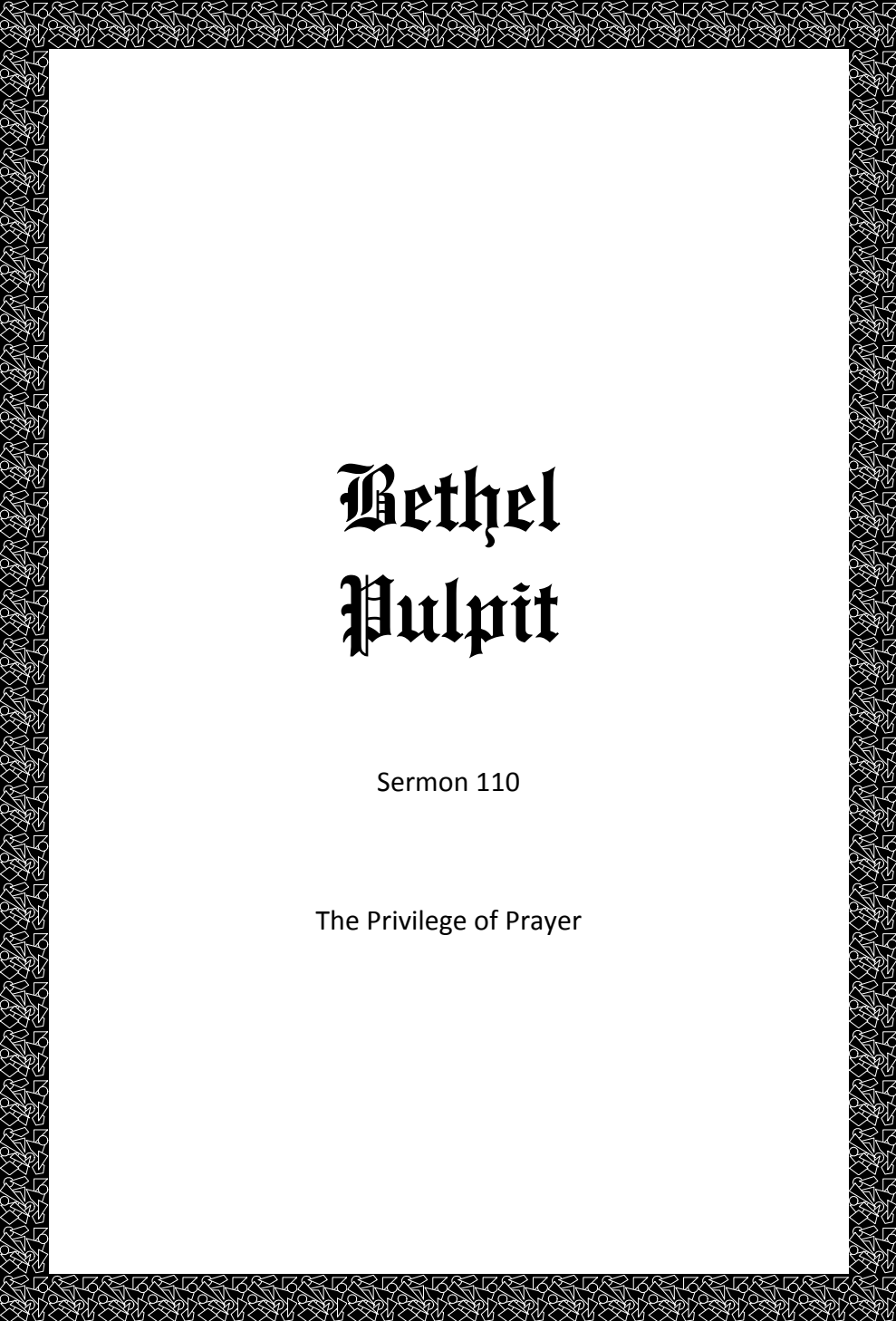




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 110

The Privilege of Prayer

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 29th May, 1994**

Text: *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4. 6, 7).*

This exhortation comes very, very close: "Be careful for nothing." To some of us, it comes as a very solemn reproof. Some of us seem as if we are careful for everything, full of care. Yet the Lord kindly, lovingly, graciously says, "Be careful for nothing." Well, of course, this is not according to nature. We might say, "The work exceeds all nature's power." "I might as soon the seasons change, or raise the dead to life." Yet the Word of God still stands: "Be careful for nothing." "Let not your heart be troubled." Let not your spirits be over-burdened, full of care. "Take therefore no thought for the morrow." Seek not to be over-anxious.

