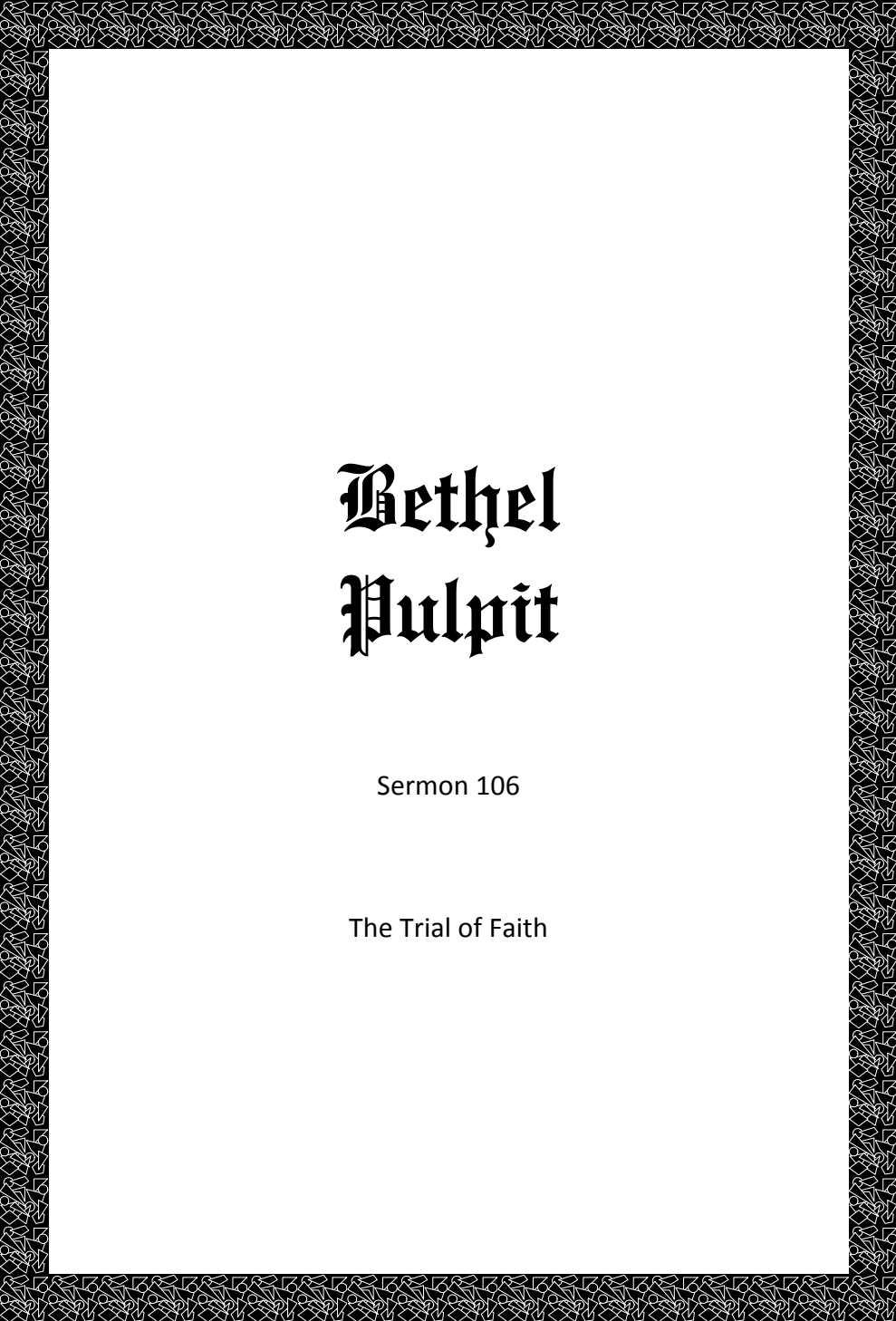




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 106

The Trial of Faith

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 10th April, 1994**

Text: *“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1. 7).*

God gives faith; then He tries faith; and then He honours faith. Real, God-given faith is indestructible. But the vital thing, beloved friends, is for you and me to possess real, true, saving faith, to be real believers on the Son of God. For those who are true believers, those who do possess real faith, have everlasting life. They will reach heaven at last, and no others.

