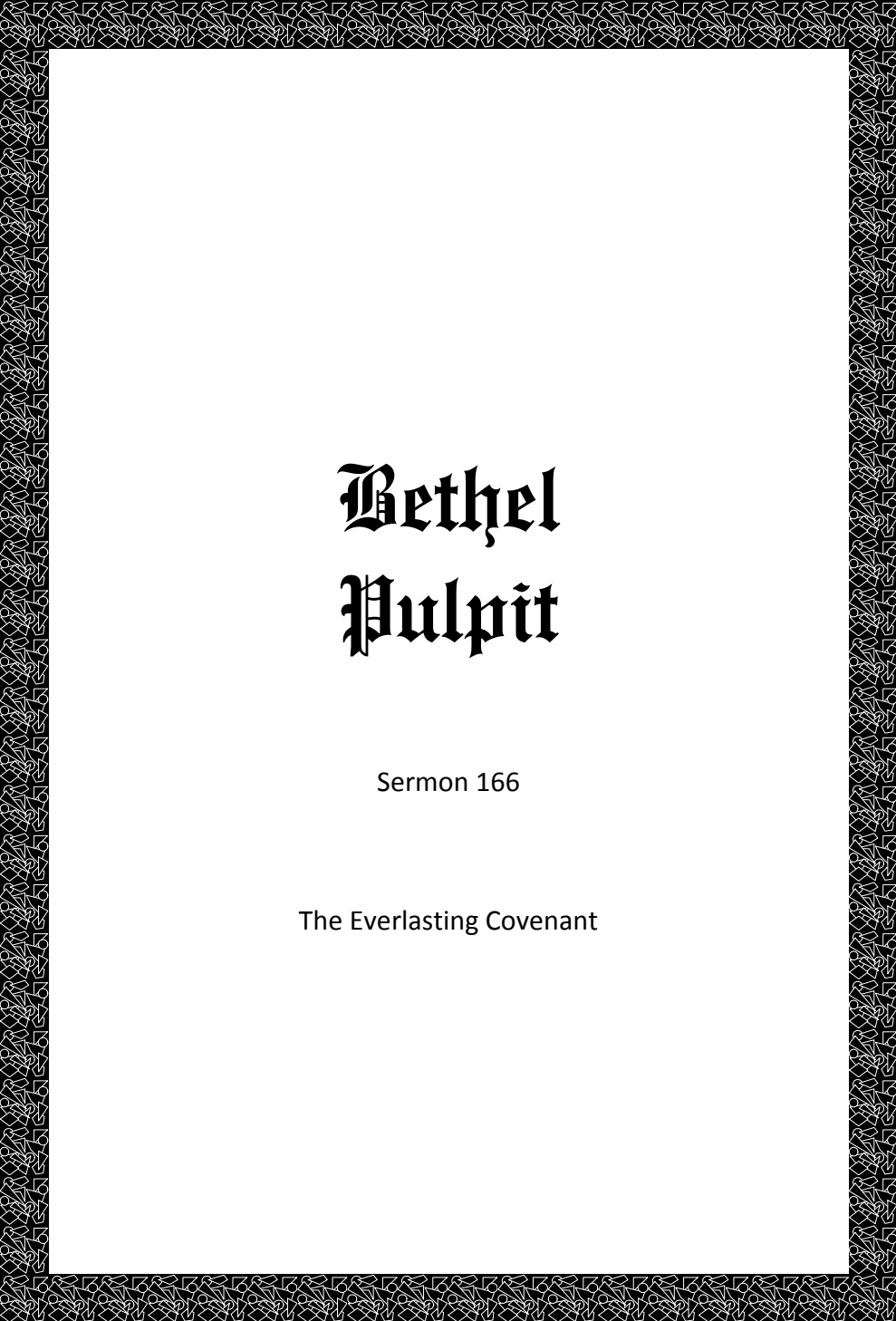




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 166

The Everlasting Covenant

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 18th April, 1999**

Text: *“Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow” (2 Samuel 23. 5).*

