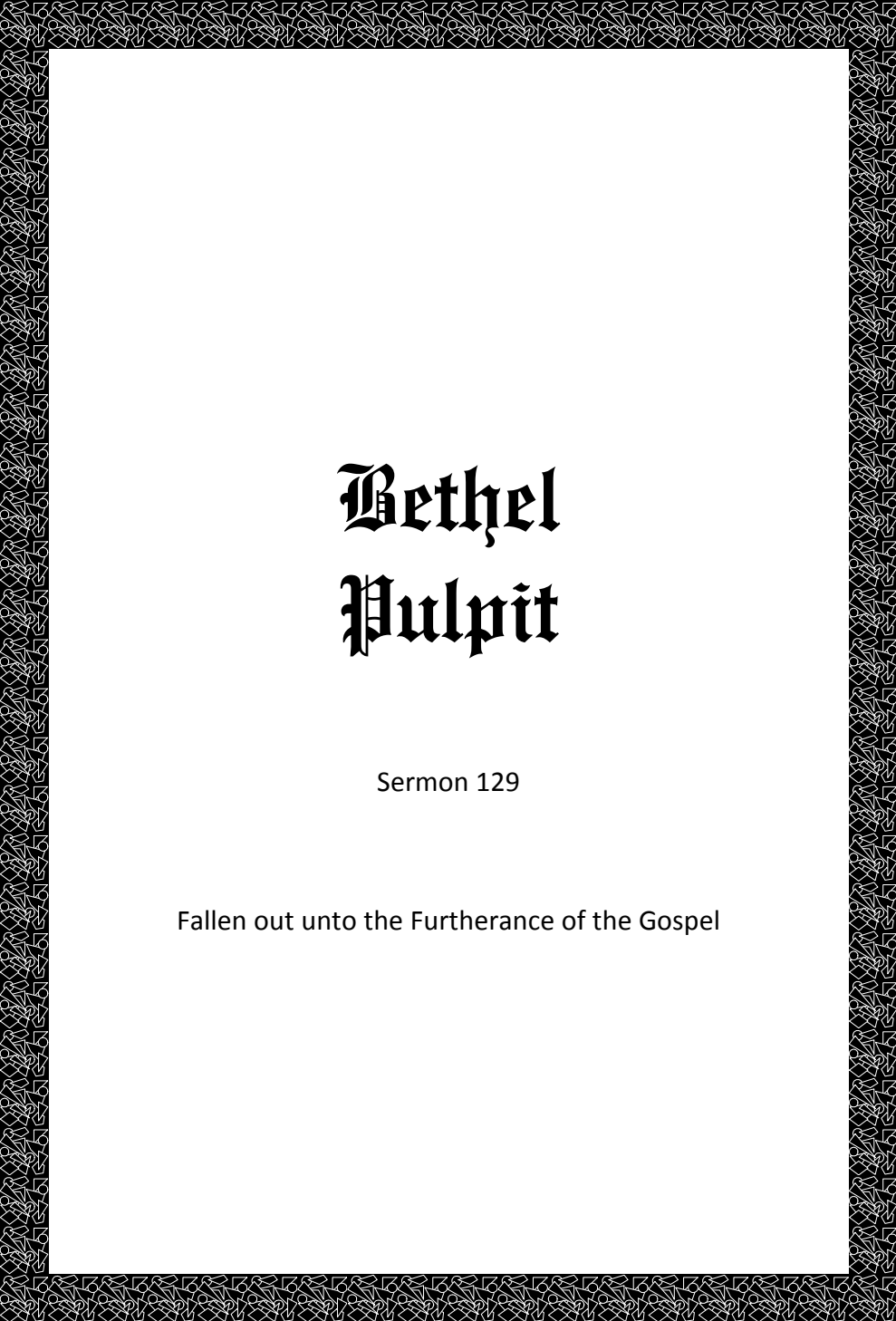




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 129

Fallen out unto the Furtherance of the Gospel

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 24th December, 1995**

Text: *“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Philippians 1. 12).*

There is much weighty affliction amongst us at present as a congregation. I do not think I can ever on any occasion over the years remember so much with so many different families at the same time and in such different ways. And again and again as I have thought about this and sought to visit many of you this week, and pray about these things, this word seems to have rested on my spirit: “I would ye should understand ... that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” O but there are so many afflicted, aren't there? And some of you have had such disappointments; and some of you have been through so much. Some of you have had such sore trials. It may be some of you are wondering why. It may be Satan is taking advantage and harassing some of you. There are so many things, the burdens and worries and problems and concerns, the disappointments, the sad things: “The things which happened unto me.” Well, each of you here this evening can fill in for yourself just what that means, the things which have happened unto me. With some of you they have been very sudden and with some of you they have been very trying.