What is it to be a true believer? What is it to possess real faith? Well, let us be clear on one thing: it is much more than just believing the Bible to be true. That is good as far as it goes. It honours God. But a person can have that and yet not get to heaven. Why, the devil himself believes that the Bible is the Word of God, that it is true, that it is infallible. True faith is more, even, than believing the doctrines of the Word, that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died, He rose again, He ascended, He is a great High Priest, He is an almighty Saviour, His blood atones for sin, one day He will come again to judge the world in righteousness. That is good as far as it goes, because it honours God. But real, saving faith is more than that. In true, God-given faith, there is a vital element of trust, a vital element of commitment.

When the new birth takes place – and “ye must be born again,” no salvation, no heaven without the new birth; by nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins – when the new birth takes place, God gives faith, real faith, living faith, saving faith. Possessing that faith you will know that God is holy and righteous. You will know that you are sinful and guilty. You will know that God punishes sin, must punish sin. And so, blessed with that God-given faith, you will realise your danger, your danger through sin, your danger for eternity, your danger when the judgment day comes.

So that faith will not be a dead faith; it will be a living faith. There will be an effect. There will be a moving of your spirit. There will be a fleeing for refuge to the Lord Jesus, a fleeing from the wrath to come. Where there is true faith, there will be repentance. You will forsake your sin. You will leave the world. You will confess your sin. Where there is true faith, it will always lead you to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You will see a beauty in Him, a suitableness in Him. And so as you flee for refuge to Him, you will look to Him and Him alone for your salvation. You will rest on His precious blood, His righteousness, His intercession. You will cry to Him to save your guilty soul. And so faith makes the Lord Jesus all its trust, all its plea, all its foundation. There is not any merit in faith. Faith comes with an empty hand.

“Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

That is faith.

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall,
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all.”

Now that is true faith, and that true faith will take you to heaven, however weak.

There are degrees of faith. There is strong faith which has a full, sweet assurance. It says, “Jesus, I know, has died for me.” It says, “I know that heaven is my eternal portion.” There is also weak faith, trembling faith that ventures. “I will go in unto the King, and if I perish, I perish.”

“I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For, if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.”

Little faith, if it is real, will take you to heaven just as much as great faith. The difference will be that great faith more honours and glorifies God, and great faith brings you more peace, more comfort. But it is whether it is real, because a grain of real, true, vital, saving faith is much more precious than gold. Peter realised that. All God’s people realise it, that faith, even

the smallest faith, though only a grain, though weak, is much more precious than gold. Why? Because you might have all the gold in the world today, and you might lose it tomorrow. Or you might have all the gold in the world, but when you die you have to leave it behind. It will not do you any good. What a word is that: “Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death”!

“Much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” Now do you believe it? How many of you really believe it? It is one thing to say it; it is another thing to mean it, that to possess this living faith which will one day take you to heaven, is “much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” O the preciousness of true, God-given faith! May many of you here, may all of you if God’s will, be blessed with this precious gift of faith, that faith which views the Lord Jesus suffering, bleeding, dying, and which says,

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

True faith will take you to heaven. It is the gift of God’s grace. We are so sinful, so unworthy, so guilty. We cannot merit heaven. We cannot merit any blessing. But these things are freely given on the ground of faith. That was the great doctrine of the glorious Reformation, that a sinner in the sight of God is justified by faith in Christ’s righteousness, not by works, lest any man should boast. O the preciousness of real, true, God-given faith!