"Be careful for nothing." Well, it seems an impossibility. But the Lord very kindly and graciously prescribes the remedy for this spirit of care, being over-burdened, being over-anxious. And it is this: turn your anxieties into prayers. That is, seek divine help, seek divine grace, to turn your anxieties into prayers. And do you believe it, that the Lord is able to cause that "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" to "keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"?

"Be careful for nothing." You see, when the Lord Jesus spoke that solemn parable of the sower, there were three kinds of ground which did not bring forth fruit. One was the thorny ground, the thorns and briars. Of course, the Lord Jesus gave various explanations of these various thorns and briars that choke the good seed, choke the ground, so that it is not fruitful. One of them was this: the cares of this life. Of course, there was the deceitfulness of riches. There were the pleasures of this life. But then there were the cares. O when we are swallowed up with them, then these cares choke the good seed. They choke the growth. They keep us from being fruitful. O but you say, "The cares that I have!" Well, to those of you tonight who feel burdened, heavily burdened with cares, the Lord

speaks a very kind word, and it is this: “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” Now that is the answer, the God-prescribed answer, for being swallowed up with care, being immersed in care, the care choking the growth, choking the good seed. Now you will have your cares, but the Lord kindly bids you to cast them upon Him, the great Burden-bearer. He who at Calvary in love bore His people’s sins, how willing He is to bear their cares! “Casting all your care upon Him” – all of it. So often we cast *some* of our care on the Lord. “Casting *all* your care upon Him; for He careth for you.”

“‘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.’”

“Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.”

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” “Let your requests be made known unto God” – “in every thing.” O what a blessed provision is the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, where sinners are welcome to come with all their cares! And the Lord Jesus will never misunderstand you. He will never tell you that you have come again and again with the same things and you do not learn. He will never say that it is your own fault that you have come into these things. Satan will tell you all that, but the Lord Jesus will not. O that mercy seat sprinkled with blood, and that loving welcome despite all your sins!

I want to say this graciously, beloved friends: the barrier, the obstacle is not with the dear Lord Jesus; it is with you and me. By nature we have a sinful aversion to prayer. We would rather do things ourselves, and when we do pray, O the wandering thoughts and the lack of reality! But it is a wonderful thing that at times the Lord enables us really to pray, to unbosom ourselves to the Lord, to unburden ourselves to the Lord. “Ye people, pour out your heart before Him.” It is a wonderful thing when you can pour out your heart in prayer. So often it is as if something sticks and there is not much moving. But when suddenly you feel your heart being poured out in prayer, you feel that sweet relief even in being enabled to pour out your cares to God, and you feel some sweetness in waiting at the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, at the throne of grace.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” “Let your requests be made known unto God” – “in every thing,” but above all in the great thing, your soul’s various concerns, your sins, your guilt, the need for forgiveness, the need for mercy, a never-ending eternity before you, the need to be made ready, made right, to be prepared.

“In every thing ... let your requests be made known unto God.” That is a good request: “Prepare me, gracious God, to stand before Thy face.” That is a good request: “In Christ’s obedience clothe, and wash me in His blood.” “In every thing ... let your requests be made known.” That request: “Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!” That request: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” That request: “Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die.” “Let your requests be made known unto God.” What a wonderful thing that a poor, wretched, fallen sinner can go in prayer to this great, holy, almighty God and say, “Lord, have mercy on me,” and He is not displeased; to say to this great God, “Lord, I am sorry” (and do not make any excuses), and He is not displeased. Mercy, pardon, forgiveness are there.

“In every thing ... let your requests be made known unto God.” *Your* request – those things that lie tonight so heavily upon your heart, those things that weigh you down, that burden you. O let *those* requests be made known unto God. There is nothing too great to bring before Him; there is nothing too small. There was an old saying that “there is nothing too small for His love and there is nothing too great for His power.” Now you ponder that: nothing too small to bring before Him because of His love, and nothing too great to bring before Him because of His power.

“In every thing” – those small things. So often we think we can manage them ourselves; so often we feel there is no need to pray. So we *do not* make our requests; we try to manage these things ourselves. Then you find the confusion and you find the failure. How often have you found this: you have something and it is such an easy matter, and you do not make any request to the Lord, and it ends in confusion? You will never find that with a hard thing when you are asking for the Lord’s help.

But “in every thing ... let your requests be made known unto God.” And then those great things, those impossible things. Hear the Lord speak: “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for

Me?” What is your hard thing tonight? What is your hard cause? May you hear the voice of omnipotence: “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” The tenderness, the compassion, the mercy, the understanding in a word like this: “Bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.”

