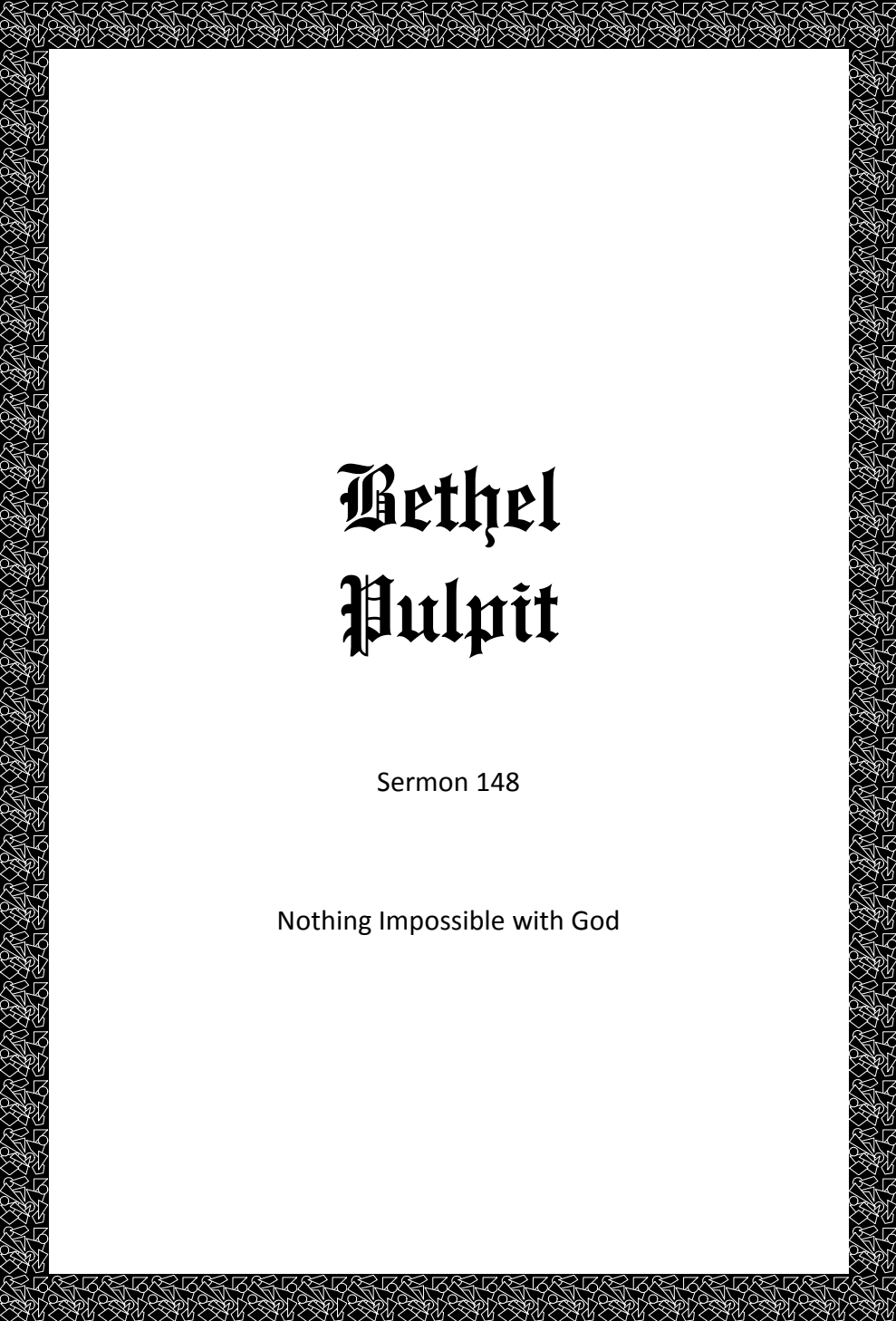




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 148

Nothing Impossible with God

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 15th December, 1996**

Text: *"For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1. 37).*

None of you can really imagine the labour that a pastor has as the Sabbath once more draws near, to find the Lord's word to bring before the people. Because God will only bless His own word. And often as the Friday and the Saturday comes, it seems as if we are toiling all night and catching nothing. But last evening, this word, with a measure of authority, rested on my spirit: "With God nothing shall be impossible." Then immediately it took me back to a time in my life about forty years ago when I was in black despair and could see no way out, no way of deliverance. There was only one text in the Bible, and it was this, and I hung on it like a drowning man with a straw, and proved the blessed truth and reality of it: "With God nothing shall be impossible." We have some things we have had burnt into our hearts that Satan can never rob us of.

