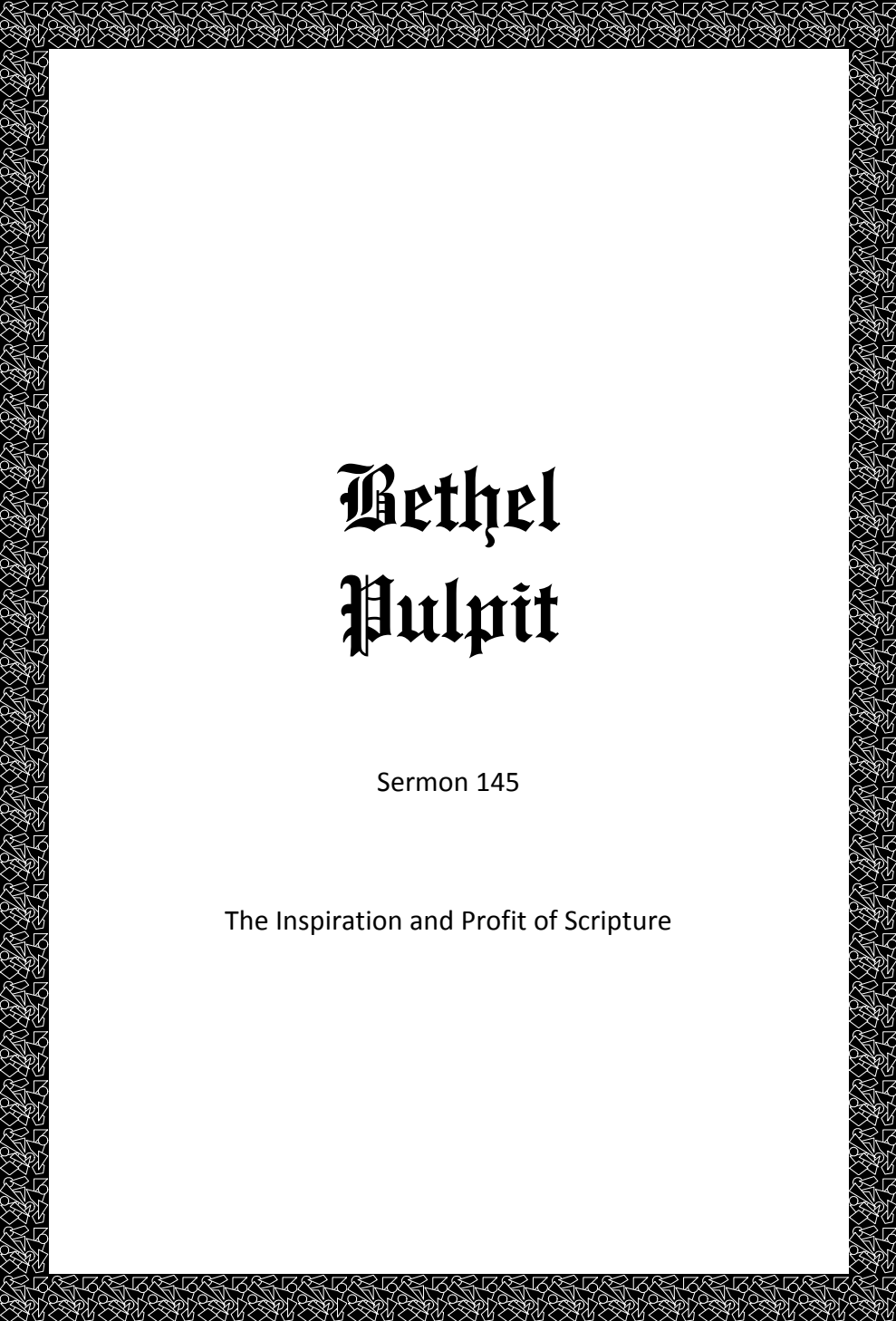




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 145

The Inspiration and Profit of Scripture

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 8th June, 1997**

Text: *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3. 16, 17).*

I suppose the way which I was led to this text was through the new book on the Bible which has just appeared and which is packing the shelves of the Luton bookshops and bookshops throughout Britain. The papers have been full of it. Very briefly, a leading Jewish mathematician claims he has discovered that there is a hidden, secret code in the Bible. Sir Isaac Newton always believed it but never really found it, but now with computers it has been found. If the code is followed carefully, every event of the future is clearly found; not only the Gulf War being found, but the name of Saddam Hussein, the word *missiles* and the date the war began. The names of Hitler and leading Nazis are found. The murder of the Israeli prime minister was foretold and he was warned about it.

A week last Saturday, I did give our young people a talk about it. I am not going to speak on this point this morning, but the only thing I am going to say is this: God never gave His holy, sacred Word to satisfy people's curiosity and He never gave His holy Word for fortune telling, for foretelling the future. But He did give His holy Word for this purpose: that it might be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Even if this code were proved to be correct, even if it be proved it is not the work of Satan, even if it is proved it is not the work of the carnal mind, where is the profit, where is the doctrine, where is the reproof, where is the correction, where is the instruction, where is the Holy Ghost making "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"? One interesting thing I did find, that though this code works on the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures, it does not seem that they threw up the name *Jesus* by prophecy; nor did they throw up the name *Christ*.

Beloved friends, we need to be very grateful to God for the gift of the Holy Scriptures, for the privilege of having them in our native tongue;

but may we ever treat them with reverence and godly fear. May we ever be found amongst those who tremble at the Word. That does not mean to be frightened of it. It means that we need to have a loving awe and reverence for it, and on the other hand to seek that our lives are completely ordered and governed by it. And the chief thing, to know the Author. I have often mentioned that little story over the years. Perhaps it is worth