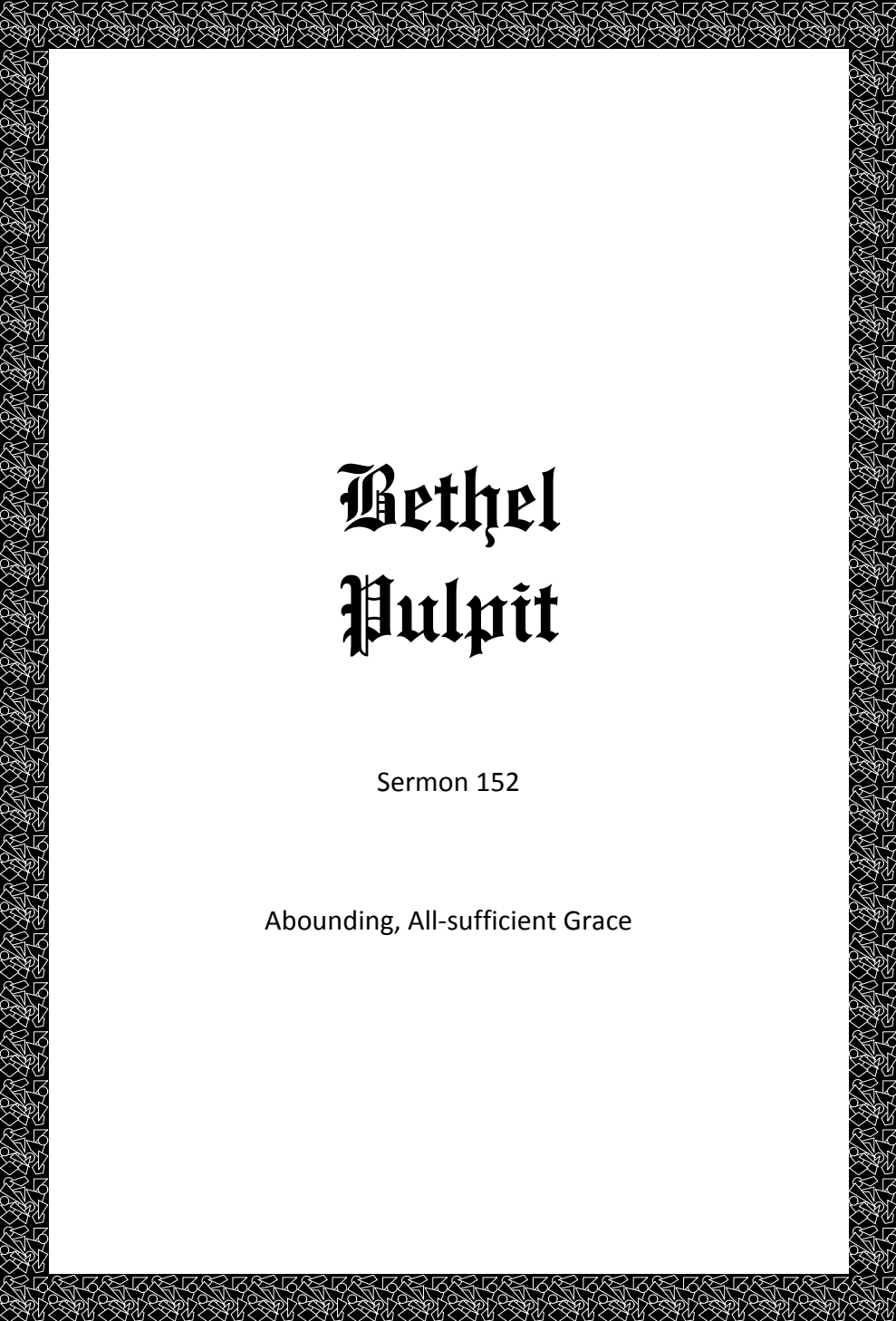




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 152

Abounding, All-sufficient Grace

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 28th September, 1997**

Text: *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Corinthians 9. 8).*

This is one of the favourite expressions of the Apostle Paul: "He is able." That is, the divine, almighty ability of the Lord, that He can do anything; He can do everything; nothing is too hard for Him. "God is able." Of course, when we say that God can do all things, God can do everything, we mean as consistent with His righteous character. The old divines used to say there are three things God cannot do: God cannot lie; God cannot die; God cannot deny Himself. So when we speak of Almighty God being able to do everything, we mean there is no limit to His omnipotence. He can speak a world into being. But we always understand it in accordance with His righteous character. It is a beautiful truth, a foundation truth: "God is able." There is so much you could add on to the end. God is able to hear and answer your prayers. God is able to make you right for eternity. God is able to show you the way in which you are to walk. You could go on.

