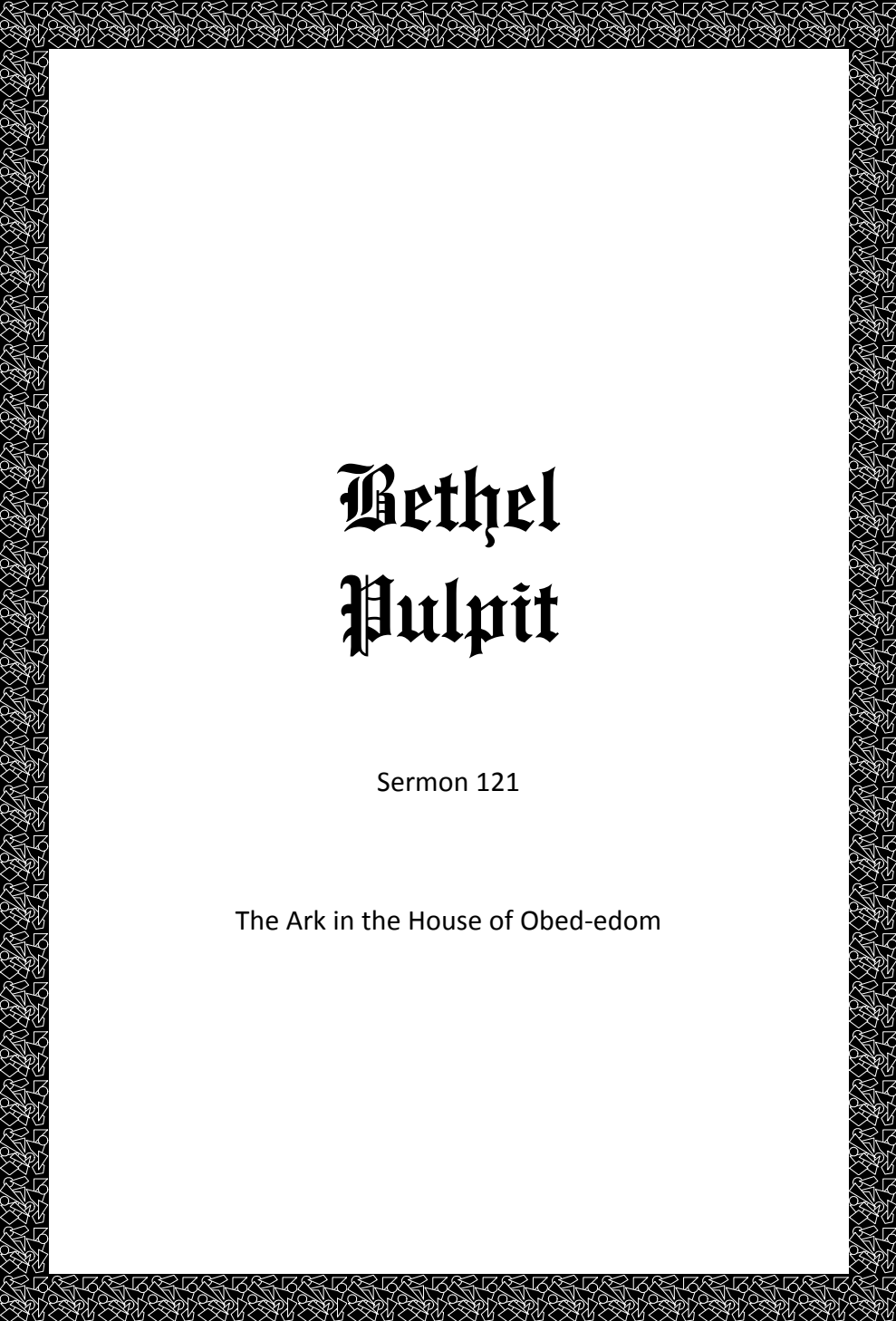




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 121

The Ark in the House of Obed-edom

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 26th March, 1995**

Text: *“And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God” (2 Samuel 6. 12).*

The ark was the most precious piece of furniture in the tabernacle. In all its fulness it pointed to Christ. Now it was a holy ark. There was the mercy seat; there was the sprinkled blood; there was the meeting place between God and sinners; there was the promise: “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat.”

