read it you feel bound up in it, embraced in it, that you are this father, you are the one on this errand of mercy, crying out, “Have compassion on me, and help me.” So you will be the one who receives the same blessing, because he received as good a blessing as any in the gospels. He received all he wanted, despite the impossibility of the case. The experience of the people of God, so much of it is this: receiving compassion, receiving help.

I often say it is a good thing if you can turn the text into a prayer and pray it on the way home. Well, you have no need to turn this into a prayer – it is a prayer already – but it is a good thing if you can pray it: “Have compassion on us, and help us.” Some of God’s people pray the whole lot. perhaps you say, “Whatever do you mean by that? I thought the beginning of it was full of unbelief.” Yes, but some of God’s people pray the whole lot, but not in a way of unbelief. They pray it like this: “Lord Jesus, if Thou canst do anything – *and I know Thou canst* – have compassion on me, and help me. Lord Jesus, if Thou canst do anything, and Thou art the only One who canst, then do have compassion on me, and help me.” Perhaps some of you have had to pray like that, looking at the enormity, the impossibility of the case. O but Lord Jesus, if Thou canst do anything – not in a way of unbelief, but in a way of venturing faith – “If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.” Those of you who have heard the Lord say, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me?” Those of you who have heard the word, “With God nothing shall be impossible.” People often quote that wrongly; they say, nothing shall be *called* impossible. There are plenty of things called impossible. The scripture does not say, nothing shall be *called* impossible: it says, “Nothing shall *be* impossible.”

Some of us go back to the time when these things were burnt in our hearts, that the impossible things with our God were easy. “Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence!” We saw the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. A lot of people this remembrance week have been singing, “O God, our help in ages past,” in a way of remembrance. With me, it has been in days past more in a way of omnipotence.

“Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame –
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.”

Then the hardest thing is easy, isn't it? “If Thou canst do anything,” and of course, Thou canst do everything. Thou dost hold the waters in the hollow of Thy hand, and mete out heaven with a span; the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Living souls are in no doubt concerning the divinity of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He sits on the circle of the earth, the inhabitants before Him are as grasshoppers. He is exalted on the throne. “The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” “With heaven and earth at His command, He waits to answer prayer.” It is in that sense we venture. Lord Jesus, if Thou canst do anything, and I know Thou canst do all things, then do in Thy love and mercy hear my prayer; have compassion on me, and do help me. “Do not turn away Thy face; mine's an urgent, pressing case.” And the poor father received all he wanted, and beloved friend, I believe in mercy so will you.