"God is able." But let me just mention two or three things as illustrations of what the apostle says: God is able. One is this: "He is able also to save them to the uttermost." O what a blessed ability, what a gracious ability that is, especially to those of you who feel to be uttermost sinners, who feel the wickedness, the vileness of your heart, to be led by precious faith to Calvary, to see mercy's streams in streams of blood, and there to see this saying come to pass: "He is able also to save them to the uttermost."

"Yes, the very worst of sinners,
Who upon His grace rely,
Shall of endless bliss be winners."

"He is able." Our hymnwriter, Joseph Hart, puts it like this: "He is able, He is willing; doubt no more," because His willingness is equal to His ability. "He is able also to save them to the uttermost." There the apostle

puts it in the context of His everlasting priesthood. “This Man” – this glorious Man, and don’t we love the precious, sacred humanity of the incarnate Son of God? – “this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.” “He is able.”

“God is able.” Now another one is this: He “is able to keep you from falling.” I remember years ago I had someone come to see me about being baptized and uniting in church membership, and she said, “But the point is the fear of having to walk it out, and enduring.” This word dropped sweetly on my spirit: He “is able to keep you from falling.” And He is. He has that blessed ability to keep the feet of His saints. He is able to keep you from falling. Now this is it: “And to present you faultless before His the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” “He is able.”

“God is able.” And just one other instance: He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” Well, you cannot rise above that and you cannot get beneath it. You say, “My case is difficult. I cannot see any way of escape. I cannot see any way of deliverance. I cannot see how this need can be supplied. I do not see how this prayer can be answered. I do not see how this hard case can be dealt with.” Well, you and I do not need to be able to see *how*. It is, “How, and why, and by what means, to His wisdom leaving.” “He is able.” This is faith’s resting point: He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

So we have a blessed foundation here, the gracious ability of God. Now here it is this: “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” We like to think of abounding grace, “sovereign grace o’er sin abounding.” It is not just that there *is* grace, or that grace exists. It always abounds; it always reigns. I think in that Christian classic, Abraham Booth’s *The Reign of Grace*, that is one of the first points he makes. It is not just that grace exists, but it abounds, it reigns. It is “sovereign grace o’er sin abounding.” “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” He made grace abound towards His people in Christ before He created the world. When He chose them, when He predestinated them unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, when He loved them with an everlasting love, when He set up His dear Son as their covenant Head and everlasting All, He was able to make all grace abound to them then.

Then when Adam fell and “sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,” it did not take God by surprise. God was able to make all grace abound, even in the Garden of Eden, in that first promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head, and in that revelation of the atonement, when He took the coats of skins and clothed Adam and Eve. “God is able to make all grace abound.” And Abel, the first sinner who went to heaven, God was able to make all grace abound toward him so that by faith he brought a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. You see it right through the ceremonial law, the types, the shadows. “God is able to make all grace abound.” You see it in the promises, the prophecies.

“God is able to make all grace abound.” And then in all its preciousness and fulness you see it in the coming of God’s dear Son. “God is able to make all grace abound.” “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” And in the life and death and resurrection of the incarnate Son of God, we see that “God is able to make all grace abound.” But see that grace whilst He was here on earth; it did not matter how great the sinner. Look at the dying thief, dying, perishing in his sin. God was able to make all grace abound towards him and take him to heaven as a trophy of that grace. But it is at Calvary, in streams of blood as sin was put away in the atonement, that we see grace abounding. “Here on the cross ’tis fairest drawn, in precious blood, and crimson lines.” There is no sweeter subject than grace abounding towards sinners in the Person and work of Jesus, because grace has to do with you and me as sinners. Grace is God’s blessing freely given without money and without price. Grace is God’s favour freely bestowed on the unworthy, the undeserving, enemies, rebels. Did it affect you, those beautiful words in the chapter we read? Especially this: “God commendeth His love toward us.” He commends His own love, but the display of His love He commends more than any other is this: “That, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

