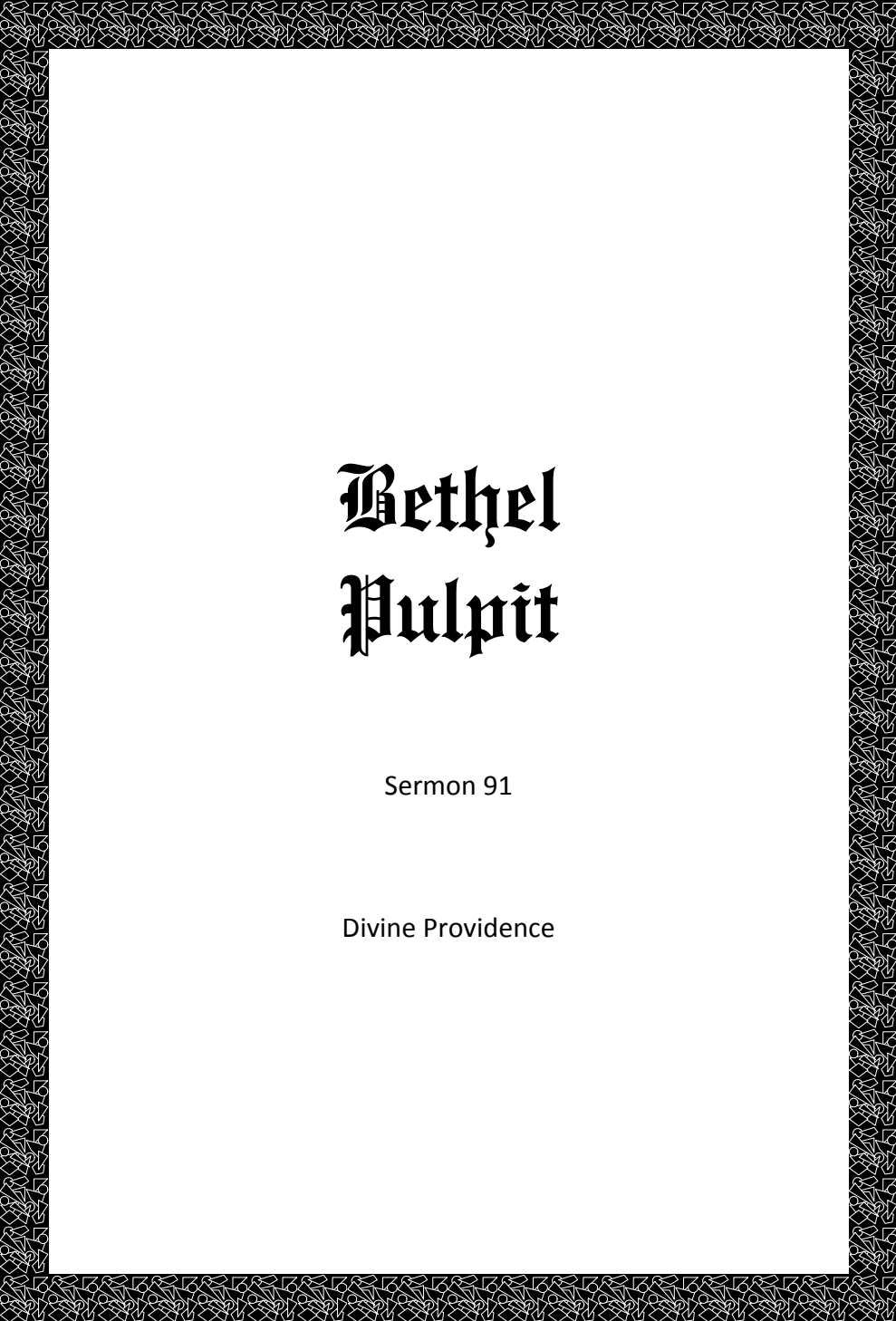




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 91

Divine Providence

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 22nd October, 1992**

Text: *“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord” (Proverbs 16. 33).*

This is an immense verse. It includes everything, it embraces everything: the whole of creation, the whole of providence, the whole of redemption. And the point here is very simple: that it is all in the Lord's hands, that everything, great or small, past, present or to come, grace or providence, is in His hands. It is a wonderful mercy if we can realise it this evening, that all things – and that embraces everything – all things are in the Lord's hands. And then if we can feel this personally: “My times are in Thy hand.”