Now at this time the holy ark of God for a long number of years had been in exile. A solemn thing, the ark of God in exile! And it seems that Israel generally was unconcerned about it. You remember well what had happened. The children of Israel were going into battle against their enemies, the Philistines, and they thought of a daring, desperate plan, but it was not a gracious plan. They took the holy ark of God into battle with them as a kind of omen, as a kind of charm. But Israel was defeated and the holy ark of God was captured by the Philistines. This was the cause of good Eli's death as he sat there and watched and trembled for the ark of God. I believe many of us today tremble for the ark of God.

But though Israel was defeated, though the ark was captured, Israel's enemies could not deal with it lightly. Wherever it came to the cities of the Philistines it brought death, it brought sickness, it brought destruction. They put it in the house of their god Dagon in triumph, but down fell Dagon, dashed in pieces. No idol, no Dagon can stand before the holy ark of God. In the end, the Philistines who had triumphed so much in possessing it were only too glad to be rid of it. Still the holy ark of God could not be tampered with. We are told about the men of Beth-shemesh, when the ark was returned to Israel; they looked into the ark with prying eyes, with curiosity, and thousands of them were smitten with death. Never pry into the holy ark of God. Never seek to look into it with curiosity.

In the end, after many years, David felt constrained to bring the holy ark of God back to Jerusalem. Let us be clear: it was a good desire. But I do not know whether you noticed in our reading this evening, it began, “And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader.” We read of all these people with whom David consulted but we do not read once that he consulted with God. I suppose the point was so simple, so straightforward. Do watch that in your lives. You have something hard, difficult, so you consult with God and the Lord graciously helps you, leads you. Then you have something you think you can manage yourself and you do not consult with God. That is where the danger begins. That is where the disaster comes.

But we find, and we know not why, that they set the holy ark of God upon a new cart to bring it up to Jerusalem, in sheer disobedience to the Lord’s commandment that the ark of God had always to be carried on staves on the shoulders of the Levites, the Kohathites. It is very clear also the ark had to be covered. It seems they put the ark on this new cart as a kind of spectacle. At first everything seemed to go well, and then the oxen pulling the ark stumbled and the ark began to shake and Uzzah put forth his hand to steady the ark and the Lord smote him with immediate death. O how exceeding solemn it was! And it is “Bow down sense and reason,” because if we let our natural thoughts and judgment begin to work, we think this is unkind of the Lord. But the Lord is very displeased with disobedience, and this was clear disobedience. And the Lord showed His marked displeasure of it.

But there was a principle here. There were important things here. The Lord does not need any unholy hand to steady His ark, and no-one apart from the priests was allowed to touch the ark, not even David. He was angry with God that day. It is a solemn thing to be angry with God, but David was angry with God. And we are told that “David was afraid of God that day.” Have you ever been afraid of God? Tell me, have you ever been afraid of God, when you have done something wrong, when you fear the Lord’s just judgment upon you? “David was afraid of God that day.”

The next time when David attempted to bring the holy ark of God back to Jerusalem, he said, The first time we did it not “after to the due order.” I do not know whether you have ever read carefully the books of Exodus and Leviticus. God gave many very clear instructions for Moses to

write down to the least detail, and He said to Moses, “See ... that thou make all things” – and see that thou do all things – “according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.” Now Moses was a wise man, a gracious man, but almighty God did not leave one single thing to Moses’ decision or choice. He had to do all things according to the pattern given him in the mount. Not the least pin, not the least hinge could Moses decide upon.