“Much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” This faith, if you have it, will always work by love. This faith will purify your heart. This faith will overcome the world. So it is not a dead grace; it is not an inactive grace. It will always live. It will always work. “Much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” May that be burnt in every heart, whether you have a sweet hope you possess this faith, or whether you feel you lack it. But may each of you realise the value of it, that it is “much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” Perhaps some of you will find that little prayer in your heart to the God of all grace that He will bestow this rich gift of faith upon you, though you feel so unworthy, that you

might be a true believer on the Son of God. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life.”

Well then, beloved friends, the word here speaks of “the trial of faith.” “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” Where God gives faith, He tries it. He puts it to the test. Let us be clear, not to prove to Himself whether it is real faith or not, because He knows all things, but to prove to you whether your faith is true faith or not. So there will be the trial of your faith. You know, sometimes when faith is put to the trial, put to the test, it is proved that it is not real faith. Did you ever come to the point: the awful discovery that all your chapel going, your Bible reading, your prayers, everything you had, in themselves they were nothing, they were just empty, they were valueless, that they could never take you to heaven?

I want to speak to you children for a moment. You listen to me. Imagine that you had a most precious gold coin which someone had given to you, and you had it carefully hidden away and locked up. It was such a precious golden coin, it was worth thousands of pounds. You always thought, Even when I grow up, if I do not get a job, it will not really matter, and when I am old I can sell this precious, beautiful gold coin, and I will have so many thousands of pounds and can always live on it, always have plenty. Now then, say that one day a man is visiting your house, and that man is a goldsmith, and he begins talking to you about what it is being a goldsmith. So quite excitedly you tell him about this wonderful, precious, golden coin that is worth thousands of pounds. He is very interested, so you go upstairs and unlock it and bring it. The goldsmith is very interested and looks at it and gets his magnifying glass out and scrutinises the coin. Then his face becomes sad. He says, “I am ever so sorry to tell you, but it is not worth anything at all. It is not real gold. It is just an imitation.” However would you feel? Would you be pleased you had learnt the real truth? Would you be angry? I am sure you would be terribly sad. But that man knows, he understands, and he has told you the truth.

That is what happens so often when the Lord begins to deal with you and me as sinners. We have so much and we think it is real, it is pure gold. The Lord takes it and shows it to us and tells us all this religion we thought was so good, so wonderful, is not worth anything at all. It is a

terrible discovery. It makes us ready to sink. Yet as we go back, it makes us so thankful that we have not gone through our lives thinking we have a precious treasure locked up and really it is not worthy anything at all.

I remember years ago a man coming to our house. I have a set of extremely valuable books, and this man was delighted to see them, and he looked through several, and suddenly stopped. He said, "Can you see that page?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Can you notice anything?" I said, "No." He said, "It is not the original page. This is a magnificent imitation. But that one page was probably added over a hundred years after the book was first printed." I looked at it, and could not see the slightest difference, but he, being an expert, could pick out a few things to prove it was not the original.

God will try your faith to see whether it is real or not. But if your conscience is made tender in the fear of God, you will be willing to bring your faith, bring your profession, to the scrutiny of God, even though He should tell you that all your religion, all your faith, is valueless. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire." The trial will be like fire. If your faith is real, it will stand. If it is not, it will be destroyed; it will be burnt up.

Well then, the trial of your faith. No doubt many of you in various ways at present are enduring the trial of your faith. You have noticed that the various problems and difficulties and sorrows and perplexities that God's people have, the Word of God calls them *trials*. Why? Because God is trying you by them. Some of you at present may be in great trouble. Now may you see it as the trial of your faith, whether your faith is real, or whether your faith will stand it. You find two people and they both set out well. They both seem true believers, and then they both come into terrible troubles. One comes out with his faith shining. The other comes out of it and goes back. John Bunyan speaks about it. He speaks of the Slough of Despond, this dreadful bog, this dreadful marsh. Bunyan's Christian went into it, and began to sink. He had the burden on his back, but he struggled along, and one on the other side pulled him through and pulled him out. But one or two others said, "We thought we were going to have the presence of God, that we were on the way to heaven." At last they managed to struggle out of the Slough of Despond, but they turned back to the world.

