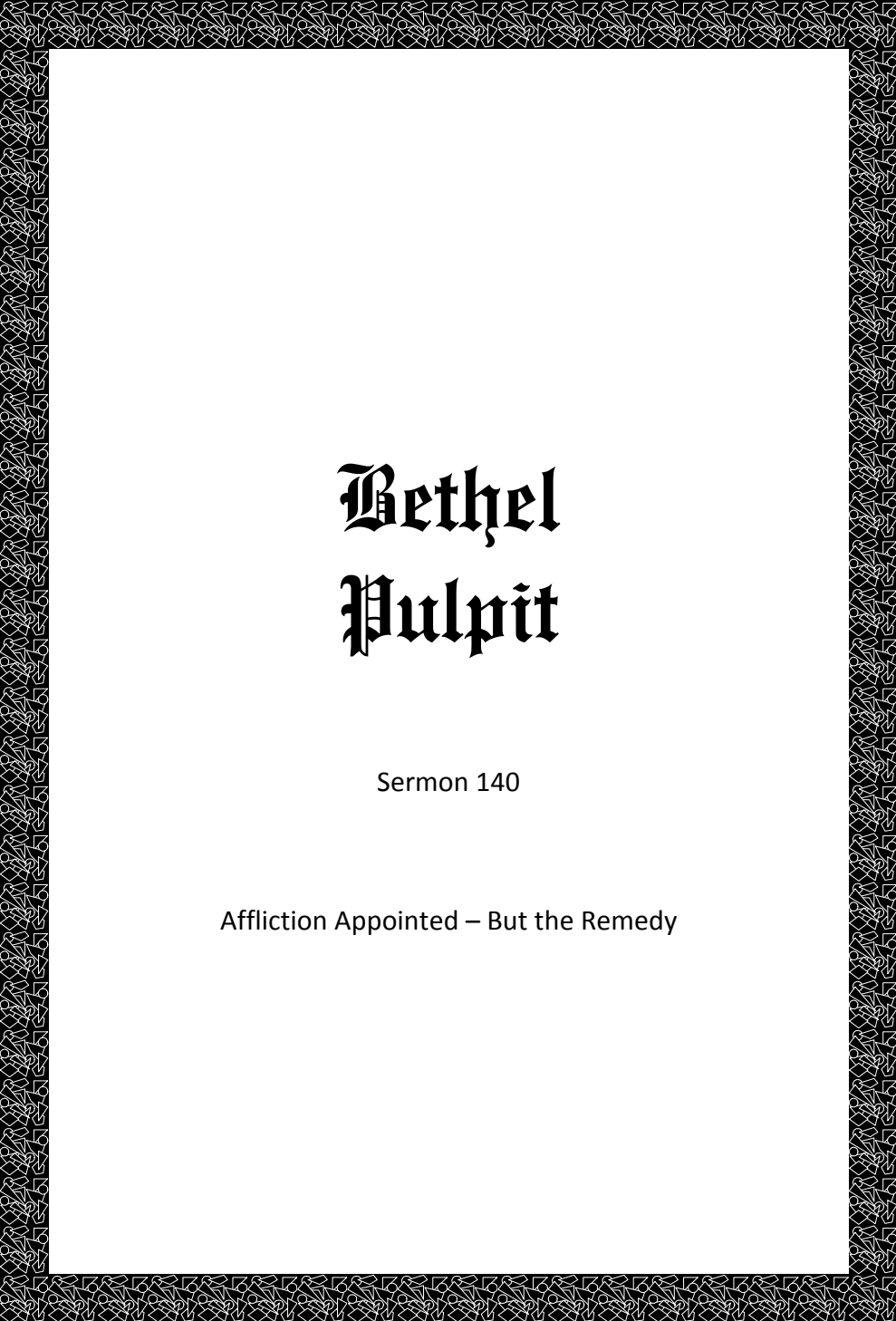




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 140

Affliction Appointed – But the Remedy

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 2nd March, 1997**

Text: *“Although 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. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number” (Job 5. 6-9).*

These are the words of Eliphaz the Temanite to Job. He was one of Job's friends who came to comfort him in his affliction. And here he makes two very simple but very important, very profound statements. One is that as long as we are here upon earth, we shall have our troubles; and the other is that these troubles do not come by chance or by accident: they come by divine appointment.

“Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” The meaning there is the certainty of it. Do not misunderstand it. We tend to have a saying nowadays about the sparks flying when we think of people disagreeing, people getting very heated, people quarrelling. We say that “the sparks are flying.” That is not really the point here. The point here is the certainty. One of those old fires, the open fires, especially a fire when wood was being burnt, whenever you saw a fire and wood burning, without fail you would see the sparks beginning to fly, and those sparks would be flying upwards. The certainty of it!

“Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” The reason being that he is born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and sin always brings with it sorrow. What a strange thing it is that the one certain thing we are promised in the Word of God is sorrow, trouble, distress in one form or another whilst we are here upon earth, yet when it comes, we wonder why, we seem surprised, we try to wriggle out of it. John Newton says,

“Why should I complain of want or distress,
Temptation or pain? He told me no less;
The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word,
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord.”

So it will not be a strange thing if there are many of you here this morning and you have your various troubles and sorrows and perplexities and griefs, the things that weigh heavily upon you. Now, “He told you no less.” “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” There is only one place where there is no trouble, and that is in heaven, and the reason why there is no trouble there is because there is no sin there.

So the certainty of it, that “man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” Never sit in judgment upon other people. You do not know what troubles those people have. Now I have proved it. I have in past years looked round from the pulpit and thought, “That person has not any trouble,” and perhaps the next week the person has come to see me and told me how they are prostrated with trouble. And then what is a trouble to one is not a trouble to another. You can have two people in the same situation and one is completely prostrated by the trouble, and the other, it does not move them at all. Look at godly Hannah. Perhaps she is set before us in Scripture as one who is more weighed down, prostrated with trouble, than anyone else; the reason was she did not have any children. Then again, I remember a person here speaking to me about a trouble they were in. It was so foolish, so ridiculous, I could almost have smiled, but I realised to that person it was so real. You will also find that what is a trouble to you at one time is not a trouble to you at another. You remember old John Warburton in his Mercies. He lost one or two little children and was so graciously helped, so graciously supported, he could not understand the prostration some people had in such circumstances. But then there was a little girl he loved very dearly, and when she died, he said in his open way that so great was his trouble and his rebellion, he could have pulled God down out of the sky.

But, “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” So do not think it a strange thing if when you come to chapel this morning your hearts are sad. It may be some of you have things concerning your soul, your sins, eternity; with others your family; with others, your relationships with other people; with others, your disappointments, your loneliness; with others, things in your business; with others, things in the church of God; with others, things concerning your health; with others, things concerning tomorrow, next week, the coming days. “The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.”

“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” And there is something else, beloved friends. If man is born unto trouble, he is born again unto more trouble. When the new birth takes place, it is the most wonderful thing that can ever happen to a sinner, that sinner passed from death to life. But sometimes people speak and think lightly of it. Now the Lord puts it like this: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” For there are the special afflictions of the people of God: the conflict with sin and Satan, that tender conscience often grieved. And then the Lord’s people will have those troubles, that they might walk in fellowship and union and communion with His beloved Son. O to hear the Lord Jesus at Calvary crying, “Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.” And John Newton says, “Let broken-hearted sinners look to a broken-hearted Saviour.” For, “His dear heart was broken too, when He bore the curse for you.”

“Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” And man is born again unto the special troubles and trials and afflictions of the people of God. I remember we had a baptism at Haslingden years ago. There were two of them, two men. I am not sure whether it was just as they were coming up out of the water or after the service, but you could hear an old woman’s voice saying, “Their tribulation is just beginning.” Well, perhaps she should not have said that; but people do not think so much like that today. But if man is born unto trouble, he is born again unto the special tribulation and affliction that is appointed for the people of God. How many things are there in the church of God! The Apostle Paul had many troubles, but the things that weighed most heavily with him: “The care of all the churches.” And these things, they come close and they bring low. So Eliphaz speaks of the certainty of it, that we should not be surprised, we should be prepared, if these things come in one way or another.

“Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” There was one old minister in Lancashire, and if he was in the hills and looked down and saw the smoke coming up from the chimneys, he said, “Wherever there is smoke coming from the chimney there is trouble in that home.” “Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”

The second thing Eliphaz the Temanite says is that these troubles and sorrows do not come by accident; they do not come by chance. “Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” That is, it does not have a human origin. We sometimes sing, “Joy is a fruit that does not grow in nature’s barren soil.” And afflictions do not grow in nature’s barren soil. “Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” Then where does it come from? Well, later in this book we have it like this: “He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy.” “He causeth it to come.” There is a lot of good divinity in that word, “Death and hell can do no more than what my Father please.” Nothing can ever touch you, nothing can ever harm you, nothing can ever take place, apart from divine permission. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.” And of course the famous comment of J. C. Philpot, referring to that verse, when William Gadsby fell down and broke his leg: “If not a sparrow can be harmed apart from divine permission, how much less William Gadsby.”

“Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” Do you believe in the mystery of divine providence, that God is in control, that He orders all things according to the counsel of His own will, and yet in no way is the author of sin? He orders all things for the honour and glory of His name and for His people’s good.

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

“Affliction cometh not forth of the dust.” O may we look beyond second causes. “Neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” “He causeth it to come.” There is a little word there, two letters: it. And that embraces your sadness and trouble and problem and difficulty this morning. You can fit your own piece in there: it. “He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for His land, or for mercy.” But not by accident, not by chance.

“Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.” At one time the Apostle Paul was in the depths of trouble, and if you read the background, the circumstances, it seemed that everything in his life was going wrong. Now he wrote this: “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” “The things which happened unto me.” They were sad things, terrible things, disappointing things. You can fit your own piece in there: “The things which happened unto me.” Now Paul said they did not spring from the dust; they did not come out of the ground: they fell out; they came from above; they fell out of the lap of divine providence; they fell out of the hand of a good and gracious God.

“His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfils some deep design.”

Now the Lord is all-wise. He never makes a mistake. And the Lord is so merciful that He is never unkind. O that you might see that the things that have happened unto you are fallen out, and then to live to prove it, “for the furtherance of the gospel.” Sometimes when you look back you would not have one thing altered. You see the Lord’s hand in it, His mercy, and His gracious purpose.

“His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.”

The certainty of trouble, and the clear truth that it never comes by accident or chance, but by divine, eternal appointment.

“Although 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.” And then you see, this man Eliphaz the Temanite gives some most wise and good and gracious counsel. Job’s friends did not always. So often they spoke wrongly and unadvisedly. The Lord Himself had to rebuke them and poor Job said, “Miserable comforters are ye all.” But here Eliphaz speaks very wisely and gives some good and

gracious and sober counsel. It is one thing to know the malady, but another thing to prescribe the remedy. Like William Gadsby, when he was walking through Trowbridge with John Warburton and John Warburton was telling him this and that. Gadsby said, "Right, physician, you have told me the malady, but please tell me what the remedy is." Well, Eliphaz does it. He says, "I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause." It is almost as if Job had said, "Eliphaz, what would you do if you were me? What would you do in this circumstance? You have told me these things and I have believed you. You have told me man is born to trouble. You have told me it does not come by accident or chance. But what would you do?" And Eliphaz said, "I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause." That is the best remedy for whatever is perplexing you this morning, casting you down, making your heart sad, bringing you low.

"I would seek unto God." There still is a throne of grace and it is especially appointed for sinners that they might obtain mercy and that they might find grace to help in time of need. And what could God promise more than that? There still is a mercyseat sprinkled with blood where sinners are invited, where sinners are welcome to come and to lay their burden there, to leave their burden there. William Cowper, in the depths of his sorrow (and he was a person who had sorrow above measure so that his poor mind went under it) wrote,

"That were a grief I could not bear,
Didst Thou not hear and answer prayer;
But a prayer-hearing, answering God
Supports me under every load.