There is a principle here. The ceremonial law is done away in Christ. The tabernacle no longer exists. The holy ark of God, we do not know what happened to it; it disappeared at the time of the captivity. But the principle still remains that God is a holy, holy, holy God and He still hates disobedience. Especially in the church of God He has laid down a clear order, a clear order of worship, a clear order concerning the officers of the church, a clear order concerning the business of the church, a clear order concerning the purpose of the church. And the vital principle is this: “that in all things He” – Christ – “might have the pre-eminence.” But He does not leave one thing to your choice and mine. It is not what you think, what I think, what you decide, what I decide. It is to discern the holy mind and will of God as revealed in His holy Word. There is a principle here. It is to do all things according to the pattern given us in the mount. And if you come to the New Testament, especially such books as Paul’s two Epistles to Timothy, you have the heavenly pattern there.

Mind you, beloved friends, first of all it starts with you and me, in our hearts in our souls. Have I a religion according to the heavenly pattern, not according to the flesh, not according to my own thoughts, my own suggestions? “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.” O but to come to the law and testimony of holy Scripture, to see delineated what a real Christian is and what a true work of grace is and what the preparation for heaven is, and then to ask the vital question, Have I a religion according to the heavenly pattern? So in our lives, the places we go, the things we do, the things we do not do, the way we behave, is it according to the heavenly pattern?

So in the church of God here upon earth, is it according to the heavenly pattern shown to us in the mount? It is God’s Word, God’s religion, God’s church, God’s way, and may we not deviate from it. Uzzah

disobeyed the heavenly pattern. David should have known better. What about all these priests and Levites? They should have known better. But they thought it did not matter, that this way was equally good; or perhaps it was better. But God's way, God's Word, God's religion must always stand right down to the end of time.

So we have this most solemn example here of Uzzah laying his unholy hand upon the holy ark of God, which was forbidden by the Lord, and being smitten with instant death. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints." He says, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me." Look at the sons of Aaron when they burned strange fire and there in their priests' robes they perished before God. Look at King Uzziah, and he was a godly man, but when he destroyed the heavenly pattern and presumed upon the priesthood, he was smitten immediately with leprosy. He remained a leper until the day of his death. We cannot play about with divine things. "Our God is a consuming fire." May we seek to worship Him in His own way; to use David's expression, "after the due order."

Well then, beloved friends, after the smiting of Uzzah, after this dreadful tragedy, this solemn judgment from almighty God, we see things in a state of sorrow, distress, confusion. King David does not know what to do. The priests, the Levites, do not know what to do. But there is this dear man, Obed-edom. He is described as a Gittite. That does not mean he was a Philistine Gittite like Goliath. It means he came from Gath-rimmon. This dear man opened his heart, opened his home. He welcomed the holy ark of God there, whatever might be the cost. He did not want the ark of God to be dishonoured. He did not want it left in the open streets. He did not want it to go back into exile. And he welcomed the holy ark of God into his own home. It must have been a tremendous sacrifice, not just for him but also for his family. As we read later in Chronicles (1 Chronicles 26. 4, 5), it was a large family. I think we read of eight sons there, and we are told that the Lord blessed them. But it must have been a great inconvenience, a great sacrifice. It must have hampered his movements, hindered the things he himself wanted to do. It must have interfered with his own personal behaviour, especially when Israel trembled because of the solemn judgment. No-one else dared draw near to the ark of God except this man.

And King David heard about it: “The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God.” There is a principle here, and that principle is this: “Them that honour Me I will honour.” *This* is not legal ground. *This* is not legality. But “them that honour Me I will honour.” O what a blessed people are those who are enabled to honour Christ! What a blessing they are to the church of God, those who always put Christ first; those who always seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; those whose chief, whose one, whose only concern is the good of Zion, the welfare of the church of God; those who cannot bear that the name of God, the name of His cause, should be dishonoured; those who do not mind what they suffer, what they endure, what it means to them, if only the name of Christ be honoured and glorified. Now “them that honour Me I will honour.”

