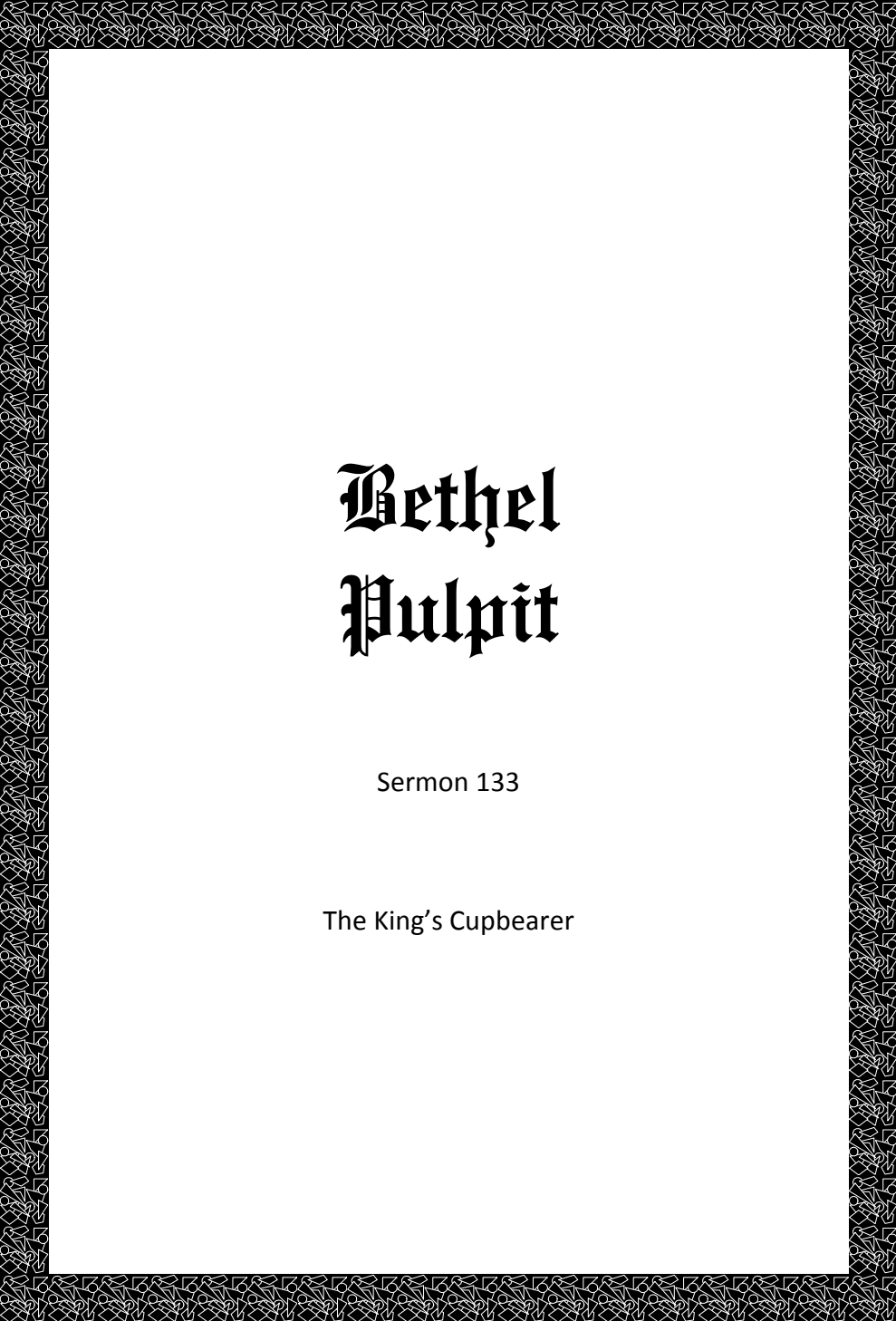




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 133

The King's Cupbearer

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 21st March, 1996**

Text: *“For I was the king’s cupbearer” (Nehemiah 1.11).*

If the Lord needs a man, then that man will be there. It does not matter what the place, what the position. None can overthrow God’s purpose. Now here it was the Lord’s purpose that this man Nehemiah should be exalted to this high, this eminent position at the court of King Artaxerxes, the greatest court, the greatest monarch on earth. And no power in earth or in hell could prevent this. Why was it that this man was so promoted? Why was it this way was made for him, this door was opened for him? Because it was God’s will and pleasure. If the Lord needs a man, then He raises him up, He equips him, He appoints him and then He uses him. No power in earth or hell can stop God’s purpose.