“God is able to make all grace abound towards you.” Now it abounded in the everlasting covenant. It abounded in Christ. But this is it: for grace to abound to you and for grace to abound to me. If you and I know anything at all of salvation, it must be through grace. It is grace which makes us feel our need of grace. That is part of the meaning of that

scripture: “Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Grace to feel our need of grace, and then grace to supply that need. Until we possess grace, we never feel our need of grace. The world needs grace, but it does not feel its need of grace. Every one of you here, you need grace, grace to save you, grace to prepare you for heaven, grace to forgive your sins. But you will not feel that need unless grace teaches it to you. But “God is able to make all grace abound toward you,” to make you feel your need of grace and then to bless you with that grace.

On this point, my mind usually goes back to a very unusual occurrence. Those of you who read the lives of John Kershaw or J. C. Philpot and so on will be very familiar with Lady Lucy Smith. She was the daughter of one of the leading noblemen in Scotland. It was an ungodly home. She lived in a castle. When she was a young girl, the Lord brought her to a saving knowledge of the truth, so she thought she should go out and visit the Scottish peasantry and talk to them. Once it was a bitterly cold day and she was in a cottage with an old woman. There was a thump on the door and a poor pedlar came in, blue with cold, and begged to warm himself by the fire. Lady Lucy thought she might never see him again, and when he had warmed himself and they had given him something to eat, she said, “Do you ever pray?” He said, “Yes, madam.” She said, “Pray with us now.” He fell on his knees and as far as she could remember, he said, “Lord, teach us our need of grace, and then give us grace to seek that grace. And then give us grace to receive grace, and when we have grace, give us grace to use grace.” And then he disappeared, and they never knew who he was and never saw him again. She never forgot it all through her life.

But it is grace from first to last. Grace to make you feel your need of grace, grace to seek grace, and grace to make you receive grace. “God is able to make all grace abound *toward you*.” That is it, personally. O we need grace in so many ways. We need the grace of God in the Lord Jesus to forgive our sins. We need to be saved by His grace. We need through grace to be prepared for heaven. We need through grace to be washed in the Redeemer’s blood. And God is able to make that grace abound towards you, even you.

Then you see, we not only need grace to save us, but we need grace to keep us. O what a hard life the life of a child of God is, especially in

these dark, solemn days – the difficulty of the pilgrimage, your own weakness, your carnal heart, the opposition of sin, Satan and the world, the power of temptation. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you,” to keep you from falling and to bring you safely through at last. We can no more keep ourselves than save ourselves. O but the grace that saves always keeps. We need to seek it. We need it daily; we need it hourly, like the manna from heaven. You and I would like to have a stock of grace in hand for tomorrow and next week and next year and the rest of our life, and we should be able to manage quite well with that stock of grace. The Lord promises it to His people in Christ, but it is in His hand. When you need it, you shall have it. “No stock on nature’s barren ground, my all is in Thy storehouse found.” It is like the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil. There will always be a little in the bottom when you need it. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you,” to keep you from falling, to keep you to the end, but you will have to seek it all along. That is a good prayer of Dr. Fawcett:

“Lord, hast Thou made me know Thy ways?
Conduct me in Thy fear;
And grant me such supplies of grace,
That I may persevere.”

“God is able to make all grace abound toward you.”

And, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you,” to answer your prayers. What is your concern tonight? What is your prayer? Something in providence, something spiritual. How can you manage? You are not able. You painfully feel your inability to do anything. But, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you,” in answering your prayer. You say, “I don’t deserve anything.” Well, it is grace, not law, and “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” And it is abounding grace. That means He answers today and answers tomorrow. It is abounding grace. It is like the ocean. The tide keeps coming and more waves and more. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you,” in hearing and answering your prayers. The place we go to in prayer, God Himself has given it a name: the throne of grace. It is a throne. The one who sits on it is King. He is almighty. He lives; He reigns. “With heaven and earth at His command, He waits to answer prayer.” But it is a throne of grace. It is the God of Jacob who sits there. It is grace abounding to the

chief of sinners, to use the title that Bunyan gave to his life. When people write their autobiography, they have all kinds of interesting titles. You read of a new book that has come out and perhaps it has a strange title or an interesting title. Bunyan gave the account of his own life this title: “Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.” “God is able to make all grace abound toward you” – not just to John Bunyan – to you. That grace has been abounding since Adam fell, but it is not exhausted. It is still ever-flowing, full and free. And, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.”