The Lord bless the church of God today with more Obed-edoms, the things of God first and everything else second. And the Lord bless us here in this congregation with many an Obed-edom. He was not particularly a public man, or a great man, or a famous man, or a notable man, but he was a man who honoured Christ. O what a blessing these are! He was sweetly constrained by love, love to Israel’s God, love to the holy ark, love to the Lord’s dear people, Israel. “The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God.” We do not read mention of anyone else in the whole of Israel who was willing to have the ark of God, but this man was.

“The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God.” A few things as this concerns you and me today. Obed-edom gave this loving welcome to the ark of God. It was welcomed into his home. It had the chief place, the first place there. So first of all concerning you and me personally. The ark of God in all its fulness represents Christ. Is there a place in your heart and mine for the holy ark of God to enter and there to dwell and there to abide? By nature there is no room in our hearts for the Saviour. By nature our hearts are like the crowded inn at Bethlehem, room for various guests of various sorts but no room for the incarnate God, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is your heart, that is my heart by nature, closed to God, closed to Christ, closed to salvation. “We will not have this Man to reign over us.” O but do you know the difference which grace makes? Has

grace ever touched your heart? “Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.”

One clear, vital effect of the new birth will always be this: to create a place in a sinner’s heart which none but Christ can fill. Have you a place like that? Do you know what Cowper means when he sings of “an aching void the world can never fill”? That empty place in your heart; the world once filled it, but now it is an aching void. O your sins, your soul, the judgment day, eternity, the vanity of everything here below, the preciousness of the things of God! That aching void, the world cannot satisfy it; the world cannot fill it. We read of “a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira ... whose heart the Lord opened.” She did not open it herself. The Lord opened it; He has the key to every heart. But we need our hearts to be opened. By nature our hearts, our sinful hearts, our carnal hearts, our unregenerate hearts are hard hearts, closed hearts, shut up against the Lord. Like Jericho, it was “straitly shut up.” None could go in. And our hearts are like that. But when the Lord begins to deal with us and teach us our need and our sin and our shame and He opens our hearts, then there is that place which none but Christ can fill. Then this will be your chief desire, that Christ might come in and enter. You are an Obed-edom. Your heart is opened to the holy ark of God.

“O come, Thou much-expected Guest!

Lord Jesus, quickly come!

Enter the chamber of my breast;

Thyself prepare the room.”

I reckon Obed-edom felt so unworthy. His house was not good enough, but there was the loving welcome for the ark of God, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Is there an Obed-edom here with a gently-opened heart, and you are willing that Christ should enter and live and reign there the hope of eternal glory?

When the Lord Jesus came to earth, the hearts of all men were closed against Him. “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” But there were some wrought upon by the Spirit of God whose hearts the Lord opened. There were a few Obed-Edoms. “But as many as received Him” – now this is faith; faith receives the Saviour in your heart, in your affections. “But as many as received Him, to them

gave He power” – that is, the right, the privilege – “to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” A believer is one made willing to receive Christ in your heart. “Which were born” – this is the secret, the reason – “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” I have often thought of the little, popular, well-known hymn, and if you sing the language graciously it is very beautiful. I know some people sing it wrongly in an Arminian sense, but if grace teaches you, you can sing it: “O come to my heart, Lord Jesus; there is room in my heart for Thee.” “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Come and dwell in my heart for ever. Come and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. Come in and cast out every idol, because if the holy ark of God enters, then Dagon cannot live there as well. Dagon must fall down, dashed in pieces before the holy ark of God.

O but this is the blessed man and this is the secret of true blessedness. “The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God.” What means this *because*? Because the ark of God was welcome there. Because the ark of God entered there. Because the ark of God took up its abode there. “Unworthy dwelling! glorious Guest! favour astonishing, divine!” So first of all your heart and my heart, your life and my life.