How do your trials affect you, when those troubles come? It may be a disappointment. It may be your health. It may be family concerns. It may be a sore bereavement. It may be a terrible cross, a terrible loss. Anything can be a trial. God can use anything as a trial. But the point is, how does our religion stand when we come into the trial? These things which cast you down, these things which make you sad, how does your religion stand? Do you begin to complain against God? Do you become dissatisfied with your lot? Do you begin to look round and blame other people? Is there that terrible spirit of discontent, or is there the humble submission, the humble acquiescence to the Lord's will, the bowing to His sovereignty? "Lord, Thou knowest best. Thou wilt never afflict me wrongfully. Thou wilt never be unkind." It may be you do not understand it, but you bow before the Lord's sovereignty.

"I cannot, Lord, Thy purpose see,
But all is well that's done by Thee."

Now how are you doing in the trial of faith?

There is another trial of faith: the trial of prosperity. When everything goes right and everything goes well, and you have not a cloud in the sky, and things are going well in your family and in your business and in your circumstances, and you are prospering. That is the trial of faith. And thousands more perish in the trial of prosperity than perish in the trial of adversity. What about any of you this morning and things are going so well for you? Well, it is the trial of your faith. O how many people there have been who have seemed so good and godly and gracious in the day of their adversity, in the day of poverty! And then riches have increased and honours have come and prosperity, and what has happened to their religion then? Well, perhaps not entirely given up, but "thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

"The trial of your faith." The trial of affliction, the trial of prosperity. Then you see, sometimes there is a terrible temptation. Here is a young girl or a young boy. They seem to be doing so nicely in the things of God. Then there comes some friendship, an ungodly person, a carnal person, and all kinds of excuses are made, and that friendship is continued with, and perhaps even marriage itself. That one who set out so well falls in the trial of temptation.

Do not forget that Satan “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith.” O do you realise anything about the trial of faith? If you make any little profession of the Lord’s name, however small, that faith is going to be tried. “Faith, though the smallest, shall surely be tried.” Sometimes there are most severe temptations of Satan, severe temptations of unbelief. O how many have that trial of their faith from the world, at school, at college, at work, in business – the persecution, the mocking! Or it may have been the other way round: the kindness, the love the world shows, and then the world allures you to go its way. But you will have the trial of faith one way or another. And let me tell you this. Satan will try you and tempt you on the point where you feel weakest. One person will be tempted to do a certain thing. Another person, it does not have any attraction for him at all. Satan will tempt that one a different way. How often Satan will tempt you to despair! How often Satan will cast you down. Satan cannot destroy, but he can harass, perplex, and dismay.

And “the trial of your faith ... though it be tried with fire.” That means two things. First of all, that trial will be very, very severe to you. “Though it be tried with fire.” But what is a trial to one is not a trial to another. Look at godly Hannah’s trial of faith, but how her faith came forth as pure gold. But the second thing about it is: “tried with the fire,” it will destroy everything which is not real, everything which is not from God, everything which is not His work. So in the trial of faith we may lose a lot of things. The mercy is that if our religion is real, we can never lose our faith. But we can lose a lot of things.

“True faith’s the life of God,
Deep in the heart it lies;
It lives and labours under load;
Thou damped, it never dies.”