“The lot is cast into the lap” – everything. If only we could believe this; if only we believed what we do believe, that “the lot is cast into the lap,” that “all must come, and last, and end, as shall please our heavenly Friend.” It was this that was such a comfort to Paul. In the midst of his problems and perplexities and sorrows, he said, “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” They had been cast into the lap by an all-wise, almighty, all-gracious God, and now they had not just happened. No, says Paul, they have fallen out. They have fallen out of the lap of providence, according to the counsel of God's will, for the honour and glory of God's name, for Paul's real, lasting good, for the good of the churches.

“The lot is cast into the lap.” So things do not just happen; they do not just occur; they fall out according to an all-wise purpose. They fall out of this lap of divine providence. Paul says, “I would ye should understand, brethren.” Unbelief does not understand it; carnality does not understand it, but faith does. “I would ye should understand.” Everything seemed to be going wrong. Paul was in prison in Rome. He could no longer go round and preach the gospel. He could no longer visit the churches he loved. It seemed everything was going wrong, that Satan was triumphing. No, says Paul, everything is going right. It is according to God's counsel

and will. These things which have happened to me, these things which are grieving you, causing you sorrow, they have fallen out unto the furtherance of the gospel.

Why should it be that the great apostle should be there in prison in Rome? It seemed that his usefulness had come to an end. Why should it be? Paul says, “Unto the furtherance of the gospel.” Well, it is in two ways. First of all, there were some of the Lord’s chosen hidden among the ruins of the fall in Rome, even in Caesar’s household. Through the witness and ministry of Paul in prison in Rome they were going to be called out. Secondly, there were going to be those wonderful epistles from the prison in Rome, not just for the churches then, but for us today. “I would ye should understand.” Satan overreaches himself. He cannot cast the lot into the lap, neither can he take the lot out of the lap. He is chained.

With Bunyan in prison in Bedford jail, it was God’s appointment. Bunyan could no longer preach. Like Paul, he was in prison, but there the things he wrote have gone out throughout the world ever since for the comfort and edification of God’s people. “I would ye should understand.”

Above all, the dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It was not by accident He went to Gethsemane and Calvary. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” – that is, the lot cast into the lap and the lot falling out of the lap – “ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified.” It was no excuse for their sin; O but the things which have happened are fallen out unto the furtherance of the gospel. Apart from the cross of Christ there would not *be* any gospel, let alone the furtherance of the gospel.

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” “The things which happened unto me” – you may fit your own piece in there; I can fit my piece in there. What are these things which have happened unto you, or are happening unto you? “I would ye should understand” that they “have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” You say, this disappointment, this sorrow, this affliction – how can it be unto the furtherance of the gospel?

“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;

Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

“His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.”

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” So you have the whole wonderful mystery of divine providence here in this verse, God ordering everything, God controlling all things, God upon the throne, God doing “according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?”

“The lot” – everything – “is cast into the lap.” But the point here really is this: the things that seem most to a carnal mind to savour of mere chance, they are in the lap of providence. Literally, this word refers to the casting of lots. We read so much in Scripture about the casting of lots. For instance, Jonah on the ship, and then the election of an apostle. You can go through Scripture and think of so many places. The finding out of Achan after his sin, the lot was taken, the lost was cast. There were different ways, of course, in which it could be done. Perhaps a black stone and a white stone, and a hand takes one out, or a hand takes the other one out. But it all seemed so contingent, so uncertain. But the point is, even when a lot is cast, which way the lot falls, what it decides, is according to the eternal counsel of God in the covenant of grace.

It just comes to my mind, that most strange, remarkable happening, I think it was in Germany many years ago when a young, godly man was most unjustly accused of murder. In the end, the real murderer was arrested and because a decision could not be reached, it was decided that one of them must die, but a lot would be cast to decide, and in this case it was two huge dice. Each of these two accused men was allowed to throw these two huge dice, and the one who got the bigger score would be set free, and the one who got the lesser score would be executed. Before this, a most solemn appeal was made to almighty God. The murderer was given the dice first, and could have got any number between two and twelve. Well, the murderer got the full score, two sixes, twelve. The godly man who was innocent lifted up his heart in prayer and dependence

on the Lord. The people thought it was no use for him to throw, but with much prayer to the Lord, he threw these two dice. Now behold a miracle, a strange thing. The one dice came up showing a six, and the other one, as it hit the floor, splintered in such a strange way it came up showing a seven. So the impossible happened. “The lot is cast into the lap,” even literally.