“In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” O what is it tonight that lies heavy on your heart? What about the trouble you are in, the trouble which weighs you down? “In everything by prayer and supplication ... let your requests be made known unto God.” He says, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” Very sovereign is the way in which the Lord delivers His people from trouble, but His gracious promise still stands: “I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing” – however small, however great. Ever remember this: that He who sits upon the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, He understands, He knows, He cares. What a word that, we have it so often in the gospels: “full of compassion”!

“In every thing.” What is it that lies so heavy on your heart? What is it that fills your spirit with such care? Is it something in your family? Is it something in your circumstances? Is it something concerning your health? Is it something concerning those you love? Or is it something about tomorrow and the unknown way? Is it something in the church of God? Is it some disappointment? “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” “Cast *thy* burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.” *Thy* burden, that which rests so heavily upon your shoulders, that which rests so heavily upon your heart. *Thy* burden. What is a burden to one is not a burden to another. What is a burden to you now may not be a burden to you in a year’s time. Something that did not trouble you at all a year ago may almost prostrate you now. But if the Lord means a thing to be a burden, it will be a burden. Sometimes the Lord lays a burden upon us and we try to shoulder it, to manage it ourselves, but if there is not the casting it on Him in prayer, the Lord will lay a heavier burden. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall *sustain* thee.” Sometimes He does not take the burden away, but He sustains you. “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“In *every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Some of you may be seeking divine leading. You are concerned; you are not sure whether it is this way or that way. You do not want to act wrongly. You want the will of the Lord to be done. “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Some of you may feel it is a time of need, great need, spiritual or providential. “In every thing ... let your requests be made known unto God.” That was a wonderful word we read towards the end of the chapter: “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” There is a never-failing treasury here. “My God shall supply all your need.” I remember when I was young being burdened in a particular matter and concerned about it, and feeling the authority of that line: “My every need He richly will supply.” And He did, and He does. “My God *shall*.” “All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen.” “My God shall supply all your need” – not everything you think you need, not everything your carnal heart wants, but all your need, great and small, providence and grace. If you need it, you shall have it, beloved. “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

“In every thing.” O but with some, you perhaps feel, “I can leave these other things, but it is my soul, the temptations I have, the hardness I feel, the darkness, the deadness, the lack of assurance, the lack of sweet liberty. If only I had this, I could let these other things go.” “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Some of you perhaps say, “But it is the great day, the day of my death. How will I do in the swellings of Jordan?”

“In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” – preachers seeking that the Lord will bless the Word, hearers seeking that the Lord will bless the Word to you.

“In every thing.” But there are some dark, peculiar, distressing things today, aren’t there, in our lives and circumstances, in the nation, in the church of God? Like some kind of maze there seems to be no way through, no way over, no way out. These great mountains that come in our

pathway at times and we cannot see any way through them or round them or over them. They are about to crush us. Years ago we learned that prayer and we learned the Lord's blessed ability to answer it: "Touch the mountains, and they shall smoke." And the Lord says, "I will make all My mountains a way."

Well, beloved friends, what is it tonight that is concerning you, body or soul, providence or grace? "In every thing" – in all places, at all times, as graciously enabled by the Spirit of God – "in every thing by prayer." O may the Lord lead us forth in the pathway of prayer. May we continue in prayer. May we pray without ceasing. May we more and more learn the value of prayer. "It is good for me to draw near to God." May we more and more learn the solemnity of being in a prayerless spirit. "In every thing by prayer." "Pray, if thou canst or canst not speak; but pray with faith in Jesus' name." Try what your poor prayers can do, your hard-hearted prayers can do. Pray through Jesus' worthy name. Plead the merits of a great High Priest. It is on that ground that the Father sends down these answers of peace.