repeating this morning. A young lady years ago was given a book for a present and she could not get on with it at all. She just read one or two pages. It was so tedious and uninteresting she put it away on a shelf. Some time later, she was on holiday and was in company with a charming, delightful gentleman. To her amazement, she found he was the author of that book on the top of her shelf. When she got home from her holiday, she took the book down and read it again. There was not anything different about it, but now it was a wonderful book. What was the difference? She knew the author. Perhaps some of you children and young people read the Bible, and if you are honest, you find it uninteresting, you find it tedious. But if through precious faith you are brought to know the Author, when you read the Bible now it will not be uninteresting any more; it will not be tedious. It is not the Bible that has changed; it is not the Author who has changed; it is you who have changed.

Some of John Kershaw's hearers in the village of Whitworth outside Rochdale had an old man they were very burdened about. They tried to get him to go and hear their pastor preach and in the end, to persuade him, they said, "Well, when your wife was ill, we did this and that." So he went, and the preacher drew a bow at a venture and the Lord sent the arrow into his heart. When he got home, the old man said, "Where is the Bible?" His wife got it and wiped the dust off it. He began to read, and said, "But this is not the same Bible!" She said, "It is; it is the only one we have ever had, the one we were given when we were married." "Well," he said, "if this is the same book, I must have different eyes!" That is just it. When salvation takes place, you will have different eyes. It is a good prayer for children and young people and all of us: "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." This is the law, all the holy Word of God, and there are some wonderful things in it, and we need our eyes opened to see them, and especially to find the Lord Jesus there. I go back to my early days spiritually when I longed to get home and just go

quietly to read the Bible and find the Lord Jesus there. Do you ever read the Bible like that, to see if you can find the Lord Jesus there? It is this really:

“Divine Instructor, gracious Lord,
Be Thou for ever near;
Teach me to love Thy sacred Word,
And find the Saviour there.”

That is the profit. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable” – not to find out if there is going to be an earthquake next week or a war next year or when the end of the world is going to come, but to “find the Saviour there.”