“The things which happened unto me.” There is a similar expression in the Book of Leviticus. There we have it like this: “Such things have befallen me,” spoken by a broken-hearted father, Aaron. “Such things have befallen me.” The day began like any other day, but before the end of the day his two sons were dead and he was there with a broken heart. We are told that two of his sons, dressed in their priestly robes, burnt strange fire on the altar. Exactly what that means, we are not sure. But we know they did not act according to God's appointment and the fire was not kindled on the altar where the sacrifice was offered and the blood was shed. Really the whole point seems to be that they despised the sacrifice, they despised the blood. May no-one here ever be left to that, to

trample underfoot the blood of the everlasting covenant. They thought they could worship God in their own way.

“Worship God, then, in His Son;
There He’s love and there alone;
Think not that He will, or may,
Pardon any other way.

“Sin to pardon without blood
Never in His nature stood.”

There, as they appeared before the Lord, the Lord smote those two sons of Aaron with instant death and they lay there, two dead bodies in their priestly robes. And Aaron said, “Such things have befallen me today.” But if ever you see grace in a man, you see it in Aaron. Have you ever noticed this, that there is only one person in the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation called a saint, and that is Aaron? (Psalm 106. 16.) These pieces over the top like *Saint* Matthew and *Saint* Mark were, of course, added by the translators. There is only one man called a saint: Aaron. Perhaps you read his life and think, not much of a saint. O but those two sons lying dead and Aaron was forbidden to mourn over them because they died in their sin. You think of that. “And Aaron held his peace.” This is Aaron, the saint of the Lord. “Such things.” “Such things have befallen me.” O to be an Aaron! “Aaron held his peace.” And it reminds us of a greater High Priest than Aaron. It is written, “But Jesus held His peace.” Poor Aaron got all mixed up that day with the service of the house of the Lord. It was vital there should not be any deviation. He got everything mixed up, and Moses rebuked Aaron because he had not carried out the services of the sanctuary aright. Moses, the representative of that iron law, goes and rebukes Aaron. There is only one thing Aaron says. He says, Moses, “such things have befallen me” today. Here you see grace. “And when Moses heard that, he was content.”

“The things which happened unto me.” “Such things have befallen me” this day, this week. You can fill your own piece in here. “The things which happened unto me have fallen out.” Brethren, I would ye should understand this. These things which have happened, they have happened, but not *just* happened, not *merely* happened, not *only* happened. They have fallen out. I would, brethren, that ye should understand this. The Lord give you grace to understand it, that the things which have happened

have fallen out. They did not spring from the dust. They did not come by chance. “Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” These things which have happened, these strange things, unexpected things, distressing things, disappointing things, sad things, I would ye should understand that they have fallen out, fallen out of the hand of an all-wise, all-gracious God, fallen out of the lap of divine providence. I would ye should understand this.

In another place, Paul is writing, and he suddenly stops, suddenly pauses. “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” O now the Lord give thee understanding in this: “I would ye should understand ... that the things which happened ... have fallen out.” O to see, “My life’s minutest circumstance is subject to His eye.” O to see, “My times are in Thy hand.” O to see that, “All must come, and last, and end, as shall please my heavenly Friend.” God makes no mistakes. He gives no account of His doings. “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.” And, “He hides the purpose of His grace, to make it better known.” Beloved friends, what thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter.

“Hereafter He will make me know,
And I shall surely find,
He was too wise to err, and O,
Too good to be unkind.”

“I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened ... have fallen out.” The mystery of divine providence, everything in the Lord’s hand, beneath His sovereign control, ordering all things after the counsel of His will. With some of you, you have known the joys mingled with the sorrows. Some of you have known the happiness, you have known the pleasure, you have known the delight. I would ye should understand that *these* things have fallen out. O do not take them for granted. Do not let them lie forgotten. May there be the spirit of sweet gratitude for them.

I remember years ago when I came home from preaching the recognition services at Chippenham, and I was so tried about the Lord’s day (because it was a Saturday evening). We arrived home very late, and our house had been burgled. This word dropped upon my spirit: “Shall we

receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out.” It is not accident. It is not chance. There is that mysterious, divine appointment which controls everything for the Lord’s honour and glory and for His people’s good. In weaving our web of time there are the dark threads as well as the bright threads. It is only when the loom is silent and the work is done and the tapestry is complete that it can be seen how everything falls into place. But I would ye should understand this.