"I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause." Now it is good advice, isn't it? It is gracious advice. "Unto God would I commit my cause." Now what is your cause this morning, the cause that lies so heavy upon your heart? "Unto God would I commit my cause." David puts it like this: "Commit thy way unto the Lord." Commit it unto Him. "Trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." There is only one way you can commit your way to the Lord, commit your cause to the Lord, and that is by faith, that is in prayer. "Commit thy way unto the Lord," whatever it is, providence or grace, great or small, soul concerns or providential concerns, thy way, that which rests heavy upon your heart.

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.” “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” And seek to leave it there. This word commit is not just taking something to the Lord: it is leaving it there. If you commit someone or something into the hands of a wise person, you leave it there; you do not take it back and try to manage it yourself. “Commit thy way unto the Lord.” Leave it there. Just like Ruth went to the feet of Boaz by night and she went softly. I think some of us know what it is to go softly by night to the feet of Jesus and lay our burdens there. Perhaps it is night and you cannot see the sun rising yet. But to go softly. You do not go presumptuously; you do not go carelessly: you go softly, with the burden of your sin, a never-ending eternity, that soul trouble: “Am I right or am I wrong?” To go softly by night, as a sinner, to the feet of Jesus and to cast your burden there. “Go then, poor sinner, cast thy soul before His nail-pierced feet.”

But Ruth had a burden. With her it was the lost inheritance, the mortgaged inheritance. She wanted a Redeemer. Perhaps some of you want a Redeemer this morning, to go to the Lord Jesus, this Redeemer, with your burden of sin and guilt and to leave it there and not rise up until you hear Him say, “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.” Is there a Ruth here this morning? You have this cause you cannot manage. It is too hard for you. “Commit thy way unto the Lord.” Ruth, encouraged by Naomi, went in softly by night and lay down at Boaz’ feet. He spoke so kindly to her. The Lord Jesus will not rebuke you. He will not turn you away. “He hateth putting away.” “He kindly listens while you tell the bitter grief you feel within.” And what then? “My daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest.” May you be enabled to go on that venture of faith to the feet of Boaz. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” Then she went home, and this is what Naomi said to her: “Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.” Really, Naomi said this: “Ruth, it is not in your hands now. It is not your concern, your burden now. You have committed it into the hands of Boaz. You have left it there. Then sit still, my daughter. It is in wise hands, capable hands, loving hands. Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this

day. It is safe in his hands.” “He engaged to manage all, by the way and to the end.”

“I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause.” Now what is your cause this morning? Is there anyone here this morning with a hard cause? O that word which has been made a blessing to me so much: “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” I do not know whether I have told you the rather strange circumstance about that. I only ever heard that word preached from once. I cannot remember, but I rather have a feeling that I was not even spiritually interested when I heard the sermon on it. But then years later, when I came into deep sorrow and trouble and concern, not only that word kept echoing in my heart, but I could hear the dear man, who by then was in heaven, saying, “Bring it to Me. It is not too hard for Me. I will hear it; I will deal with it.” “He being dead yet speaketh.” We do not know what effect our words might have in a generation to come.

There is only one qualification here: that the cause is too hard for you. You can fit that qualification well, can’t you? You have to say, “Lord, it is too hard for me.” “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” There are no causes too hard for the Lord. You think of His love, His tenderness, His sympathy. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.” “A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.” O His tender, sympathising heart! He knows; He understands. He once wept at the grave of Lazarus. “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.”

“Although 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. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause.” And then Eliphaz makes a few good comments, and they are very helpful and very useful and very profitable. He reminds Job who this God is, Job’s God, Eliphaz’s God, this God who sits on the throne of grace, this God who hears and answers prayer. He is the God “which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.” Now when

we go to the Lord with our concerns and difficulties and problems and troubles, may we always be reminded of who He is. And a little sight of this by faith will help you to pray when you see that He is the One who does great things. He performs miracles. When the Lord Jesus was here on earth, He did great things. There is nothing too hard for Him. O the tenderness and sympathy and love as a leper came to Him and a blind man, and the mother of one who was dead! And you might go on. But He did great things, and He still does great things. Creation was a great thing, yet it was an easy thing. He spake, and it was done. This is the One who is going to deal with your hard cause. This is the One who is going to listen to you, sympathise with you. He is the One who does great things. The resurrection was a great thing.

“Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids His rise;
Christ has opened paradise.”

