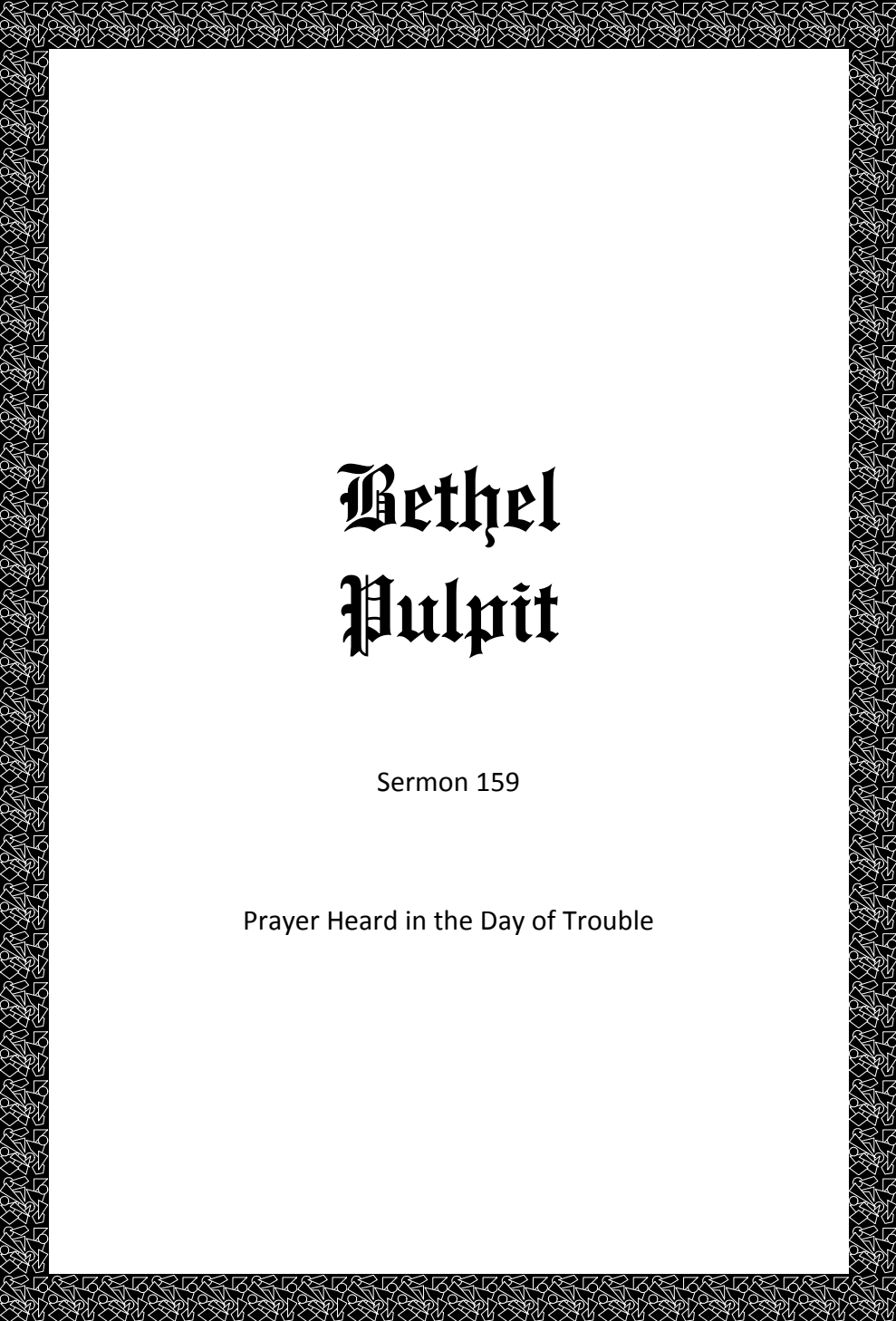




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 159

Prayer Heard in the Day of Trouble

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 26th June, 1986**

Text: *“The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel” (Psalm 20. 1-4).*