“It was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God.” Now secondly concerning our homes. Literally this was the home of Obed-edom. It was the house where he lived with his family, and the ark of God entered. That home, that family could never be the same again. Tell me, beloved friends, is the holy ark of God welcome in your homes? If it is, you cannot have the world there. The world will have to go. It is a mockery of the name of Christ if you want the world and the holy ark of God in the same room. Where the holy ark of God comes it will always sanctify and it will interfere with your life, and when you are in a right spirit under the sweet constrainings of the love of Christ, you will want it to interfere with your life and you will be willing for it to interfere with everything. If the ark of God dwells in your home there will be so many things your flesh wants to do, but it will be “so did not I, because of the fear of God.” There will be many things your old flesh does not want to do, but you will be sweetly constrained by the love of God to do them. It will be a sacrifice and it will interfere with so much. But you will say,

“Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” You will see the precious blood sprinkled on the ark and you will know where it was shed. You will see it shed at Calvary and you will see it sprinkled on the ark. And “love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

I would come to points with you. How many of you really have the ark of God welcome in your homes? Or is it this: you are glad to come to chapel; it is not a trouble; you like coming. But when half past seven comes on the Lord’s day evening, you are very glad to leave the holy ark of God in chapel. You do not want to take it home with you to your own dwelling place. I wonder how many of you here this evening want the world and Christ. You cannot have both. You cannot journey to heaven with Christ in one hand and the world in the other. It has to be one or the other. “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” “Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.”

But beware of hypocrisy, because it is hateful to the all-seeing eye of God. And that all-seeing eye is a flame of fire which sees right into the very recesses of the soul. It sees all the hypocrisy there, the contradiction, the inconsistency. Do not talk of the holy ark of God having an abiding place in your heart if it does not have an abiding place in your home. “That in all things He might have the pre-eminence.” “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” Parents, your children know whether the things of God are everything to you or whether they are not. But whatever the sacrifice, as you go forth “unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach,” however it interferes with you, whatever you have to give up, you will never be a loser. There used to be a saying which our old preachers used a lot. We need to be careful what we mean, but I just mention it to you. They used to say that the Lord will never be a debtor to any man. Well most certainly He will not. But you will prove this: “Them that honour Me I will honour.”

“And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God.” So first our hearts and lives, and second our homes, and then third the congregation, the house of the Lord. May it be our chief desire that the holy ark of God abides here, because if it departs where are we? May we be kept from grieving the Holy Spirit. At a later date, at the time

Solomon built the temple (and that temple must have been one of the most magnificent buildings that was ever known, when you think of the gold and the silver, the exquisite workmanship, the cedar, the jewels bestudding the walls), when Solomon came to the dedication he realised that all of this, destitute of the Lord's presence, was worthless. Do you believe that? Whatever name we might have, whatever congregation we might have, whatever else we might have, destitute of the Lord's presence, then our worship is empty and worthless. But did not Solomon wrestle with his God in prayer? And it was this: "Arise, O Lord God, into Thy resting place, Thou, and the ark of Thy strength: let Thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in goodness." God answered Solomon's prayer. He did. As the holy ark of God entered Solomon's temple, we are told that the whole building was so full of the glory of the Lord that the priests were unable to enter because of the weight of the glory.

We look back to some of our former days at Bethel when the Lord made the place of His feet glorious and when the glory of the Lord filled this house. How sweet the memory still! But may there be that urgent, burning desire, "Arise, O Lord God, into Thy rest." In other words, let this be Thy resting place. Dwell here, live here, reign here for ever. "Thou, and the ark of Thy strength." That is the secret of blessing, the Lord's gracious presence among His people, the sanctifying effect of the truth, the preaching of the Word as it is sealed home with power by the Holy Ghost.

"And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God." Beloved friends, may our hearts and lives be as the house of Obed-edom. May our homes be as the house of Obed-edom. And may this house of prayer here be as the house of Obed-edom, the Lord Jesus having all the honour, all the glory. "That in all things He might have the pre-eminence."