

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 108

Going in the Lord's Strength

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 20th February, 1994**

Text: *"I will go in the strength of the Lord God" (Psalm 71. 16).*

One of the clearest truths in the Word of God is that the Lord is almighty. Now we have that continually emphasised, the constant revelation that our God is almighty, our God is all-powerful, our God is omnipotent. "In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Of course, we have many proofs of this, many displays of it. The two greatest displays of omnipotence are the creation and the resurrection. What a display that was of divine omnipotence when in creation the Lord "spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast"! The greatness, the power, the omnipotence of God. Then again in the resurrection, the wonders of divine, almighty power put forth, raising the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from the dead. Those are the two greatest displays of omnipotence, the creation and the resurrection. And then of course there are many others. No doubt your mind goes right through the Scriptures. Perhaps you think of the crossing of the Red Sea, or the dividing of the waters of Jordan, or the way the lions' mouths were shut, or the way Elijah was miraculously fed. All these displays we have of the greatness, the power of God. What a terrible display of omnipotence was that when the Lord drowned the world!

Some of you might be saying, "Well, this is right. We see in Scripture, we see it clearly that God is almighty, God is all-powerful. 'In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.' But what help is this to me? What comfort is it to me? Why," you say, "the damned in hell know the greatness of omnipotence to all eternity. It does not do them any good. Where is the comfort, where is the blessedness of knowing that the Lord is so great, that the Lord is almighty?" Well, really in two things. First of all, if we know that in all our weakness and helplessness and need this great, almighty God is on our side, that God is with us, God is for us, that this God is our Helper. He is the God who created the world, He is the God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, He is the God with whom nothing shall be impossible. *"This God is our God for ever and ever."* But

then the second thing, and that is this great God who is so powerful, so mighty, communicates strength, He gives strength to His people.

Of course this is the beautiful point, the blessed point in this word we have before us this morning, the gracious way in which the Lord gives strength, communicates strength. So not only do you have the statement, “in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength,” but often you have things like this, a word of personal testimony: “The Lord is my strength.”

O but if your religion and mine are real, one thing we shall painfully learn is our absolute weakness and helplessness, not just at the beginning in our inability to save ourselves, but all the way along: our inability to keep ourselves, our inability, our helplessness, our weakness in everything. Then this will be a very attractive truth and a more attractive experience, that this great, this almighty God, in the riches of His grace, communicates this strength, and He is able to make us strong.

Why, we read in that wonderful eleventh chapter to the Hebrews of some that “out of weakness were made strong.” The reference there seems to be specially to Gideon, poor, fearful, trembling Gideon. “Out of weakness were made strong.” O you say, “My family is poor in Manasseh and I am the least in my Father’s house”; “Why then is all this befallen us?” “Go in this thy might ... have not I sent thee?” It did not matter how weak Gideon was, if God was on his side. It did not matter how strong the Midianites were, if God was not on their side. A pitcher and a lamp – what pitiful weapons these seemed to be, and only three hundred men to go forth against that might army and all their weapons. A pitcher and a lamp. And then they had to shout, “The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.” Well, really we do not read that Gideon carried a sword. Do you know what Gideon’s sword was? When the Lord said, “Go in this thy might ... have not I sent thee?” – that was the sword the Lord put in Gideon’s hand, and it was an omnipotent sword. “Out of weakness were made strong.” “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

So beloved friends, this is the blessedness of it – not just that “in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength,” but that He *gives* it, He communicates it, and as one of the Psalms very strikingly puts it, He commands it. What does that mean? All the Lord needs to do is to speak and that strength is there. “Thy God hath commanded thy strength.” I believe in the covenant of grace almighty God saw all the strength all His

people would ever need, all the strength that you here this morning need, and He commanded it. He commanded it in His beloved Son. “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” Now your strength is already there. It is already commanded. And when you need it, you shall have it. O this communication of divine strength! Daniel was so weak and prostrate and helpless, but he said, The Lord touched me and He strengthened me. “The Lord God will help me ... and I know that I shall not be ashamed.”

There are two very beautiful scriptures especially concerning the way in which the Lord commands this strength His people need, spiritual strength, bodily strength, whatever kind of strength they need. One is in the Old Testament, one is in the New. The one in the Old Testament is this: “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” Now there is a gracious equation there. On the one side, “As thy days.” And it does not matter how many they are, how trying they are, how dark they are. On the other side, divine strength. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” Then,

“Let not thy heart despond, and say,
‘How shall I stand the trying day?’
He has engaged, by firm decree,
That as thy days, thy strength shall be.”

“As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” That is the Old Testament one.

Now the New: “And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul felt so weak, so helpless. He had that thorn in the flesh. You find it sometimes. You are walking a trying pathway. There are hard things, difficult things. But you have that little thorn in the flesh hidden away from sight. No-one can see it. No-one knows about it. But if you have ever literally had a thorn in and you cannot get it out, you cannot rest, it is with you all the time. Paul said, “I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.” Did the Lord answer his prayer, or did He not? He said, “I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” This wonderful theme, this wonderful subject, this great, this almighty God, communicating strength to His people, kindly giving it, when they feel weak and helpless and ready to faint.