It seems an amazing thing that one of the Jewish exiles, the despised Jewish exiles, should be able to say, “I was the king’s cupbearer” – this honoured position. This position of the king’s cupbearer was not just some kind of ordinary servant. It was a position of the highest responsibility and importance. Some have thought it was almost equivalent to being the prime minister. This one, so trustworthy that he personally handed the cup to the king, had the king’s life in his hand. And in those days of terrible intrigue, it was important that the king should not be poisoned. Also, the king’s cupbearer had to supervise the king’s bodyguard to guard his life – a most honoured position. How came it that this man, a Jew, one of the children of the captivity, one of the exiles, how came it that he should be exalted to this position? Only because the Lord would have him there.

One thing is clear: there was no sin attached to Nehemiah being in this place – as there was no sin attached to Daniel being in a similar position and no sin attached to Obadiah being honoured at the court of wicked, ungodly Ahab. It was the Lord’s will that one of His people, one of His servants, should be there. It would be a wonderful thing today if some of the Lord’s people were advanced to eminent positions, especially if there were no compromise, that their position should be used to the Lord’s honour and glory. You have the right man in the right place at the

right time. And good Nehemiah never compromised. Pre-eminently he walked lovingly, tenderly in the fear of God, even though he was the king's cupbearer. There is one important scripture which sums up the life and witness and ministry of Nehemiah and it is this: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Now you just look for a moment at Nehemiah. One day one of his brethren named Hanani returned from Jerusalem. He came with a sad tale. The people there were in great affliction and reproach. "The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." When Nehemiah heard these tidings, he was prostrated. He could find no peace. I suppose the world would say, "But Nehemiah, it is nothing to do with you. The Lord has placed you here. You have this honoured position. These people are a thousand miles away." But Nehemiah had no peace. He says, "I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days." And then he wrestled with God for Zion's true peace and prosperity. This wonderful prayer (chapter 1)! He could have no peace whilst the walls of Jerusalem were broken down, whilst the city of Jerusalem was in ruins. He was the king's cupbearer. He was living in peace and prosperity. The world would say, "Nehemiah, why bother about these feeble Jews a thousand miles away?" I wonder if some of you here can say, "While Thy dear cause is thus suppressed, my burdened soul can take no rest." "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee." "Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem."

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer, but his great concern was for the poor, despised people of God. He wanted to identify with them, and he was made willing to give up this honoured position. He was made willing to set out on that dangerous journey. He was made willing even to work with a trowel in his hands building the walls, and he was made willing to fight with a weapon in his hand. O these Nehemiahs, what a blessing they are to the church of God! All on the altar, willing to sacrifice, willing to spend and be spent, themselves nothing, the Lord everything, their one concern: the honour and glory of God and the good of Zion. Of course, again they might have said, "But Nehemiah, what can you do? What can one man do?" But it is what can one man *not* do if it is the Lord's purpose to use him.

Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer, a great man, but so conscious of his own weakness and helplessness. He prayed his way along. "Remember me." "O God, strengthen my hands." When the Lord remembered him and prospered him and the wall was built, it was always this: "According to the good hand of my God upon me." The king's cupbearer, and yet walking tenderly all the days of his life in the holy fear of God. And God honoured him and used him.

Well, I say these few things concerning this godly, gracious, great man Nehemiah, the book that bears his name, his burdens, his exercises, his prayer, the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, the wonderful success which attended his work, "according to the good hand of my God upon me." Really, though, this word has rested on my mind in a completely different way, in a spiritual sense. "I was the king's cupbearer." Nehemiah served King Artaxerxes. He served him well; he served him faithfully. But he knew a greater King and it was his desire, his delight, to serve that greater King. Artaxerxes was great, but he was not almighty. But Nehemiah's God and King was almighty.