Of course, where this word stands in Scripture is in immediate relationship with the virgin birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It was an impossibility, yet that impossibility took place. To Mary it was an impossibility; she said that it was an impossibility. But the answer was, it *is* an impossibility, but with God impossibilities do not exist. Remember, the Lord Jesus Himself said to Peter, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." And so the angel kindly told Mary that though this was an impossibility, this impossibility would take place. Whenever we speak of the virgin birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we need to take our shoes from off our feet, for the place whereon we stand is holy ground.

Often we talk about the wonderful *birth* of the Saviour. Strictly, we should speak of the wonderful *conception* of the Saviour, because the actual birth of the Lord Jesus was as natural a birth as any that ever took place. It was His mysterious conception that was a miracle. But you see the impossibility of it. It was the everlasting purpose of God that His beloved Son should come into this world, that God might become Man. Now the impossibility of it all! The old Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle have always been counted the greatest minds the world

has ever known – of course, they believed in all manner of gods – and they spoke of the utter impossibility of any of the gods ever really becoming man. They could see with the intellect they had that this was the only way of salvation. But they said, “The thing is impossible. Gods cannot really become men.” How can God become man? How can the Son of God be born a man? The impossibility of it! How can He be born? How can He become a man, a real man, without partaking of sin, without partaking of original sin? That is the impossibility, but the impossibility took place.

He was to have no earthly father. He was to be conceived by the overshadowing work of the Holy Spirit. We can get no further than that. Mary said, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” It is an impossibility. It is beautiful language, isn’t it, and we do not venture any close than this: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” In other words, the impossibility will take place. “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.” And some of us have to say, “I love the Incarnate Mystery, and there is all my trust.”

For salvation’s work the Saviour must be divine. He must be truly God. But He must also be man. He must be a real man. So the Son of God took our nature without sin into lasting union with His divine Person. The sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus never existed apart from His divine Person. Now there is an indissoluble union there. It is in the same nature now glorified for ever that He appears in heaven this morning. We believe “the God shines gracious through the Man,” even in heaven this morning. But Joseph Irons puts it well: “Man to suffer, God to save.” “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” Blessed be God that the impossibility took place, otherwise you and I would have been lost and ruined to all eternity.

“With God nothing shall be impossible.” Of course, also this word does touch the birth of John the Baptist as well, because the angel had just said, “Behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.” So it also touches the birth of John the Baptist to an aged mother. It is interesting that a similar word to this is also bound up with a remarkable birth. I mean God’s word to Abraham and Sarah: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” That was the promise of a birth, an impossible birth, the

birth of Isaac, the heir of promise, when Sarah was ninety years old. You see the impossibility of it! Now here we have it: “With God nothing shall be impossible”; and there in the book of Genesis: “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” The birth of Isaac, the birth of John the Baptist, aged Sarah, aged Elisabeth, the impossibility. But, “With God nothing shall be impossible.” And one thing stands out very clearly: that nothing can ever stop an heir of glory being born. If there is a child of God bound up in the covenant of grace, written in the book of life, then no power on earth or hell, no impossibility, can stop that vessel of mercy being born.

There have been many remarkable occasions of this over the years and in the history of the church of God. Let me just briefly mention the most remarkable and the strangest of all. One of the most honoured ministers the church of God has ever known was Ralph Erskine. But Ralph Erskine’s mother was not only dead, but buried, well before Ralph Erskine was born. So it seemed. She died and the burial had taken place. It was in a vault, so her body was laid there open, and the avaricious sexton noticed she was wearing a valuable ring, and decided to take it. He went there at the dead of night. It is a gruesome story. He could not get the ring off, so he took a knife. When the corpse let out a scream, the sexton fled, and after some time the woman, who was not dead but in a trance, came round and was able to stagger home, and banging on the door, wakened her husband, who was amazed. It was after that that Ralph Erskine was born. If there is a vessel of mercy to be born, there is no power in earth or hell can stop it.

“For with God nothing shall be impossible.” So this remarkable word is bound up with the birth of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and then with the birth of John the Baptist. But it makes us think of the new birth. O the impossibility, you would say, of this one and that one ever being born again of the Spirit of God, ever being called by grace. But, “With God nothing shall be impossible.” If the Lord has a purpose of mercy to this one sunk in the ruins of the Fall, “as far from God as sheep can run,” however impossible the case is, when the appointed time comes in covenant purpose, that one is born of the Spirit and called by grace. “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” Think of Manasseh, the chief of sinners. Read that dreadful account of the most wicked of all the kings in the Old Testament, his vileness, his wickedness, his cruelty. He made the streets of Jerusalem to run with blood. That is the way the Holy Ghost

described it: he made the streets of Jerusalem to run with blood. There you have an impossible case. But, "With God nothing shall be impossible." The time came when, under the afflicting hand of God, he was brought to bitter repentance and he enjoyed forgiveness.