So it is on this solid foundation, this good ground, that David makes his resolve: “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” Now David knew what he was talking about, didn’t he? It was not the first time he had made this resolve. He does so here when he is old and grey-headed. But when he was only a young boy and he went against Goliath, he made this resolve then. “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” It is a wonderful thing if in our early days we are able, through grace, to make a resolve, and if like David when we come to the end of our life, we are still walking it out; we have not turned aside from it. Many make a profession and they go back. Many make a good resolve and they give it up. But David, a young boy, going against Goliath: “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” And he knew that resolve stood. He knew the Lord honoured it. They would have given David Saul’s armour. He said, “I have not proved them.” I think some of you know something about that, don’t you? You cannot go in Saul’s armour. You cannot go in borrowed armour. You want something you have proved. David said, “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” “Go, and the Lord be with thee,” says Saul. Let me remind you, as I have so often, that we know the end of the story. David did not. You young children here, even the little ones, you know the story of David and Goliath. You know what happened. You know how David took his five pebbles from the brook. All of us, even to the smallest ones here, know what happened. But David did not know what was going to happen. Humanly speaking, he was facing certain death. He was willing to go for the sake of Israel’s God. “What have I now done? Is there not a cause?” The cause of God and truth lay heavy on young David’s heart. And do not forget this: Goliath was a real giant, not a story-book giant, not an imaginary one. David said to Saul (O what a wonderful testimony!), “The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” Faith like that is never dishonoured. Faith like that is always owned.

“His love in time past forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.”

So you find David at the end of his life still walking out that childhood resolve, “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” O wouldn’t

it be a wonderful thing if some of our children early in life knew a resolve like this: “I will go in the strength of the Lord God”? This is it. It is the enduring, the walking it out, the proving of it, still walking it out as an old man. “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” You might say, “But David, surely you can manage a bit yourself now. You are the king of Israel. You have a great army on your side.” What a mercy to be kept on the same ground as when we first began, leaning on all-sufficient grace, no confidence in self, all our hope, all our help in the Lord! Now David had only a few months or years to live, but it is the same ground, the same resolve right to the end. “I will go in the strength of the Lord.” You say, “Why are you talking like this, David?” David would have said, “I have tried my own strength, and it has failed, but whenever I have tried the Lord’s strength, whenever I have leaned on that, it has never, never failed me, and I believe it never will.”

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” Well then, quite a few things. You and I have a pilgrimage to walk out. It is not an easy thing to walk out your pilgrimage. How can you walk it out, when you feel how weak you are, when you feel the strength of unbelief and temptation and indwelling sin, when you see Satan and the world opposing you, when you have so many burdens to weigh you down? This is the only way in which we can ever walk out our pilgrimage, the only way in which we can ever endure to the end, the only way we can ever come through more than conquerors at last: “in the strength of the Lord.” “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” She is “a weakling, more than strong.” She “vents in His bosom all her woes, and leaning moves along.” But she can never perish because it is an almighty arm on which she leans. And she leans there in safety. She leans there in security. She can never perish while Jesus can save. This is the only way in which you and I can ever walk out our profession. Now there will be that resolve: “I will go.” “I will go,” but it must be “in the strength of the Lord God.”

Now what about any of you who are concerned about openly professing the Lord’s name? If you are, no doubt Samuel’s question (1 Sam. 16. 2) is uppermost on your spirit: “How can I go?” Yet David here says, “I will go.” O but to come from those two points, from one to the other: “How can I go?” “I will go.” Why, it almost seems like having to leap across the ocean, from, “How can I go?” to “I will go.”

I will tell you what will make the transformation. There was once a girl called Rebekah down in Padan-aram, and she said exactly what David said here. She said, “I will go.” Now what was it that made her willing to set out on that long journey? Well, I will tell you. Here was Abraham’s servant seeking a bride for his master, Isaac. Can we say an emblem of the dear Holy Spirit in His sovereign work as He seeks a bride for the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? What did Abraham’s servant do? Well he spoke well of Isaac, didn’t he? He told how his father had blessed him with all things. He spoke of all the glory and grandeur and beauty of Isaac, and he produced a few tokens, and he brought them forth and gave them to Rebekah. And then at the end, the great question: “Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.” That will bring you from, “How can I go?” to “I will go,” if the dear Holy Spirit speaks well of the dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, His glory, His riches, His blessed suitability. And then if He takes of these things of Jesus and shows them to you, gives you a few tokens of His love and favour, and then, “Wilt thou go with this Man?” And your heart all aflame and the love of Christ shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, faith will say, “I will go.” “Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way.”

“O God of faithful Abraham,
In mercy send for me,
And I from Padan-aram
Will rise, and come to Thee.”

Do you know the answer of faith? Do you know the obedience of faith? “Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp.” You say, “How can I go?” “In the strength of the Lord God.” But, “I will go.” “Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” What is the *therefore*? “Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” And faith says, “I will go.” “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.”

“His institutions would I prize;
Take up my cross, the shame despise.”