How this subject seems to rest on my mind is to speak to you first of the King, and then the King's cup, and then the King's cupbearer.

"King of kings, and Lord of lords!
These are great and awful words;
'Tis to Jesus they belong."

O to view the Lord Jesus as Zion's God and King! He is on the throne; He ever lives; He ever reigns; He is in control; He is almighty; the government is upon His shoulder; "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" He reigns in creation. He reigns in providence. "All creatures obey His command." The great, the mighty movements of the planets, the crushing of a moth, the falling of a sparrow: "All creatures obey His command." He is King of kings and Lord of lords. The God of heaven is greater than Artaxerxes. Nehemiah says, "I ... prayed before the God of heaven, and said, I beseech Thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God." O but with His people He reigns and causes all things to work together for their good. He also reigns in their hearts. He sets up His kingdom there. His kingdom is one of grace and it is an everlasting kingdom. Daniel, explaining the

remarkable vision the king had, prophetically he said, “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”

O the King! To see the Lord Jesus exalted in heaven as King! On earth He wore a crown of thorns. In heaven He for ever wears a crown of glory. May we by faith tonight have a little glimpse of Zion’s God and King. May we see how great He is – greater than King Artaxerxes – and may we see how gracious He is. May we remember that although Nehemiah was an honourable servant of an earthly king, his greatest honour was to be a servant of the heavenly King. And may that be your concern and mine: “Ye serve the Lord Christ,” the King. O but may you see Him in the gospel. “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.” May you see Him as the King of grace as well as the King of glory. May you echo that language: “I’ll speak the honours of my King, His form divinely fair.” The King.

And then the King’s cup. We read of a cup of blessing that the Lord gives to His people. “A cup of blessing for the poor, that’s free, and full, and flowing o’er.” We read of that cup which the King Himself took in the Garden of Gethsemane and began to taste it and then emptied it to its very dregs. “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” O that cup that the Lord Jesus took, the King took, from the hands of His heavenly Father – and He emptied it! What was in that cup? O to see our everlasting salvation in that cup. So He took that cup with all the curse in it and He emptied it. And He gives His people a cup of blessing. There is no curse in it. “A cup of blessing for the poor, that’s free, and full, and flowing o’er.”

Sometimes He gives His people a cup of sorrow to drink. But, “At most we do but taste the cup, for Thou alone hast drunk it up.” That cup of sorrow He gives, He gives in love, and there is no sting, no bitterness in it. And when He gives this cup, His people at times are able to say,

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

We read of the cup of wrath which the Lord pours out, which He empties upon the wicked. Terrible thing to have to endure the cup of the King's wrath, the cup of divine wrath! We read of the cup of providence. In the Lord's hand there is a cup and in that cup there is a mixture, and the mixture in that cup of providence He gives to His people to drink. "With mercy and with judgment my web of time He wove." And then the Word of God speaks of the cup of consolation. That is a blessed cup, but He says the wicked shall not taste it. But God's people do, in the gospel, in the promises, in the love and blood of Christ, in their sorrows, trials and afflictions. They drink the cup of divine consolation. And, "Are the consolations of God small?" There is the communion cup. "This cup is the New Testament in My blood." O the remembrance there of the sin-atoning sufferings and sacrifice of the King Himself when here on earth, our incarnate God, to remember what He suffered, to remember the wonderful value of the atonement. "Dear Lord, what heavenly wonders dwell in Thy atoning blood!"

So we have the King, and we have the King's cup in so many different ways in Scripture. And then especially here, the King's cupbearer. Dear old Mr. Jupp, who was the Pastor at Blackboys for so many years, before that was one of the deacons at Blackboys, and the first time as deacon at the Lord's supper, as he was carrying the cup round, this word fell into his soul: "I was the King's cupbearer." He felt the honour, the privilege of it. In the last century there was a nobleman who was an elder in the church. He was a humble, godly, gracious man. He said he felt the greatest honour of his life was to be able to take round the cup and to give it to some of the Lord's very poor, despised people. Not earthly honours, but that honour.