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” There are three great works of God the Holy Spirit. One is the mysterious conception of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. One is the work of grace in a sinner’s heart. And one is the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Now this word *inspiration* means that God breathed the Scriptures. He breathed them out. They are God-given. They are God-breathed. And because of that, it means there is no mistake and there is no possibility of any mistake. If God breathed them, then there is not the slightest possibility of there being any mistake. They are infallible. They are inerrant. Those two words, which are so often used, simply mean there is no mistake and there is no possibility of mistake, even in the details. Now there will be many things we cannot understand. Matthew Henry, the great commentator, said it does us good, it humbles our pride, to realise there are many things in Scripture we cannot understand. But Joseph Hart has a good point:

“If aught there dark appear,
Bewail thy want of sight;
No imperfection can be there.”

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Now you young people, if anyone speaks to you about things in the Bible not being right, not being true, I think the simplest, clearest ground to stand on is this. We believe that there is a God in heaven, the great, the sovereign, the omnipotent, the infinite God, who created all things. If He should condescend to reveal Himself in a Book to poor, sinful creatures, is it possible He would have allowed there to be mistakes in it? That is the

ground on which we stand. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” We believe that not only the thoughts are inspired, but the very words – verbal inspiration. Of course, this is a mystery. Each of the writers has his own style, his own character. It is not like a kind of robot. John does not write like Peter, and Peter does not write like Paul. Yet the very words are perfect and inspired and accurate. I look at it something like this. You might take a lovely tune like *Deep Harmony* and get four people to play it. One plays it on a violin; one plays it on a piano; one plays it on a trumpet; another plays it on a harp. It would be the same tune, exactly the same tune, perfect, not a note wrong, but each of the four instruments would give its own peculiar character and tone. That is the verbal inspiration of the Bible. It is like the different musical instruments, Peter and Paul and John; there is their own, personal character, yet the words are perfect, infallible, inspired. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.” Some people think just the New Testament. Some people think just the doctrinal parts. Some people think, not the scientific parts. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

Now then, beloved friends, and especially you young people, I would warn you against the new translations, because if you look, the new translations have this word translated like this: “Every scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable.” Now if you think, that does not mean what the word before us here says: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.” The new versions say, “Every scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable,” as if to suggest only some scriptures are given by inspiration of God and only they are profitable, and other scriptures are not given by inspiration of God, and so they are not profitable. Let us hold fast to the truth: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.” This is one point on which in recent years the Evangelical churches generally have taken a firm stand and have contended very, very clearly on the point of inspiration. It seems to me that where the weakness lies is this: the walking of it out, that it is *all* Scripture given by inspiration of God. We can stand as firmly as the Apostle Paul in theory that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” but in our spirit we can be like Jehoiakim with his penknife that cuts out the little pieces we do not altogether like and assigns them to the bonfire.

Beware of being a Jehoiakim, leaving out the points you do not like, trying to explain them away.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Now then, this weakness was seen during the recent debates there have been on women priests. The reason we do not believe in women preachers, women priests, is exceedingly simple: that it is forbidden in the Word of God. Now what caused a lot of confusion is this: there were modernistic people contending for women priests and when the scripture was quoted to them, well they said, “We do not believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture.” So they were consistent. But there were many Evangelical contenders against women priests, and their opponents said, “You say you are against women priests because Scripture forbids it. Why do you allow women to pray at your prayer meetings, when that is forbidden in Scripture? Why don’t you insist on all your women having their hair long, when that is clearly commanded in Scripture? Why do you not insist on the women’s head covering, when that is so clear in Scripture?” They said, “We do not believe in the infallibility of Scripture. You do, but you accept the points you like, and if there is something else, you say it is ‘just the culture of the day, just Paul’s view.’” All of us by nature like to abide by the points we like and neglect the ones we do not.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” At the time of the Reformation and especially later with the godly dissenters, it was like a motto: the Word of God our only rule for faith and practice. It is not just, “Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable”; “*all* Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” Now I wonder when we read the Bible if there are some parts we never read. Perhaps some of you are a little bit puzzled why I read this morning that chapter in Ezra (chapter 10) which ends with a long catalogue of names. Perhaps you wonder whatever it has to do with the subject. I suppose it was when I was a teenager and first spiritually interested and I tried to read different parts of the Bible, and my mind goes back very clearly to reading that chapter I read this morning. I thought, “Whatever is the point of all this? Whatever use is it? Whatever profit is there in it?” And especially all that long list of names toward the end, and I was just puzzled. Yet I hope I had a humble reverence for the Word of God. So I looked at it again and found it hard and difficult and not especially helpful and profitable. Then I came to the verse: “And being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass.” I had such