And faith says, “I will go.” But it is as sweetly constrained by the love of a dear, dying Saviour. Is there a Rebekah here this morning, who, constrained by the love of Christ, can answer that question, “Wilt thou go

with this Man?”? This glorified Man, this Man who now lives and reigns in heaven, this Man who once suffered, bled and died without the gate.

“Ye that pass by, behold the Man!
The Man of griefs condemned for you;
The Lamb of God for sinners slain,
Weeping to Calvary pursue.”

“Wilt thou go with this Man?” And faith says, “I will go.”

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” This is the only way anyone can ever walk out a profession. This is the only way anyone can ever endure to the end. This is the only way you can stand in the hour of conflict. This is the only way you can come to heaven at last. “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” It is not just the beginning; it is the carrying on; it is the walking it out. It is “by evil report and good report.” But faith ever says, “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.”

There may be some of you here, and the Lord is leading you in a special way, a special pathway. It is the exercise of your soul and there it lies before you, and perhaps you shrink from it. Perhaps you say, “How can I go?” Now if it is right, if it is from the Lord – and may the Lord deliver us from false exercises, because we are plagued with them – but if it is right, may the Lord bring you to the obedience of faith: “I will go in the strength of the Lord.” I remember how back in 1956 I used to sit with that letter in front of me week after week, day after day, praying over it. “How can I go?” The impossibility of going to preach. And the Lord brought me over and over again to Isaiah 55, and one day it was just like a whisper from heaven in my soul: “Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace.” Immediately, spontaneously, this sprang right out of my heart: “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” I look back. There was the Lord saying, “Ye shall go,” and there was my heart responding, “I will go.” There will not be any contradiction between your experience and the Lord’s work and purpose for you. “Ye shall go out with joy.” “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.”

It may be that some of you at present are walking a pathway which is very difficult, very trying for you. It may be in your work day by day. It may be in your dealings with other people. It may be in your relationships. It may be in your family. Well, it may be a multitude of things, but the

point is, you find the weight of it, the trial of it, it is hard for you, the continuing day by day, the going on. Well, may this be your resolve: “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” Sometimes it is a promise; sometimes it is a resolve.

How are you going to walk out a resolve like this? One thing will be in prayer. Another thing will be in waiting upon the Lord. For “they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” It will be in dependence. “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” “In His strength may we be strong.” But this wonderful strength of the Lord to uphold you and to help you and to support you and to supply all your needs!

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” There may be some of you and there is something you know you have to do. You know it is right, and yet you shrink from it. It is like that sometimes. There is the conflict. You feel you cannot, you dare not, yet you have no peace while you do not. Toplady says,

“Has God a command to fulfil,
Which nature untoward would shun?
Love brings to compliance the will,
And causes the deed to be done.”

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” With some of you it may be something that is before you tomorrow, or next week, or in the unknown way. It may be something spiritual; it may be something providential. You know what it is. You fear that day coming. You know what it is and the Lord knows what it is. You say, What shall I do when I come there? There are girls, there are boys, there are young people, you have your things. For instance, you have your examinations. It is a wonderful thing if you can pray your way concerning examinations. I hope the Lord has spoken to me a few times in my life, but the most powerfully I have ever felt a word from heaven was when I was quite young, long before I was baptised, and it was before an important examination. O the power of that word! I remember the power of it now. I trust I have heard the Lord’s voice a few times since, but never more powerfully than that. It stilled every fear. It put everything right. Now, “I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” Whatever it is you have before you, whatever it is you fear, whatever it is from which you shrink – “in the strength of the Lord God.”

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” I go back again to my first baptism. It was a good one too. I look back with much pleasure. I was baptizing an aged lady, and I was very, very fearful: naturally fearful, fearful because it was an aged lady, and the Haslingden baptistry was so narrow and so deep, it was like going down into a grave. I remember the power of the Word that morning: “The Lord will help me; ... and I know that I shall not be ashamed.” I have never felt more peaceful in my life than when I stood with that dear, old lady down in the water. “I will go in the strength of the Lord.” And,

“Many days have passed since then;
Many changes I have seen;
Yet have been upheld till now;
Who could hold me up but Thou?”

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” It is wonderful sometimes to look back. David on one occasion said, “My soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.” Can you look back this morning? Can you see that Mount Hermon where the Lord appeared for you, and that little hill Mizar?

“His former visits we recount,
On Mizar’s hill and Hermon’s mount;
Yet still our souls desire anew,
His sweetest, loveliest face to view.”

One thing is sure: what the Lord has been to us, He ever will be to us. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God.” Now it must be so right to the very end, right down to the swellings of Jordan, and you will view it so. You will view it in the swellings of Jordan. The young may die, but the old must. With some of you dear, old friends it can only be a year or two, and perhaps sometimes you wonder how you will do in Jordan’s swellings. “The storm of death draws on apace, and who can say how nigh?” May you go down to the end of your journey like this, finish your pilgrimage how you began it: “I will go in the strength of the Lord,” leaning on His merits, pleading His precious, sin-atoning blood, looking unto Jesus and unto Jesus alone. And if you are brought there in the

strength of the Lord to hide beneath His sheltering blood, “’twill Jordan’s icy waves divide, and land your soul with God.”

“I will go in the strength of the Lord God.”