So this scripture has a special application to the diaconate. "I was the King's cupbearer." To bear the elements, the broken bread, the poured-out cup, the emblems of the Saviour's sufferings and death, and to hand them to the Lord's people. But also, not just the broken bread and the poured-out cup, emblems of the Lord's sacrifice, but the bearing of the cup at the Lord's supper as the emblem of the work of the diaconate, willing to spend and be spent in serving the Lord's people, ministering to them, helping them, watching over them, guiding them, visiting them, supplying their needs. The honour, the privilege, as unto the Lord, not unto man. "For I was the King's cupbearer."

Then, of course, this does have a reference to preachers of the everlasting gospel. “I was the King’s cupbearer.” The privilege, the favour, to bring this cup of blessing and there to hand it to the people of God! “Drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” And to “give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.” The wonderful wine which maketh glad the heart of God and of man and that is the love of Christ. O to be the King’s cupbearer, to hand the cup in the gospel to the poor, weak, weary, perishing, tormented one, and to hand the cup in the gospel to that one who has been brought to thirst after the blessings of the gospel, who says, “Give me Christ, or else I die.” O to be the King’s cupbearer in the gospel ministry! For,

“The gospel table’s spread
And richly furnished too,
With wine and milk, and living bread,
And dainties not a few.”

O do you long that the Lord, under the preaching of the gospel, might favour you with one of the days of the Son of man? Do you long that He might bring you into the banqueting house and His banner over you be love? Do you long that you might sit under His shadow with sweet delight and that His fruit might be sweet to your taste?

“For I was the King’s cupbearer.” And then there is a sense concerning all God’s people. Of course, there is that sad and solemn sense when in greater or lesser measure the Lord gives you a cup of sorrow or bereavement or trouble or loneliness or persecution or weariness or grief, and this is the cup the Lord has appointed for you to bear. There is a cup appointed for every one of God’s dear people to bear, and at times you drink from that cup. You might pray that the cup might pass away or that it might be a different cup. O but if only you see that this is the King’s appointment, and this is the cup the King Himself gives to you, the cup the King bids you to drink, this will make all the difference. Then you will say, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

Now for every one of God’s people there is a drinking of the cup He has appointed for them. In that cup there is the mixture. There is joy in the cup. Above all there is salvation in the cup. “I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.” Then sometimes there is sorrow and affliction and trouble in the cup. O for grace to take the cup as

from the Lord's hand and see that it is the King's appointment and that it is in loving union and communion and fellowship with Him. "Though our cup seems filled with gall, there's something secret sweetens all." O to be the King's cupbearer!

But then the cup in this sense: in the responsibilities the Lord lays upon you, however small, however great. All His people in love are called to take up their cross and follow Him and serve Him, the King. Some of you minister to His aged people. Some of you care for your loved ones, aged loved ones, afflicted loved ones. Some of you serve, caring for your own children. And then there is the way the Lord calls you to walk, the cup He puts in your hand, the cup He gives you to drink. And, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." O to see the solemn accountability if the Lord, the King, has in any small or great measure made you His cupbearer – the accountability, the weight, the responsibility. But then especially the privilege. Some are weak and helpless and aged, but they are the King's cupbearer in this: there is the pathway of prayer which God has marked out for them. "This is the way, walk ye in it." This is the cup they have to bear: to pray for Zion's peace and prosperity, to pray for the minister, to pray for the afflicted people of God. O the accountability, but then the sacred privilege, sweetly constrained by love.

You read of people at times who are servants of some eminent man, or the servants of someone in the nobility, and don't they glory in it! We have met them. There have been some of our Strict Baptist friends and they have been in the service of some of the most eminent people. They have delighted to talk about it, and they have felt what a great honour it has been. Those who in any way are called to serve the royal family, to serve the queen, what an honour it is accounted! But then this: to serve the King of kings and Lord of lords – the wonderful privilege of it. When we are brought to see how unfit and sinful and vile and unworthy and helpless and useless we are (and the Lord can very well do without us, easily manage without us), but He condescends to give us this privilege, serving Him, serving Him in His saints, serving Him in His people. If you and I in any little measure are able to say this, lay claim to this: "I was the King's cupbearer," so unworthy, what an honour, what a privilege!

"I was the King's cupbearer."