"That sacred flood, from Jesus' veins,
Was free to take away
A Mary's or Manasseh's stains,
Or sins more vile than they."

"For with God nothing shall be impossible." Look at the dying thief. There is an impossible case. He has lived his life in sin and has come right to the end of his life. We talk about the eleventh hour. Well, it is the midnight hour and it is very clear from comparing the gospels that when he was crucified he was still as hard and dead and impenitent as he ever was in his life, because both of the thieves reviled the Lord and Saviour. Now, "With God nothing shall be impossible." The appointed hour, the appointed moment has come, "not to propose but call by grace." Now can it really be true, to hear him rebuking his fellow thief? "We indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss." Who taught him his sin? Who taught him the innocence of the Saviour? And then that prayer: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Who taught him that this dear, dying Man was the Lord? Who taught him He had a kingdom? Who taught him He could give it? Who taught him that this wonderful Man could hear and answer prayer? "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." O what wonders free grace has done!

"For with God nothing shall be impossible." I hope you do not misunderstand me here, but sometimes I think there is almost a greater impossibility than such a case as Manasseh and the dying thief. What do I mean? Well, I mean this boy, this girl, you perhaps look at them and you cannot see a visible flaw in them. They have always been kind and gentle and good. They have never caused their parents any distress. Yet the impossibility of it that such an one as this should be sighing with deep repentance, mourning over the vileness of their hearts, confessing their sin, crying for mercy! I sometimes think that is a greater impossibility than such an one as these should be brought to feel their sin. But look back in

your life, the time when you were born again, and don't you see the impossibility of it? But, "With God nothing shall be impossible."

There is another impossibility, and blessed be God it takes place: not just that sinners should be born again and called by grace, but these sinners who *are* born again, who are called by grace, should be brought safely through to heaven at last. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved," and only he that endureth to the end. You think of it. Look at this one, so weak, so helpless, and the pilgrimage to walk out, and indwelling sin so strong, and temptation so strong, and Satan so strong. The impossibility of this one ever coming safely through at last, but he does. That is the wonder of wonders. But then see not just this one: see the whole church of God in all ages from Adam's day to the end of time, the impossibility of them enduring, coming through every trial, every temptation. But you look at the whole, blood-bought church of God in all ages and you see the whole lot of them, one by one, being brought safely through to heaven. It is a miracle that one ever gets to heaven, but the miracle of miracles is this: that they all get to heaven, that Satan has never snatched one down to hell, not the most feeble believer.

"He'll lead them on fair Zion's road,
Though weary, weak, and faint;
For O! they ne'er shall lose their God,
Or God e'er lose a saint."

The wonderful truth of the everlasting safety, the eternal security of the people of God! The impossible takes place.

"For with God nothing shall be impossible." But then in the lives of God's people, there are continually these impossible things. You will have them. I believe that the Lord brings His people into places where things with them are not just hard, but impossible. But He brings them there, not that they might sink or perish or be destroyed, but that they might prove that "with God nothing shall be impossible." O to have this burnt in our hearts! When you have your hard things, your impossible things, the Lord is not going to destroy you, but He brings you there that you might learn this lesson, not just because it is in the Bible, but by blessed experience: that God is the God of impossibilities. For,

“Faith the promise sees,
And trusts in God alone;
Laughs at impossibilities
And says, ‘It shall be done.’”

“For with God nothing shall be impossible.” Now the Word of God is full of impossibilities taking place. Just think of Israel being brought to the Red Sea, and think of the impossibility of it all. These slaves who have just fled from Egypt and mighty Pharaoh and his army pursuing them, and they are hedged in on both sides by the mountains and in front of them the impassable waters of the Red Sea. The utter impossibility of the case, the utter impossibility of any escape, the utter impossibility of any deliverance! “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” And the utter impossibility takes place. There was nothing Israel could do. They were so helpless. There was nothing Israel *had* to do; God did it all. But there will be times when you come to the Red Sea place in your life – “when thou canst no deliverance see” – in spiritual things and in providential things. Then God is going to make Himself known as the almighty God, the powerful God, the omnipotent God, nothing too hard for Him, nothing impossible with Him. Sometimes we have to say, “It is time for Thee, Lord, to work.” Sometimes we have to say, “The work exceeds all nature’s power.” But to “stand still and see the salvation of God.”

Just think of Gideon. He felt so weak and helpless. He said, “My family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” Yet he is able to go forth and deliver the Israelites from the hand of the Midianites. Poor Gideon shrank from it. He trembled at the impossibility of the case. There had been mightier warriors than Gideon and they could not do it. Here he is. He is not a soldier. He is a farmer’s son. “Go in this thy might ... have not I sent thee?” “With God nothing shall be impossible.” God delights to perform the impossible for His people, and He delights to use the smallest, the most insignificant of means. Gideon did his best, but we have to be brought to nothing. “The people that are with thee are too many.” They have to be brought down until there are only three hundred. The impossibility of it, three hundred against this might army. “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon.” We do not read that

Gideon had a sword, but he had the sword of the Lord, and God was on his side and God was almighty. Israel had nothing to do but to pursue and conquer.