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire.” How is the Lord trying your religion at present? How is Satan trying your religion at present? It is very difficult for you to know whether this is a temptation from Satan or whether it is a trial that the Lord has sent. A lot of the old preachers used to relate this expression, “much more precious than of gold,” not to the faith but to the trial of faith. They used to take it, “that the *trial* of your

faith, being much more precious than of gold.” I have been pondering this point for many years. In some ways, it is not right to say that the trial of your faith is precious. These temptations of Satan and sin to blasphemy and rebellion and discontentment, there is nothing much precious about them, is there? But beloved friends, if the trial of your faith purifies your hearts, if it is to the honour and glory of God, if it humbles you, if it weans you from the world, if it brings you away from false religion, if it makes you hold the world with a loose hand, if it makes Christ precious, if it sets your affections on things above, if you receive a blessing in it, then the very trial is “more precious than of gold that perisheth.”

O but beloved friends, may our trials work for good. May they have a gracious effect. Do not seek for trouble; do not ask for it; do not pray for it. But when trial comes, seek that it might work for your real, lasting, eternal good, to the honour and glory of God. Seek that there may be a real blessing for your soul in it. Seek that you might come out the right side. “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth.” Well you dear souls in the trial of faith this morning, how the Lord loves you, how He watches over you, how He sympathises with you!

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

O but God gives faith and then He tries faith and then He honours faith. But may you realise that the things through which you are passing do not come by chance or by accident. They have not sprung out of the ground. They are for the trial of your faith, that it “might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” It is the reason for the trial of your faith. It is a mercy if in our trials we are confirmed and if in our trials we lose our dross.

That it “might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Now that will be a solemn day. That will be a day when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed. That will be a day when it will be settled to all eternity whether our religion was right or whether our religion was wrong. “The appearing of Jesus Christ.” It does not matter which way you take it, whether you take it as the last great day,

the second coming, when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and the great white judgment throne shall be set up and the eternal separation and the eternal reckoning – “the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Or whether you take it the other way, the day of your death, when time for you shall be no more. “The appearing of Jesus Christ.” I affectionately put that question to you: “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?” O you younger friends, are you ever concerned about the great day, how it will be with you? We are only on earth for a little moment of time and then eternity for ever and ever. Is it ever a concern with you as to how it will be with you in that great day? Some of us look back, how we were going on carelessly, self-satisfied, unconcerned, and then this became the greatest of all concerns. The question was with us day and night how it would be with us at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Would we be eternally saved or eternally lost? Would it be heaven or would it be hell? “The appearing of Jesus Christ.”

That your faith “might be *found* unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” I like that word *found*. That your faith might be found. There is something there, something that has not been destroyed. There is something that still lives. That it might be *found*. It has not been lost. It has not altogether disappeared. O beloved friends, in the last great day may we be found with faith in our hearts, faith in the dear Lord Jesus, that faith which has endured every trial, that faith which has not been destroyed. That it “might be *found*, found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” That our faith might be found, and that it might be thus with you and me, that I might “be found in Him,” Christ, “clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.”

That it “might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” First of all, to the praise, honour and glory of that great God and Saviour who first blessed us with living faith, who maintained that living faith in the trial, and who is now going to honour it to all eternity. O that is the end of faith in heaven, to the praise and honour and glory of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to bless Him for all through which you have passed, to sing the riches of His grace, to put the crown on His head. “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins

in His own blood ... to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.” That is the end of faith; it ends in heaven.

That it “might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” O but then secondly, the honour that the Lord and Saviour will put upon this poor soul who has been brought safely through, the honour that will rest upon him for ever and ever, this poor, trembling sinner who has been blessed with the gift of living faith. It has separated him from the world, caused him to go forth after Christ, to seek to honour the Saviour. O the trials through which that faith passed, but it could not be destroyed. And then the honour that the Lord Jesus in love puts upon this sinner, this sinner loved with an everlasting love, now brought safely through to heaven. “Unto praise and honour and glory.” The glory that awaits the people of God, these true believers, these who have been blessed with faith. On earth they have had a glimpse of the glory of the Lord Jesus. Now they shall see it for ever. Now they too shall be for ever glorified. Beloved friends, this is the end, the everlasting end of true, God-given, saving faith. O what an unspeakable mercy if you and I possess it!

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”