And then, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you,” to supply your needs; not to give you what your carnal heart would like, but what you need. Really, the sum and substance of this verse is similar to, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Or as Gadsby puts it, “My every need He richly will supply.” “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” This one tonight, and you feel weak and helpless. This one to night, you are in trouble. This one tonight, you are sad, you are disappointed. Do you believe it, that “God is able to make all grace abound toward you”? You have things tomorrow, this coming week, the unknown way. How are you going to stand the trying day? This is the answer to it all: “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” Some of you say, “I am growing older. I don’t know how I am going to manage. I have got the winter coming on.” “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” God has not changed. His promise has not changed. His ability has not changed, and it never will. “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” And then that time of need and helplessness. “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul is writing of his own experience. Later in this epistle he tells us the Lord spoke that to him. Really Paul is saying, This is something I have tried and proved. Like the old woman, I can write *T* and *P* against it, *tried* and *proved*. I know it by experience. I am not just writing it as a doctrine. If ever anybody needed it, I did. And God is able to make all grace abound toward me. That is why God appointed sinners to preach the gospel and not angels, because sinners have experienced the power of abounding grace. Angels have not. Someone once said, “I would not go to that chapel if an angel was preaching there!” Someone else answered, “I am sure I would not, because an angel could not enter into my sorrows and

feelings and sins.” “Never did angels taste above, redeeming grace and dying love.” “God is able to make all grace abound toward you,” says Paul. I know it; I have experienced it. And what God has done for me, I know He will do for you.

“God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” Let me for a moment just put this in its context. This chapter and the preceding chapter are dealing with a very practical thing: Christian giving. There is so much spoken concerning it. But it seems that some of these Corinthians were somewhat fearful, that if they really gave, really sacrificed, how would they manage? How would their families manage? What about if hard times came? What about the unknown way? This is the Lord’s answer to it. If that is your fear, well, there is no need to fear. “He which soweth sparingly,” says God, “shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” This good work, of looking after the poor and the needy and those in distress. As if the Lord says, You will not lose out by it. Like that king (2 Chron. 25. 5-9) who acted wrongly and hired a great army, and it cost him a hundred talents of silver. And the prophet came and said, “Break off this alliance.” He was willing to do it, but he said, “What of all these talents of silver?” “The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.”

Some of the old people used to say that God pays the best interest. How many have proved it, if they have been constrained to give something for Jesus’ sake, that God has made all grace abound toward them, compensating it all, balancing it, overbalancing it! They were so fearful how things might go with them. They wanted to do what was right, but they were so fearful. You may be fearful. It may be literally giving away something you feel constrained to, but there may be something else. It may be making some tremendous sacrifice for Christ’s sake, and you are willing, but you wonder how things will go. You do not want to be presumptuous. This is God’s answer. The Lord’s eye is upon you. You will not suffer for it. “God loveth a cheerful giver.” “Them that honour Me I will honour.” The Lord said to Peter, “There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of

God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." Perhaps you have a new venture of faith. Perhaps there is something you have to give up for Jesus' sake. Perhaps there is a new pathway in your life. Perhaps there is something you are constrained to do for Jesus' sake, but you are tried. "God is able to make all grace abound toward you." Even an open profession of the name of Jesus. How can I stand the trying day? "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." If the Lord has told you to do it, do it, and if the Lord has told you not to do it, do not do it.