This was the text at my baptizing service. If I remember aright, on the thirtieth anniversary of my baptism, I tried to speak from this beautiful word here. In my early days as a believer, the Lord led me very clearly and very sweetly into this verse, the whole truth of covenant salvation. And really, He established me here, and it has been a help all through my Christian pilgrimage, these divine certainties that are so clearly revealed here, this everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure. I think it was something like this: “Although my house be not so with God.” I was thinking, “Well, I do not seem to be progressing very well as a Christian, if I am one at all. There does not seem to be much growth in grace. There does not seem to be much blessing.” There seemed to be that sense of everything wrong, unworthiness. And then there were a few problems and a few perplexities and difficulties. “Although my house be not so with God.” And then I thought of everything that lay before me: how long I might be seeking to live the Christian life, and I do not know what is going to be in my life, what is not going to be in my life. “My house be not so with God.” It was a kind of gloom resting on my spirit. And then the Lord led me into this *yet*. Whatever there will be, whatever there has been, whatever there may be, “*Yet* He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” And then for a long time, probably some weeks, it was as if the Lord took me and He led me into the covenant of grace and all the blessings of the covenant. He showed me my personal interest in it. How often that rung in my heart: “On my unworthy, favoured head, its blessings all unite”! Really, it was walking out that scripture: “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant.”

Now just lingering here for a moment. I was only young at the time, and yet the Lord established me in this truth; He burnt it in my heart. And before that, He established me in the truth of the atonement; He burnt that in my heart. And the sacred humanity of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; He burnt that in my heart. When years later all this controversy came concerning the Person of the Lord Jesus, the Man Christ Jesus and His sacred humanity, it did not take me by surprise. I could say, "I know whom I have believed," because the Holy Ghost revealed it to me when I was young.

But it is my desire that the Lord might take many of you by the hand and sweetly lead you into the sacred truths of the gospel. I believe many of you here have been taught your sin and ruin and led to Christ as your only hope, but what a wonderful thing if the Holy Spirit should take you by the hand and lead you into some portion of divine truth or some doctrine! You will know what Luther meant when he said, "Doctrine is heaven." I hope you young people especially might be led into these things. People might say, The doctrine of the covenant, covenant theology, surely that is for theologians. It was not just theology for me. It was such a help, such an establishing.

And then there was something, and this really, perhaps more than anything else, has steadied me and settled me over many years, and it was this. It is a truth which we believe, but to learn it by experience is a wonderful thing. And you young people who fear God, I do hope the Lord will establish you clearly in this. After a few weeks or months, day by day enjoying the blessings of the covenant of grace, I woke up one morning and everything had gone. I said, "Lord, what has happened? Where am I?" It was almost like being in darkness. I had known all these blessings all these weeks and woke up one day and there was nothing. It was all gone. Well, I did not know what to do. Do you know what the Lord said? It was this. It has established me for life. The Lord so sweetly spoke this into my heart: "Though with no sweet enjoyments blessed, this covenant stands the same." And really that established me for the whole of my life, that whatever I felt or did not feel, whether I was dark or whether I was light, whether I was in joy or sorrow, whether things were going well or going badly, that covenant of grace stood eternally the same. Nothing could make any alteration to it. Nothing could ever change its blessings. Nothing could ever change my interest in it. I think that has established

me over the years. If the Lord has really blessed me, I have not been lifted up too much. I have thought, “I am not any more in the covenant of grace than I was before.” And if I have got down, it has not unduly depressed me. I have thought, “The covenant of grace is eternally the same.” I hope you young people who fear God might be established in this.