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer *and supplication*." Supplication is the same as prayer, but there is more life and more liberty and more energy in it. Like Jacob when he said, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." That is supplication. That is wrestling in prayer. I think you will know the difference, those of you who know and fear the Lord. Sometimes you seek to pray, and there is not any prayer in it at all. You do not feel those prayers are reaching any higher than the ceiling. Then sometimes quietly you feel you are enabled to pray. But then when that spirit of supplication seizes you, you cannot take *no* for an answer. You pray in submission to the Lord's will, subject to the Lord's will, but "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence!" "By prayer and supplication." When the Lord revives Zion, He has promised to pour out the spirit of grace and supplication. J. C. Philpot says, that beautiful, gently-flowing stream – prayer. The same stream after there has been a heavy rain, rushing along, almost a torrent – that is supplication. The same stream but more power, more urgency. May the Lord bless us with a spirit of supplication.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*.” Now the Lord puts that in; may we not leave it out. How backward we are to thank the Lord for His mercies, to thank Him for all His kindness! “With thanksgiving.” Some of God’s people have found this. They have perhaps sat down one day feeling so dead and dark and tried and barren, and they have tried to thank the Lord for His mercies. Then under the realisation of the greatness of God’s mercies their heart has began to flow in holy gratitude and thanksgiving. “When all Thy mercies, O my God, my ravished soul surveys.” May the Lord bless us with a spirit of thanksgiving. Even in our most solemn moments, even in our deepest sorrows, even in our greatest disappointments, if only we might be sweetly enabled to mingle thanksgiving with our prayer and supplication. And if in nothing else, thanksgiving that we are still out of a deserved hell.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known *unto God*.” Unto God. Now there is an emphasis there. “*Unto God*.” This great God in heaven who is almighty, who is eternal, who is sovereign, who with heaven and earth at His command waits to answer prayer. He who in creation spake and it was done; He who on the sea of Galilee said, “Peace, be still. ... And there was a great calm.” This great, this sovereign, this omnipotent God. Now let your requests be made known to Him, and may you have believing views of His greatness, His ability to answer prayer. “Let your requests be made known unto God.” This God who has invited His people to pray; this God who has encouraged them to draw near; this God who has opened the way of prayer through the merits of His beloved Son, so that a sinner with all his sin and wretchedness and ruin and guilt is permitted to draw near, invited to draw near, welcomed to draw near in prayer. The Lord is much more ready to hear than we are to pray. Now this God who has made such precious promises concerning the throne of grace, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, “let your requests be made known unto God.” This God who is merciful and gracious; this God who delights in mercy; a sin-pardoning God; this God who “will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

“Let your requests be made known unto God.” And dare you say which is the greater: His power or His compassion, His omnipotence or

His tenderness? And mingled with it, the faithfulness of God. You say, "I love His wondrous faithfulness!" Let your requests be made known to this faithful God. And His wisdom; He understands. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Let your requests be made unto this God, this faithful God, this all-wise God. "Let your requests be made known unto God." This God who can make a way where there is no way. The hearts of all men are in His hand. This God who divided the waters of the Red Sea. This God who shut the lions' mouths. "Is thy God ... able to deliver thee?" This God who is the helper of His people; this God who is an almighty deliverer.

"Then let our humble faith address
His mercy and His power;
We shall obtain delivering grace,
We shall obtain delivering grace,
In the distressing hour."

"Let your requests be made known unto God."

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Now don't we long for the sweet realisation of this: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"? It will still every fear, quiet every pang. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Leave everything in My hands; trust completely to Me. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding." Peace to that poor, tried, harassed, burdened conscience, weighted down with sin. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts." O that peace made by the blood of His cross! "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding." He says, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

"The peace which Jesus' blood secures,
And fixes in our hearts,
To all eternity endures,
Nor finally departs."

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Peace in the day of trouble. That has been a good word to me over the years: “And this Man shall be the peace.” And that word linked with it: “He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind.” The Lord has a blessed ability to stay the rough wind in the day of the east wind. “And this Man shall be the peace.” “When thou canst no deliverance see, yet still this Man thy peace shall be.”

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Hearing your prayers, answering your prayers. Now look at Hannah. She was in bitterness of soul. Her burden was so great, she felt it unbearable. But she was sweetly enabled by prayer and supplication to let her requests be made known unto God. Godly Eli, the high priest, completely misunderstood her; he rebuked her. God did not. The Lord heard her petitions. We have that beautiful word: “And the Lord remembered her.” He remembered her. She went back from Shiloh, “and her countenance was no more sad.” She had not got her Samuel yet; she was still waiting for the answer, but she had been sweetly enabled to heave her burden at the Lord’s feet, to leave it in His hands, and O the peace she felt! Just like Ruth when she went in softly by night to Boaz with that heavy burden, and she fell down at Boaz’s feet and left it there. O this peace from Zion’s prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God, this peace which ends in heaven, this everlasting peace! And it is all in Christ. It is all through Christ Jesus.

Well, beloved friends, amidst all our cares and burdens and the things which try us and perplex us, may the Lord in love and mercy graciously enable us to walk out this word. May He “draw us to His loving breast, there we find the promised rest”; lead us in prayer; exercise our hearts for ourselves and those we love, for the church of God and our family; exercise our hearts at the throne of grace, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat; and then send us those answers of peace, bless us with this sweet peace in our hearts and lives, this which shall end in everlasting peace.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”