This is God’s Israel praying for its king. David himself wrote the psalm, but it was a psalm for his own people to use in prayer for him. It has been called the national anthem of ancient Israel. Just as we sing our national anthem, “God save the Queen,” so this is Israel praying for its king. And we are reminded of this, that though David was so great, and so eminent, so gracious and so mighty, yet he did not despise the prayers of the poor of his people. He realised what value there was in them. “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” It was a psalm which was said or sung when Israel went into battle, with King David at the head of the army, a psalm said or sung in the midst of the conflict, the midst of the turmoil.

“The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” I think you will find that nearly all the ancient godly divines interpret this as the church of God praying for Christ in His sufferings, as if the whole church of God in all ages was there present looking on Gethsemane, looking on Calvary, praying for their dear Redeemer in the conflict.

“The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” Really, there is not a more tender, loving wish that we can have than this, is there, for our friends – “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble”? And really this is the exercise of a gospel minister concerning his congregation in every time of sorrow, in every time of need. “The Lord hear thee” – personally, each one – “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” Well, you will have your days of trouble. Sooner or later they will come. One of the Puritans said that there are not many flowers in the garden on which the sun shines in the morning and in the evening.

“The day of trouble.” What a mercy if the Lord hears you, answers, has mercy on you, then! So the church of God prays one for

another, and what a good exercise it is in the church when one is in sadness and another in grief, and the whole church, the whole congregation, takes up the burden, “The Lord hear thee.” When we feel so helpless ourselves that we cannot do anything, when the work exceeds all nature’s power, then, “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.”

There is the day of soul trouble when born again of the Holy Ghost; you are brought to feel your need, your sin, eternity before you, the appointment of death, and it is a day of trouble. Let me affectionately ask you, has it ever been a day of trouble to you, your sins and your soul and eternity? Well has it, or are all your troubles only providential things? That is a day of trouble, when you see a vast eternity before you, when you realise that you are trembling on the brink, when you feel unready, unfit to die. Then, “The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” That is a day of trouble when you feel the sore temptations of Satan, when he harasses you and torments you, when you cannot stand before his fiery darts.

“The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” That is the day of trouble when you walk in darkness and have no light, when your heart is hard and cold, when you cannot get any access, when there is no communion and you have no sense of the Lord’s gracious presence. “The Lord near thee in the day of trouble.” That is the day of trouble, when you are seeking after Christ, but you cannot find Him, when you look on the right hand and on the left and behold, He is not there, when you cannot get what you want, when you feel your bondage, when you are held fast and cannot come forth, when you seem to seek the Lord, and He is not to be found.

“The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” And then there are the many days of providential trouble. What is a trouble to one is not a trouble to another. There may be many of you tonight and you are in trouble. With one, it is your soul. With another, it is your circumstances. With another, it is your relationship with other people. With yet another, it is something in your business. With another, it is in your family. With yet another, it is something in the church of God, or it may be your health, or what lies before you tomorrow, or in the unknown way. As we read through these beautiful petitions in the psalm, they are revealed almost in the way of a promise that the Lord will do all these things. Well, beloved friends, He will. The Lord *will* hear you in the day of trouble.

“Did ever trouble yet befall,
And He refuse to hear thy call?”

“The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” So the implication here is this, that this one in trouble must be praying too. You follow me in this point, don’t you? Here the cry is, “The Lord hear *thee*” – the person in trouble. But when he says, “*thee*,” the implication is that this one in trouble is praying also. Well, do you pray in trouble? It is a solemn thing if you come into trouble and you do not pray. Perhaps you dare not call it praying, but it is crying to the Lord. It does not just say, “Hear thy prayers, hear thy wrestlings, hear thy petitions” but, “hear *thee*.” Sometimes you can hardly speak a word, but your very case cries out to the Lord, and sometimes it is that sigh that the Lord understands.