a clear view of the atonement. Here were these people. They had sinned badly. Now they were brought to a humble point of confession. They were brought to bitter repentance. Not only that, they put everything right that was wrong and they promised in the future they would never do it again. “But being guilty” – they were still guilty.

“Not the labour of my hands,
Can fulfil Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone.”

They were still guilty. They were weeping; they were sorrowful; they put everything right; but they were still guilty. They needed a lamb to be sacrificed. They needed blood to be shed. They needed atonement to be made. Then there was pardon and forgiveness, and then everything was right. “Thou must save, and Thou alone.” That taught me a lesson in my early days spiritually, that even in the most unusual places of Scripture you will find precious gems. In the minor prophets you will find them. You will not understand everything in the minor prophets, but you will stumble across precious gems of divine truth. In Nahum, there is so much about the destruction of Nineveh, but then: “The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him.” May we be led by the Spirit of God to read all Scripture, because it is *all* given by inspiration of God and it is *all* profitable.

So we have this word *profitable* and it is a very important word, that *all* Scripture is profitable. In the Book of Malachi, God’s people kept asking the question, “What profit? What profit is there? What profit in our solemn feasts? What profit in our fastings?” They were speaking carnally. Really, What good is there? What good can I get out of it? But there is a right sense in which you and I in all our concerns should ask the question, “What profit?”

I want to speak very carefully and graciously here. I would be burdened that the preaching might be profitable. It will not always be a blessing to you, and sometimes it will not be particularly good, and sometimes you will not get on at all, and sometimes you will be glad when the sermon ends – but I hope there will be some profit in it. This is what I want to say, and I hope I say it graciously. You can hear a sermon

preached, and it is a wonderful sermon, an outstanding sermon, but when you are going home, you think, “What is the point of it? Where is the profit in it?” I have felt over the years I would like the preaching to be a help to you. You have your lives to live; I have my life to live. There are our sins and sorrows and our unworthiness and our faults and failings, the troubles we have. We need help, we need leading, we need forgiveness, we need grace. Do pray for this, that the preaching might be profitable.

When you read God’s holy Word in secret, pray that it might be profitable to you. Let me just pause there and say that I hope all of you do read God’s holy Word. You probably notice when I am visiting you, I usually ask you to find the Bible. Would you believe it that twice over the years in visiting, when I have asked for the Bible to read, I have been told, “Well, I don’t have a Bible; I don’t possess one”? You think, a person who attends a church or chapel every Sunday, and they do not have a Bible. “I used to have a Bible years ago, but I got rid of it.” “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.” You young ones and you children, do not forget before you go to sleep at night just to read a few verses from the Bible, from God’s holy Word of truth, and may God bless you in reading.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.” If you and I were asked to write down four things for which the Bible is profitable, I do not think we would have said exactly these: doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction. But that is what God says. Let me just come to this point this morning, that all Scripture is profitable for *doctrine*. People do not like doctrine today. There is a kind of ministry that is popular and there is no doctrine in it. Mind you, if there is nothing but doctrine, it is dry. I have often said it: doctrine is like the bones of your body. What would your body be if you had no bones? Just a mass of flesh. But if there was nothing but bones, and no flesh on it, it would be a dead, dry skeleton.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine.” I understand this to be the whole of the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of grace. And that is why God gave His holy Scriptures, that we might be taught these things that otherwise we should never have known. The nineteenth Psalm clearly teaches us that creation reveals that there is a God. Romans 1 tells us