“There’s not a particle of dust can fly,
A sparrow fall, or cloud obscure the sky,
A moth be crushed, or leaf fall from a tree,
But in submission to His wise decree.”

The old Lancashire preachers used to quote that so much.

“He must and will at all times keep in view
His glory, and His people’s welfare too;
Bright days, dark nights, the furnace or the flood,
He overrules for Zion’s real good.”

I would ye should understand this, brethren. Unbelief never understands it and never will. Our carnal hearts never understand it and never will. But faith understands it, and faith receives it, and faith submits to it. But this is not of the flesh; this is of the spirit. Left to ourselves we do not understand it. Left to ourselves we misunderstand everything. Left to ourselves we are ready to sink. O but to have a glimpse: “It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good.” I would that ye should understand this. The Lord give us a gracious understanding. All these things that are happening amongst us at present in our homes and lives and families and circumstances, all these things have fallen out of the lap of divine providence. “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” O that we might understand that all these things have fallen out of the hand of a good and gracious God!

“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” It reminds us of Joseph’s words to his brethren. “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.” Where could you see the good

in it? Joseph's brethren, they meant it for evil. There was not anything good about it from them. It was nothing but bad: envying their brother Joseph, seizing him, stripping him of his coat of many colours, throwing him into the pit, selling him to the Ishmeelites, and Potiphar throwing him into prison. "Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him." It will try you. There was disappointment after disappointment. He was wrongly treated, wickedly treated, and the chief butler did not remember Joseph but forgot him. But God meant it unto good, and the end of the thing was better than the beginning. Every seemingly downward step was really an upward step. Every step which seemed to be in the wrong direction was a step to his exaltation next to Pharaoh's throne, and it was for the salvation of God's Israel. "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." The thing in itself may be evil, but God can use it unto good. It is a wonderful account, isn't it, the mysterious providence of God in the life of Joseph? "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."

"I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." What was happening to the Apostle Paul at this time? Well, everything seemed to be going wrong. He had had sorrow upon sorrow, and now he was in prison in Rome, and no longer could he journey forth and visit the churches. No longer could he go to preach to them, to see how the brethren did, to confirm the churches. It seemed everything was going wrong, everything for Paul, everything for the church of God. It seemed that God's sovereign purposes were being frustrated. Paul was afraid these early Christian churches would not understand this, that they would be tried, that they would think Satan was getting the upper hand. So he writes to assure them. "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." You say, How could this be? Paul has now been silenced, he has been confined to Rome, he is in prison. It seems as if his work is ended.

There were two special ways in which this fell out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. The first was this: there were some of the Lord's chosen who were hidden away in the ruins of the Fall who were at Rome, and some who were even in Caesar's palace, and it was the Lord's purpose that they should be effectually called by grace through the life and

witness of Paul the prisoner at Rome. What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter. It is very often in looking back. It is so often afterwards that these things all fall into their right place. And you see there was not a single thing which was wrong. Some of God's dear children have come to this: they would not have one single thing altered. All those sinners who were to be saved by grace through the life and witness of Paul the prisoner in Rome.

But there was a second way how all this fell out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. While Paul was in Rome he wrote so many of these beautiful epistles. They were not only made a blessing to the church of God then, but two thousand years later are being made a blessing to the church of God now. Let us be clear, through Paul's epistles there has been greater blessing to the church of God than ever there was through his ministry. I would, brethren, ye understood this. It is for the furtherance of the gospel. Paul the prisoner was writing things like this: He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.... He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him." Paul was writing things like this: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Paul was writing such things as these: "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."

"The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." There is another thing. In his own soul Paul realised how the Lord had used his sorrows, his sufferings, his disappointments for his real, lasting, eternal good and for His own honour and glory, that he might be crucified with Christ, and yet live a life by the faith of the Son of God.

"I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." Some things are not just sad: they are terrible; they are awful; they are the work of Satan. Yet God even uses Satan to accomplish His own purposes. I know this is a very deep and solemn point and I want to speak very advisedly on it. There is greater glory given to God through the Fall than if ever man had not fallen. Now I want to speak very carefully on

that point. The preacher sought acceptable words, and this is a deep mystery. There is a scripture, "The wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." That means the wickedness of evil men, either God will restrain it, or if He does not, He will make it work for His own good. There was one word when I was quite young in the way which attracted me and I have often quoted it:

"Great is the mystery, truly great,
That hell's designs should hell defeat.
But here eternal wisdom shines,
For Satan works what God designs."