“The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble.” One thing is very clear, transparently clear in Scripture. When we read or speak of the Lord hearing prayer, we mean that He answers it. “He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when He shall hear it, He will answer thee.” There used to be that expression in our chapels, “a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God.” But in a sense, it is a repetition, because if the Lord hears, He does answer. “I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them.”

Well then, beloved friends, in all your sorrows and problems tonight, “the Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee.” So there must be some conflict if we need defending, there must be some warfare, there must be some opposition without and within, if we need God Himself to defend us. What a wonderful thing that God is the defence of His people! So often He is compared to a shield. “Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me.” You can shelter behind that shield. You can find a hiding place behind that shield. You can say, “Thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.” It is a beautiful theme, Christ His people’s shield. You see, there is a blow being aimed at this poor, defenceless man, a blow of a spear or a javelin or a sword, and it would slay him, but there is a shield in between. The shield is what comes between the blow and the person at whom the blow is aimed. And you know what it is in its fullest sense:

“He, to save my soul from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.”

That is Christ our shield.

“The name of the God of Jacob defend thee.” By the Lord’s name, we are to understand all that He is and all that He has revealed. God is immortal, invisible. We know as much of Him as He has been pleased to reveal in His gracious name. Here, David prays this for his encouragement, that God is “the God of Jacob.” What does that mean? The God of all grace, the God of poor, unworthy, wretched sinners. Jacob was such a great sinner, a sinner against light and knowledge, but God was “the God of Jacob,” and this is the one that we need to defend us – the God of all grace, the God who shows mercy, the God who forgives. “He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.” In other words, He did everything that Jacob needed, everything that Jacob could not do for himself.

“The name of the God of Jacob defend thee.” Now it is a beautiful title, “the God of Jacob,” the God of all grace. Do not forget also that often we read of it like this: the *mighty* God of Jacob. That is, He is well able to hear thee in the day of trouble, He is well able to defend thee, He is well able to do for you all that you desire. “The name of the God” – the mighty God – “of Jacob defend thee.” You see, Jacob knew what it was to have his prayers heard and answered. Jacob knew much trouble, but he knew what it was to cast himself on his God in the day of trouble, and the Lord heard him and answered him and delivered him.

I think especially of that occasion when he was left alone and Esau was coming to meet him, vowing his death, with four hundred armed men, and Jacob was sore afraid. Didn’t he pray! He cast himself on his God, and he proved this, that the God of Jacob does hear in the day of trouble, that the God of Jacob does defend. When Esau met him, he fell on his neck and kissed him. Have you ever had a trouble like that? You thought it was going to be your death, but when it came, it fell on your neck and kissed you? You know what old Jacob meant when he said, “I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God” – reconciliation.

“The name of the God of Jacob defend thee.” The margin puts it something like this: “The name of the God of Jacob set thee on an high place.” That means to defend you in this sense: to give you a place of sure defence, to put you upon the Rock of ages, to put you within the cleft of the rock, giving you a sure hiding place in Christ. Don’t some of you find an echo in your very soul? You say, “This is the kind of defence that I long for, to have my feet set upon the Rock of ages and to find a hiding place secure upon the Rock, in all my fear.” The point is, it does not matter how weak you are if you are inside the Rock, for the Rock is not weak. It does not matter how much you shake, because the Rock does not shake. Satan must overthrow the Rock before he can overthrow you.

“The name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary.” How many of you tonight are in this place in your life, that it is help that you need? Is there anyone here who today has had to say, “Lord, help me”? Are there some of you who almost say it in your sleep? Or perhaps you wake up saying it, or you say it when you are semi-conscious: “Lord, help me.” So much of the Word of God consists of sinners needing God’s help and sinners receiving God’s help, and so much of gracious experience consists of this, seeking for help and receiving help.