He “doeth great things.” You can go right through the Bible. The Red Sea. “When thou canst no deliverance see,” no way out, no way forward, no way of escape. “I would seek unto God ... which doeth great things.” “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” He makes a way where there is no way. There is some good divinity in those lines:

“He sees when I am sunk in grief,
And quickly flies to my relief.”

“I would seek unto God ... which doeth great things.” His omnipotence is great; His power is great. But His love is as great as His power, and so is His mercy, and so is His compassion, and so is His faithfulness. He “doeth great things.” He has promised them, and He is able to fulfil His promise.

He “doeth great things and unsearchable.” Who by searching can find out God? Charles Wesley has a good verse on this point of the love of God in Christ:

“Unsearchable the love
That has the Saviour brought;
The grace is far above
Or man’s or angel’s thought.”

“Great things and unsearchable.” And I think the point here as it concerns you this morning with your trouble and trial and grief: He does great things, but they are unsearchable. If you can follow me, there are times when we are in a difficulty, a problem, but we can see very, very clearly the way in which God can deliver us. But then there are other times and we just cannot think of the way God could deliver us. That is where we are wrong. It is God “which doeth great things and unsearchable,” when you cannot see any way out. What way could Moses see out when he was at the Red Sea? What way could Elisha see when he came to Jordan and could not see the way across? What about Elijah when he came to Cherith? We cannot understand it and we cannot plan the way, and we must not dictate to God.

“Unsearchable.” Some people translate it like this: unfathomable. Cowper puts it like this:

“Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.”

“I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things.” It is only God who does marvellous things, things that when you contemplate them, you will stand in wonder and amazement. O look at salvation’s work flowing from the everlasting covenant, and the coming of the Lord Jesus, and then at Calvary. See those marvellous things, the wonders of redemption: “The Angel did wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on.” And He still does wondrously. “Marvellous things.” “Wonders of grace to God belong; repeat His mercies in your song.”

“I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things.” If your religion is real, there will be a sense of wonder and amazement in it. There will be times when you just have to look on in helplessness, and yet in amazement, at the wonders God alone can do. What a mercy we have a wonder-working God! What a mercy that the day of miracles is not past! What a mercy that God, our God still does marvellous things! “For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death.”

And finally, Eliphaz adds this: “Without number.” There is no limit to the power of God. He does marvellous things, but without number. You will never come to the end of His power. There are some people, perhaps some famous man who has some famous achievement, and he does it again and again and again, but the next time he fails. His ability lessens. But the God to whom we commit our cause does marvellous things without number. Really, what it means is this: if He helped you yesterday, He will not fail to help you today. If He helps you today, He will not have come to the end of it tomorrow. If you look back over your life and find He has done marvellous things to deliver and help you time without number, He will not be weary of it. You might have your best friend and you keep going to him, and then he says, “Really, I think you should try to manage yourself. I cannot keep helping you.” It is not like that with God. “Which doeth ... marvellous things without number.” But I think it is something like this with us. When we go with our problem and hard thing, Satan says, “But you don’t deserve it.” And your heart witnesses that it is true. You think of all the times the Lord has helped you, and your sin, your hardness, your lack of gratitude. Will He say, “I have been answering you, but there have been such poor returns”? “Call upon Me in the day of trouble,” despite all your sin and unworthiness and past ingratitude. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.”

“I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: which doeth ... marvellous things without number.” That is what Eliphaz means a few verses later when he says, “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.” There are many of you here and the Lord has delivered you in six troubles, but what about this seventh? You do not deserve deliverance and fear you cannot see any deliverance. But is thy God still able to deliver thee in seven troubles as well as six? “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven” – that seventh one which is worse than the other six put together. “Yea, in seven.” “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.” And it is not trust ill-grounded. “Is thy God ... able to deliver thee?”

“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.”

Well, it is good and gracious counsel that Eliphaz gives. “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea in seven.” Good and gracious counsel. He says, “I would seek unto God,” and then that good and gracious counsel when he so beautifully explains who this great and gracious God is. He does great things, unsearchable, unfathomable things, marvellous things, and there is no end, no measure to them. Beloved friends, may we prove the blessedness of it.

“Although 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. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause; which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.”