Do you believe it?

"I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." He puts a *rather* on it. "*Rather* unto the furtherance of the gospel." Of course, the greatest point of all on this subject is the cross of Christ, the things which happened there, all those solemn things. It seemed as if Satan had his vent. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." The disciples forsook Him and fled. It seemed that the power of hell had triumphed. It seemed that truth was vanquished when the Lord Jesus bowed His head at Calvary and died. But I would ye should understand this, that these things which happened at Calvary have fallen out to the furtherance of the gospel. There would not have been any gospel apart from that. O the things which happened at Calvary for the furtherance of the gospel, let sin, Satan, death, hell and the grave, let them all do their worst! O to see the fountain opened for sin, the precious blood that cleanses, a ransom found, payment made, a way of forgiveness, the way to heaven opened up! You see this in all its fulness at Calvary when the things which happened, the solemn things which happened, fell out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

So it was with John Bunyan. He was a godly preacher and a godly pastor and he was silenced, thrown in prison, unjustly so. There was more blessing came from the prison in the writings of Bunyan than ever came from that gracious man's ministry. You think what a blessing those writings of his have been made through the ages to the church of God.

“The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” And so it has been right down the ages. There are just two things resting upon my mind here. There was a minister once in the 1920’s who was travelling by train and he missed his connection and had a long wait. His first feeling was to be angry, and the next to be very sad. Then it came across his spirit that this had not come by chance; it must be God’s appointment. He prayed that the Lord would sanctify it. He went out for a walk and came to a park. He sat on a seat and there on the other end of the seat was a man groaning in agony of spirit. The minister went and tried to speak kindly to him. The man did not even look up. In the end, in despair, the man cried out, “There is only one person on earth to whom I could speak: a minister I knew in the trenches during the war.” He mentioned the name of the minister sitting next to him.

“The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” The other thing: over a hundred years ago in one of the Protestant churches of France there was an eminent preacher with a large congregation, being greatly blessed, a comparatively young man, and suddenly he was seized with an incurable disease and he was laid aside in his bedroom dying for several months. It was laid upon this man’s spirit to pray that the Lord would overrule this and that he would be more blessed in his affliction and death than he ever was in his life and ministry. The Lord answered his prayer because about once or twice a week some of his old hearers, just a few, came in his bedroom. He lay flat on his back and as strength was given, he gave them a little sermon or short address lasting perhaps five or ten minutes. When he died, those little talks were published and more blessing was known from that little book than ever from that man’s eminent ministry. “He hides the purpose of His grace, to make it better known.” The Lord makes no mistakes.

“I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” Perhaps you are saying, John Bunyan and those other two people were preachers. I am not. How can it be for the furtherance of the gospel? Well, in this sense: the furtherance of the gospel in your soul; the furtherance of the gospel in your life. How far has the gospel got in your soul? How far has the gospel got in your life? And sometimes it is this: that something happens to you, a trial, a disappointment, a sorrow, an

affliction, and as the Lord blesses it and uses it and sanctifies it, the gospel makes more furtherance in your heart and life than it has done for years before. How many have testified this! They have been laid on a bed of affliction, or had a disappointment, a deep sorrow, and it is then the Lord has sweetly led them into the truth and blessed them. That is why many of the choicest saints have found their saddest hours their best. How many, on a bed of affliction, have been able to meditate on the sufferings of Christ, and have been blessed in it!

“How bitter that cup, no heart can conceive,
Which He drank quite up that sinners might live!
His way was much rougher and darker than mine;
Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?”

“I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” Do not seek for affliction. Do not pray for trouble. But when you are in it, do seek, do pray, that it might all be for the furtherance of the gospel.

Of course you will realise I have mentioned this text many times over the years. It was once made a very powerful word to me. One morning I received a letter through the post and it could almost have meant the end of our magazine, the *Gospel Standard*. I was just about to leave home to go to The Dicker to preach. This word dropped so sweetly upon my spirit (I was not familiar with it): “The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” I watched them and they did. The whole thing was turned upside down and it was made a blessing to our magazine. So whenever I think of this beautiful word, to me, though in a little measure and not in any personal affliction, yet it is a word which I can testify has been tried and proved.

Well, beloved friends, perhaps you did not expect a sermon like this this evening. But may the Lord sanctify it and may the Lord bless it to you.

“‘Tis expressed in words like these
‘I am with thee,
Israel, passing through the fire.’

“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 Lord bless you; the Lord bless His Word. And “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.”