creation teaches us of God, so that man is without excuse. But if we did not have God's holy Word, the Bible, we would not know who God is; we would not know the way of salvation; we would not know there is a heaven or a hell. Bless God for the gift of holy Scripture.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine.” Well, this is an inexhaustible subject. I can only just mention it. The doctrine of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three Persons in one undivided Godhead. The doctrine of man, created perfect by God, yet fallen into sin, the whole human race ruined in Adam, their federal head, and by personal sin, incapable of doing anything to merit forgiveness or heaven, incapable even of repenting or believing. The doctrine of Christ, the Son of God from all eternity, equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but becoming a real Man. The doctrine of redemption, special and particular, a redemption that redeems all those for whom it was offered; the shedding of the blood of Jesus that sinners might be cleansed from their sin; the righteousness of Jesus, His obedience to the law imputed to His people. The doctrine of the resurrection, the ascension, the intercession of the Lord Jesus. The doctrine of the Holy Ghost, a Person, a divine Person, co-equal, co-eternal with the Father and the Son. The doctrine of His work of grace in effectual calling, in the new birth, making His people willing in the day of His power. The doctrine of the eternal purpose of God in His divine decrees, election, predestination, the covenant of grace. The doctrine of providence, in which God effectually brings to pass all that He purposed in eternity, without in any way being the author of sin. The doctrine of the eternal safety of the people of God. The doctrine of sanctification, that those who are justified will always be sanctified. The doctrine of grace, that salvation is all of grace from first to last. The doctrine of the last things, that Jesus will come again in great glory and judge the quick and the dead, that there will be the end of all things. The doctrine of eternity, the doctrine of heaven, the doctrine of hell. Well, I have just tried to mention some of the vital doctrines of the Word of God, and that is why Scripture is given, that is why Scripture is profitable. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine.”

But the fourth of the four things, he says, “For instruction in righteousness.” So it is not just to have the Bible in our hands. It is to know the gracious teaching of God. “All thy children shall be taught of

the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.” We need the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures sovereignly and graciously to work in our hearts, to soften our hearts, to open our eyes, to lead us into the Scriptures of truth, to lead us into God’s Word, that the Word might be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. We need the truth brought with divine, gracious, almighty power. We need it sovereignly applied to our hearts. We want it to have an abiding effect. O beloved friends, we have the Scriptures. You have them in the preaching, in the pew, in your own home. But what about words like this: “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning”? Pray for an abiding effect, a saving, gracious, sanctifying effect of the Word in your heart. “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.” And then a word like this: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” That is, the sacred truths of the Bible being found written, not just in Scripture with a pen of ink, but by the Spirit of God on the fleshy tables of my heart. In other words, as the old preachers used to say, we do not just want a letter knowledge of Scripture; we want an experimental knowledge of Scripture.

In the context this is exactly what the apostle is writing about. He is not writing in a hard, detached way. He is writing to his beloved Timothy. “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Timothy as a young boy knew the holy Scriptures and they were blessed to him to his salvation. So I say to all our children and our young people the words of the Lord Jesus: “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.”

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine.” But the whole, vital matter here is comprehended in this. Paul says, “Timothy, you have the Scriptures. We believe they are inspired. We believe they are infallible. But this is the vital point; here is the profit: under the sacred influence of the Holy Ghost they are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” That is why we love God’s holy Word, because it sets forth the precious truths of salvation. O to know and feel our lost, ruined condition, and then in the

gospel in God's holy Word to see such an attraction in that great salvation wrought out by our blessed Redeemer, and to know that wonderful, inestimable truth, "Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation"!

Well, beloved friends, may the Lord lead us together into this: "From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

(If the Lord will, the evening sermon on the same text will be published next month.)