In one sense, beloved friends, I do not know a verse anything like this in the whole Bible. What do I mean? Well, the emphasis, the way this word, *all*, keeps coming in. "God is able to make *all* grace abound toward you; that ye, *always* having *all* sufficiency in *all* things, may abound to every good work." If a child started talking like that, you would think he was perhaps exaggerating or speaking foolishly or unnecessarily. Yet Almighty God has spoken like that for the comfort of His poor, tried, tempted people. The great point is the all-sufficiency of grace. One of our little hymns starts off, "All-sufficient is our Jesus, though our sins are black as hell." The all-sufficiency of grace. Another of our hymns says, "When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, My grace *all-sufficient* shall be thy supply." The all-sufficiency of grace. Because if your religion and mine is real, one thing we will be brought painfully to feel – and we do, I do – our complete, utter insufficiency. How can we pray? How can we preach? How can we live the life of faith? How can we do anything good? How can we do anything right? We have had to learn this: our utter, absolute, complete insufficiency in everything. Well, Paul himself learned it in the early chapters of this epistle: "Who is sufficient for these things?" You will cry it out sometimes, and you can fill that piece in yourself, what it means tonight, beloved: "These things." You know what it means in your life and I know what it means in my life. "These things." "Who is sufficient for these things?" In the next chapter, Paul answers his own question. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." God is all-sufficient. As we sing in that little new year hymn: "Standing on His promise, what have we to fear? God is all-sufficient for the coming year." "Our sufficiency is of God," the God of love and mercy, the God of all grace, and His grace is

not just *sufficient*: it is *all-sufficient*. There is a difference, you know, between something being sufficient and something being *all-sufficient*. It is that wonderful fulness of grace in Jesus, that never fails, that never will fail.

Look at the emphasis here: “always.” When you are young, when you are old, always; in the time of joy, in the time of sorrow, always; now and tomorrow and next week, always; and when you come to die, when you come down to the swellings of Jordan, always. It is unfailing grace and it is a prelude to unfailing glory.

When I was a teenager, if there was a good meeting anywhere on a Saturday, I used to love to get to it. I saw a Sovereign Grace Union meeting advertised at a place called Fecitt Brow, Blackburn. I did not know either of the speakers, but the subject attracted me. The one in the afternoon was going to speak on *unfailing grace*, and the one in the evening was advertised to speak on *unfading glory*. What could be more attractive than that to a young believer? “He will not fail thee.” “The Lord, He it is that doth go before thee; He will be with thee, He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee.” Unfailing grace, a sweet prelude to unfading glory. The Puritans used to say that grace is glory in the bud, and glory is grace in the flower. The psalmist says that He will give both. “The Lord will give grace and glory.” This wonderful all-sufficiency of grace, always, at all times, in all places. As the Lord spoke to Jacob at Bethel: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.” Didn’t old Jacob come into some strange places? In all places, at all times.

And then He adds this, as if that were not enough: “In all things.” Things in providence and things in your family, things in your business, things concerning your soul, things in the church of God, all things. All grace, all-sufficiency, always, all things. “What more can He say than to you He has said?” But O our poor, blind unbelief which is sure to err! An old man came up to a preacher in Lancashire and said, “You don’t quote that hymn right. You talk about blind unbelief erring.” He said, “It is *sure* to err.” Some of you prove that, that blind unbelief is sure to err. O for precious faith to rest on God’s covenant promise!

“God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”

Really, the whole point is this: there is a pilgrimage to walk out. There is a life of faith. There is a conflict. There is a warfare. We are completely weak and helpless, insufficient. How can this poor pilgrim come safely through? How can he endure to the end? What about his trials, his problems, his difficulties? Here the Holy Ghost gives this beautiful revelation of the all-sufficiency of grace. “Whate’er I need in Jesus dwells.” The all-sufficiency of grace, always, at all times, in all things. Grace all-sufficient. “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” The more you feel your emptiness, the more welcome you are to this fulness of grace which is in Christ. It reigns. It reigns to eternal life, and it abounds. “Sovereign grace o’er sin abounding.” All the help you need, all the wisdom you need, all the strength you need, in a word, all the grace you need, that you lack, that you have not got, that you must have, all there treasured up in Christ, and all freely flowing to guilty sinners on mercy’s ground through the atonement.

O beloved friends, may you be able to take this home with you, or rather may this word take you home with it, and may it dwell richly in your hearts by faith. The wonders of grace, abounding grace, all-sufficient grace. “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”