Now, “send thee help from the sanctuary.” I just want to make four points concerning the sanctuary. First of all, “send help from the sanctuary.” That is, from heaven itself. Heaven is the eternal sanctuary. It is almighty help, it is divine help, it is help from heaven that David needs. “Send thee help from the sanctuary” – not some little, helping hand from some fellow sinner. The work exceeds all nature’s aid. “Send thee help from the sanctuary.” Now this is the kind of help that the Lord delights to send, help that is so suitable, help that is so timely, help that comes from heaven, help that is divine, help that is almighty. Is this what you need tonight, in your trouble, your need?

Then secondly, “send thee help from the sanctuary” – from the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. At this time, the temple was not yet built. The sanctuary really consisted of the tabernacle, the ark of God dwelling in tents. That was the sanctuary to David, to Israel, it was the place where God’s glory dwelt. But it was the place where the blood was sprinkled. It was the place where there was the mercy seat, and it was the place where there was the promise, “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune

with thee from above the mercy seat.” This is the kind of help you need, from the sanctuary, from that mercy seat sprinkled with blood. You want Christ to be your propitiation. It is mercy through blood you seek. This is what the publican wanted, all these blessings, these ten thousand blessings for unworthy, guilty souls, that freely flow from the blood-sprinkled mercy seat.

“Send thee help from the sanctuary.” And then thirdly it is the house of God, the place where God was worshipped. In one sense, it answers to our solemn assemblies in the house of God. One of the purposes the Lord has appointed the meeting of His people and the preaching of the gospel is that they might find help even in the sanctuary. Tell me, are there not some of you who have come at times in your downcast, helpless condition, and you have received help from the sanctuary? You cannot deny it. You perhaps have not had the full deliverance, but you cannot deny this, that you have received help from the sanctuary. Now the Lord has promised it. You have the privilege of asking for it.

“Send thee help from the sanctuary.” And then fourthly, Christ, Christ His people’s Sanctuary. He says, “Although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little Sanctuary in the countries where they shall come.”

“In Thee I every glory view,
Of safety, strength, and beauty too;
Beloved Saviour, ever be
A Sanctuary unto me.”

Send me help from heaven. Send me help from the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. Send me help from the solemn assemblies of Thy people. But O, above all, send me help from Christ, the dear Saviour Himself, Him upon whom all the help of His people is laid.

“Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion.” That is another thing all God’s people need – strength, divine strength, and “thy God hath commanded thy strength.” If your religion is real, you will feel so weak and helpless. Sometimes it will be bodily, and often it will be spiritually, no power to do anything to save yourself, to keep yourself, no power to believe. You want that strength to be made

perfect in weakness. “The Lord ... strengthen thee out of Zion.” Well, He does. He says, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.” And you will prove this, that His grace is all-sufficient, and His strength is made perfect in weakness.

“And strengthen thee out of Zion.” The margin says, “And support thee.” Is there anyone here who feels this: you feel a need of that divine support? You want a strong arm to lean on. You want someone to hold you up. “And strengthen thee” – support thee – “out of Zion.”

I had thought to conclude the text with the two verses this evening, but in reading through the psalm, verses three and four seemed to be attractive: “Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice.” And he puts a “Selah” here. We do need to be careful. If God puts this solemn pause in, invariably there is something of real importance that has gone before. If God says, Stop, if God says, Pause, there is something that must not be looked over.

“Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice.” There is the offering, the sacrifice of a broken heart. There is the offering, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. But I believe especially it is this. Here, Israel looks at David, David, though such a mighty king, conscious of his awful unworthiness and guilt, and he goes there with the offering. He goes with the burnt sacrifice, the lamb slain, the blood shed, and David’s desire is this: that the Lord will have respect to *this* offering, that He will remember it, and that the Lord will accept it – not like Cain’s offering that was rejected. David’s hope, his belief, is entirely in the sacrifice, and Israel looks on him, sees his deep concern, in love prays for him, that that burnt offering, that sacrifice will avail for him.