So the allusion is to casting lots – in various ways. Because of this, we use the word *lot* in everyday language as that portion which is appointed for us. We talk of a man having a very hard lot, or a man having an easy lot. Really, the origin of this is when the Promised Land of Canaan was divided between the twelve tribes by lot. So we have the word, something being “allotted” to someone. So this word has its origin in the casting of lots. But the further meaning of it is the portion which is appointed for us, what our lot is in life, a lot of sorrow, or a lot of joy. The point here, “the lot is cast into the lap” – not the lap of Satan, not the lap of sin, not the lap of blind fate – into the lap of an all-wise providence, an almighty God.

So this is the wonderful doctrine of providence: nothing takes place by accident or by chance; all things are arranged; all things happen according to the purpose of God, yet in no way is God the author of sin.

“There is an overruling providence,
That wisely marshals every circumstance.”

That is, the lot of your life, the lot of my life, is cast into the lap, ordered by God, all things coming to pass according to His all-wise counsel, for His eternal glory, for our real, true, lasting good; everything in the Lord’s hands.

Now as He casts your lot into the lap, He does not make any mistake. It is infinite wisdom which casts the lot into the lap, and the Lord’s hand is almighty to accomplish His own purposes of love and mercy, and make everything work together for good. How much hangs on how little! The mighty things, the great things, the important events are cast into the lap. So is the numbering of the very hairs of your head. “The lot is cast into the lap.” May you feel it tonight, that your lot, whatever it is, is cast into the lap of God’s gracious providence. And what a mercy if you and I can sing tonight,

“Thou givest me the lot
Of those that fear Thy name;
If endless life be their reward,
I shall possess the same”!

“The lot is cast into the lap.” We see this especially in the life of Joseph, how the whole lot of Joseph’s life was cast into the lap, and the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord. So at the end Joseph could say, “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.” It was cast into the lap, and the whole disposing thereof was of the Lord. It was not according to the wishes of Joseph’s cruel brethren or Potiphar’s wife, or anything like that. The whole disposing thereof was of the Lord. He worked in a mysterious way His wonders to perform with Joseph (but it was not mysterious to God). We can never get beyond that word: “But He Himself knew what He would do.” He always has; He always does.

So through the life of Joseph from the moment when he left his home to go in search of his brethren, see how the whole lot was cast into the lap. He could not find his brethren, could he? Humanly speaking, he would have gone back home to his father. That would have been the end. But a man saw him wandering in the field. Why did that man see him wandering in the field? The man spoke to him and asked him what the trouble was, what he wanted. When Joseph told him he was seeking his brethren, the man said he had heard them say, “Let us go to Dothan.” Why had the man heard the remark, and why should he remember it, and why was it this man who should stumble upon Joseph? All this was in the mystery of divine providence, so that Joseph might be seized by his brethren, thrown into the pit, sold to the Midianites. Why were those Midianites passing, and why was it to Egypt they were bound? “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

“With mercy and with judgment,
My web of time He wove.”

Sometimes as you look back, those trials you shrank from, you would not have one thing different tonight; that disappointment, you can see it was His appointment.

“His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;

Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfil some deep design.”

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” The things you are in tonight, the things you have tomorrow, the whole of the unknown way, they are all in the gracious hands of your God.

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” You see it also remarkably in the Book of Esther and the life of Esther. The name of God is not mentioned once in the whole book but His hand is seen in almost every verse. So much again hangs on so little. Mordecai rescued the king, saving his life. Why did the king forget? Why did he not reward him? Why should it be that Mordecai should have this sorrow, this ingratitude? And then there was Haman’s cruel plot to destroy the Lord’s people. “That night could not the king sleep.” Why that night? Why not a different night? He would have a comfortable bed; he would have comfortable surroundings. But he could not sleep, and he decided to have some diversion. Why not something different? Why read a book? And why the book of the chronicles, and why turn to that page, and read that Mordecai had saved his life, and why make this decree that this man whom the king delighted to honour should be so favoured and exalted? Now it is morning, and Haman is waiting. “What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?” Haman thinks, that is me. But it is Mordecai. “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” Joseph’s God, Esther’s God, is still on the throne tonight. It is not a precarious throne. The government is still upon His shoulder. He is still almighty. He still reigns.

“The lot is cast into the lap.” But in the Book of Esther in an absolutely literal sense we see this. What I am referring to is: at the beginning of the book, when Haman had permission from King Ahasuerus to destroy the whole of the Jewish nation, he cast lots which would be the best time for him to do it, thinking he was being wise, yet the lot fell the worst possible way for Haman and the best possible way for the persecuted people of God (Esther 3. 7). It was very many months ahead. Humanly speaking if the lot had fallen tomorrow, they would all have died without hope. This ungodly man takes the lot and casts it, but there is this loving God in heaven, His watchful eye over His people, and He decides which way the lot should fall.