“For with God nothing shall be impossible.” And then think of David, little David going out against Goliath. That was an impossibility, an impossible case. You and I know the end of the story; we have always known the end of the story. David did not. This great giant, and a real giant, not an imaginary one, well-armed, and a boy with five stones from the brook. “With God nothing shall be impossible.” O but wasn’t David’s religion a good one! He knew something of this already. He said, “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” Now that is good ground. “The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” I suppose David was thinking it had been impossible for him to deliver the lamb from the lion and the bear. You could not, unarmed, do such a thing. But God did the impossible then and He can do the impossible now, do it again. “The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” In other words, dear child of God, “He who hath helped you hitherto, will help you all your journey through.” And still there are these impossible things for you.

“For with God nothing shall be impossible.” Then think of the three Hebrew children in the burning, fiery furnace. Look at their grace, look at their religion. “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter.... Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us....But if not, we will not worship the golden image thou hast set up.” O to have a religion like that! There is an impossibility. There is not a greater impossibility in all Scripture. That burning fire, that furnace, the heat of it was so great that even the king’s servants who came near were burnt to death. You think of Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego thrown into the fire. Now the impossibility of it! Their garments were not even singed. It seems the only thing that was burnt were the bonds which bound them. “Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?...Lo, I see four men loose,...and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” I know the divines have disputed exactly what the king meant by that. That does not matter. He saw a glorious Person. What he meant does not really matter. It was the Son of God.

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

“With God nothing shall be impossible.” When the Lord brings you into a fiery trial, you see the impossibility of ever coming out of it. You feel sure you are going to be burnt up and destroyed in it. But, “With God nothing shall be impossible.” Unbelief looks at the fire; faith looks to God. Unbelief sees our own weakness, helplessness and sinfulness; faith views the greatness, the sovereignty, the almighty power of God. May we be kept from looking at the things that are seen. May we look at the things which are not seen. We cannot help seeing the things that are seen, but may we look beyond them to the things which are not seen. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.”

“For with God nothing shall be impossible.” And then Daniel. Again, you and I know the end of the story; we have always known the end of the story. The deliverance of Daniel. Also, do not forget these were real lions, not imitation ones. Now the impossibility of the case, that Daniel should be flung into the lion’s den and that he should come forth completely untouched, completely unharmed. “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” He who divided the waters of the Red Sea can shut the lions’ mouths. “All creatures obey His command” – angels, devils, circumstances, ravens, lions – “all creatures obey His command.” The hearts of all men are in His hand. “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” “Daniel, ... is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” Daniel knew the answer, and I trust through mercy you and I know the answer: that God is an almighty Deliverer. With Paul we can say, “Who delivered ... and doth deliver,... He will deliver.” “Who delivered us from so great a death.” Well you look back, and He did, didn’t He? “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust” – it is not trust ill-founded – “in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.” “Is thy God ... able to deliver thee?”

“Then let our humble faith address
His mercy and His power;

We shall obtain delivering grace,
We shall obtain delivering grace,
In the distressing hour.”

“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.”

“For with God nothing shall be impossible.” Now this is a scripture, for some reason or other, that is so often misquoted. Usually, I do not know why, people say, “With God nothing shall be *called* impossible.” The Bible does not say that. It does not say, “Nothing shall be *called* impossible.” It says, “Nothing shall *be* impossible.” There are many things which are *called* impossible; we call them impossible; unbelief calls them impossible; Satan calls them impossible. But, “With God nothing shall *be* impossible.”

Now the wonderful thing is this: that God is just as almighty, just as omnipotent this morning as He was in the days of Moses and Gideon and David and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and Daniel and Manasseh and the dying thief, and here, the time of the birth of the Lord Jesus and John the Baptist. “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” – unchanging, immutable in His mercy and faithfulness and everlasting love and free grace, eternally the same in His divine, almighty power. What a wonderful mercy, instead of saying, “With God nothing shall be impossible,” if through grace we are enabled to say, *our God*, our God in Christ, our God in immutable bonds that can never be broken! “This God is our God for ever and ever.” The psalmist speaks about God doing various things (Psalm 48), wonderful things. “This God is our God” – and not only our God – “our God for ever and ever.” Well, beloved friends, may we know it and may we prove it, not just to say, “With God,” but before we go home to say this morning, “With *our* God. With *our* God nothing shall be impossible.”