“Selah.” This is it. In our day of trouble, when we seek to pray, when we are concerned about our souls, especially under the awful burden of sin and guilt, we have one plea, and one plea alone, and that is Christ in His sin-atonement sacrifice. If the Lord remembers this, if the Lord accepts this, then we are saved. But if not, then we must perish. “Selah.”

“Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice.” Those of you who of necessity have to plead the preciousness of the blood

of Jesus, those of you who of necessity can come with this your only plea, Christ Himself.

“To Christ for help I fly,
The Friend of sinners lost,
A Refuge sweet, and sure, and nigh,
And there is all my trust.”

“Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice.” Well, He will. This is what we pray for one another. This is what we desire for you as you go with Christ your plea, like the priest who took the burnt offering with him. He was under such a sense of his guilt, and there he saw that lamb slain, saw that lamb bleeding, dying, and he laid his hand on its head and confessed his sin. “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” He rested all the weight of his immortal soul on the sacrifice. He laid all his sins on the head of the sacrifice. It was his only hope, his only plea. There he laid his hand, and there he rested all his hope and all his sin.

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

There is no other way to heaven but this: “Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah.” O do you know what it is to go to a holy God as a sinner with no plea but Christ, with nothing between your soul and hell but Christ and His precious blood?

“Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice.” Now this is the way that leads to heaven. Oliver Cromwell in one of his beautiful letters writes that “under a daily sense of my sins and infirmities, I present to God the Father a perfect Christ.” Now is that your plea for your forgiveness, for your salvation, for your acceptance – a perfect Christ? “Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah.”

“Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.” “O,” you say, “this is what I long for, that the Lord will grant my soul’s desires, that He will not cut me off, that He will not cast me away. If only the Lord would do this for me.” Then, “Delight thyself also

in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” And what is the desire of your heart? Is there anyone here tonight and it is this: to know my sins forgiven, to know peace with God, to know that I am right, to know that Christ is mine? Is there anyone here who says, “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death”? O, the Lord “grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.” These are not the desires of the flesh; these are the desires, the longings that flow from a new-born heart, from a renewed heart. O these longings! Your heart almost breaks at times with the longings it has after Christ and His salvation, those longings to be right. “O that I knew where I might find Him!”

“Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.” He will fulfil the desire of the righteous, that is, those who have no righteousness of their own, but trust in the righteousness of another, even Jesus. The Lord will fulfil the desires of the righteous. “For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.”

“Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,
'Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you still seek.”

“Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.” O what are these desires of your heart, these prayers, these sighs, these longings after Christ? You remember our hymnwriter says,

“What ails those eyes bedewed with tears?
Those labouring sighs that heave thy breast?
Those oft-repeated, broken prayers?
Dost thou not long for Jesus’ rest?
And can the Lord pass heedless by,
And see a mourning sinner die?”

“Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.” I want to make two concluding observations. The first is this: this that the church prays for David and what we would lovingly pray for one another, if your religion is real, you will pray it for yourself. It will be, “The Lord hear *me* in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend *me*; send *me* help from the sanctuary, and strengthen *me* out of

Zion.” Tell me, can you, dare you, must you, pray the language of this prayer personally, for yourself?

The second observation is this: the word is put before us as a kind of prayer, as the desire of the church for the king and then for one another. But in the Word of God and as it stands in the analogy of the Word of God – that is, comparing scripture with scripture – I believe it has the force of a gracious promise, that God *will* do all these things that are sought for here, that the Lord *will* do all these things that are here requested. “The Lord fulfil all thy petitions.” The Lord must deny Himself before all this can fall to the ground. There are sure answers here. It is in the nature of a promise. It is something the Lord will do, the Lord must do. You say, then, “May He in love and mercy do it for me.”

“The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel.”