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” You can see it right through the Book of Daniel, God in control. Mighty monarchs making their plans, yet Nebuchadnezzar becoming as a beast, Belshazzar seeing the hand on the wall and that night being slain. “The lot is cast into the lap.” Things do not happen by accident or chance. We live in a dying, changing world, but let us be clear: God is still in control. He will still have the last word. He will gather out His people. He will accomplish all His purposes, in judgment or in mercy. O but for His beloved people to be inside this, not outside it, to have a saving interest in it!

“All things for us must work for good,
For whom the Lamb has shed His blood.”

“The lot is cast into the lap.” God Himself has cast it there. Now beloved friends, let us come to this. In our concerns, our burdens, and our exercises, we are to cast all these things where almighty God has cast them from eternity, into His lap, not to try and manage them ourselves and not just to look at it in a way of stark fatalism. Let me personally by faith venture to the throne of grace, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, and let me cast my lot into the Lord’s lap. The thing which weighs heavily upon me, the thing which burdens me and casts me down, let me take that lot and cast it into the lap, and that is where the Lord has cast it from all eternity.

The eternal Father says of His dear Son, “I have laid help upon One that is mighty.” That is, God in the covenant of grace saw all the help that all His people would ever need and He laid it on His dear Son. Personally, experimentally, faith comes in all our helplessness and need with a “Lord, help me,” and we lay our help where the eternal Father has laid it from all eternity. So here we venture with our burden, and we cast it where the eternal Father has cast it from all eternity.

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” May we ever be kept there. In a word it is this: “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you” – casting your lot into the lap. O the tremendous lot of our sins and our souls and a never-ending eternity! But O to be enabled by precious faith to venture and to cast our everlasting all into the lap!

“My soul into Thy arms I cast;
I trust I shall be saved at last.”

Like David, “Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord.” No sinner ever perished there.

“The lot is cast into the lap.” You have things in your family that are concerning you. Can you cast those into the lap instead of trying to manage them yourselves? You have things concerning the church of God. Can you cast them into the lap? The Lord is more concerned about Zion than you and me. You have tomorrow. Can you cast it into the lap? You have your troubles, your problems, your perplexities. Can you cast them into the lap? Some of you have things in your business. Some of you are concerned about the future, the unknown way, what may happen to you, what may not happen to you. Can you cast it all into the lap, like Ruth when she came softly by night and cast all her concerns into the lap of Boaz? “Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.” “My daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest.”

“The lot is cast into the lap.” You know what your lot is tonight; I know what my lot is tonight – the things which concern us, the things which burden us, the things which try us and tempt us, the things which weigh us down. May you be enabled to cast them into the lap. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” Now you are safe there, and your concerns are safe there, as “He engaged to manage all, by the way and to the end.”

And then you see, “the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” Now it is not accident or chance or Satan. It is the Lord who is going to dispose it. Well then, tell me, how is the Lord going to dispose this lot that you have cast into the lap? First of all, He is going to be with you and bless you with His gracious presence. “For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” That is the way in which He is going to dispose of your lot. He is going to make all things work together for your good. “And we know” – we do not always feel it, we cannot always see it – but, “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

“To His church, His joy, and treasure,
Every trial works for good;
They are dealt in weight and measure,
Yet how little understood!
Not in anger,
But from His dear covenant love.”

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” How is He going to dispose of it? He is going to enable you to depend on Him, to look to Him, to hang upon His tried, almighty arm. How is He going to dispose of that lot? Why, He is going to uphold you with the right hand of His righteousness. When you feel perhaps that lot is so heavy you are going to sink under it, He is going to uphold you. “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.” “*Even there* shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.” “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” How is the Lord going to dispose of this lot? He is going to command deliverance for Jacob. He says, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.”

“‘Cast,’ He said, ‘on Me thy care;
’Tis enough that I am nigh;
I will all thy burdens bear;
I will all thy needs supply.’”

Now there is a scripture here we can live on and we can die on, because there is heaven in it. He is determined to bring to glory at last all those to whom He makes all things work together for good. A good, gracious, merciful, compassionate, almighty God. “The lot is cast into the lap.” Well, is it? Have you been sweetly enabled to cast *your* lot into the lap? Then, “the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord,” for your good, for His glory.