Samuel Rutherford in one of his beautiful letters says when the cabin boy in the ship goes to sea for the first time, when the ship begins to move, he thinks the land is moving. So it is with the young believer. When things begin to happen, begin to change, you think the Lord has changed. “No,” he said, “It is only your little boat. The Lord is still the same.” Really, it is bound up with that foundation truth, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

“Although my house be not so with God” – whatever there is, whatever there is not, whatever I feel, whatever I do not feel – “yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Now that will never, never make a believer careless – that because divine, eternal realities are the same, his standing in Christ is the same, it does not matter whether he feels the Lord’s presence or does not, he can just go on carelessly. So we notice those beautiful words, solemn words too, we read this morning in the great covenant psalm, the eighty-ninth psalm; the Lord will deal with His people if they begin to become careless and take things for granted. He says, “Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” They are not going to be allowed to settle down in carnal confidence. Now this is it: “Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips.” It is we that change, not the Lord. “Our love through many changes goes, His love no variation knows.”

What took hold of me those years ago was the absolute certainty of divine things, the absolute certainty of divine realities, that they can never alter, they can never change. The opposite in myself: weak, helpless, unworthy, nothing but sin, nothing but change; but these eternal, everlasting realities secured in Christ, there and there for ever, no change, no variation, no shadow of turning. I remember at that time I used to read some of Oliver Cromwell’s speeches and letters. Actually, this year England is celebrating the four-hundredth anniversary of Oliver

Cromwell's death. He made his mistakes, but he was a godly man. The great point with him was the covenant of grace. He would make a speech before Parliament and remind them of the covenant of grace. When he was dying, again and again he spoke of the covenant. He said, "It is completely outside me. It was made in Christ before the world ever had any being. It must stand secure and stand eternally, and there is my safety."

"Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure." Now we are told that these were the last words of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. David has come to the end of his life. He was a great man, a godly man, but he had made a lot of mistakes, and he had had a lot of sorrows. As he thinks over his past life, and looks back, looks around, there is something that fills his heart with sadness, with distress, almost with despair. It is this: my house is not so with God; not so as I would have it to be; not so as it should be; not so as one day I hoped it would be. My house is not so with God. So David's heart is filled with sadness. He looks around in his kingdom. There were so many things he wished were different. He looks around and he looks back in his family. "My house be not so with God." So many things to distress him. He could never forget them. He is going to take them right down to the grave with him: the awful happenings with Amnon; the rape of Tamar; the death of his beloved son, Absalom. There were so many things in his family.

"My house be not so with God." But especially, more than anything else, he looked back over his life and he saw so much to fill him with shame, so much sin and so much sadness, so many faults, so much guilt. And if you read the life of David, there were a lot of mistakes, and the Lord recorded them, and that is a mercy, an encouragement for you and me. Do not forget that *God* said that David was "a man after His own heart." But there were so many sins, and not only the great sins, but many, many occasions when he did not act wisely. So he looked around on his family, and looked around on his kingdom, considering his life, and saw the sin and the shame and the sorrow.

"Although my house be not so with God." Then he finds a resting place: "Yet" – yet, despite all this – "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation." And

David can die in peace. It is solid ground. It is a good resting place, “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.”

Well then, what is this everlasting covenant? The Word of God, of course, is a Book of many covenants. You think of a covenant made with Abraham, a covenant made with Noah, a covenant made with David – many covenants. Yet strictly speaking, there are two great covenants: the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Let me just say this. When you come to the blessed truth of the covenant of grace, it is not set out just in one chapter verse by verse like some doctrines. It is more like the Trinity. It would be very hard to say, That is where we have the Trinity. We have it here, and there, and somewhere else. And so with the covenant. I think you will find there was a day in England when many pulpits of our land resounded week by week with the truth of the covenant of grace, and not just the Baptist chapels or the Independents, but the Church of England, people like the well-known Dr. Hawker. We think of our beautiful hymns on the covenant of grace. Most of them were by John Kent, and he was not a Strict Baptist. He used to go to the parish church, the Church of England. How England has fallen since those blessed days!

When Adam was created in the Garden of Eden, God made a covenant with him, an agreement. A covenant has certain conditions, certain promises. The condition was that Adam should continue in perfect obedience. He had not to eat of the forbidden tree, the forbidden fruit, and he was promised blessing on condition of his continuing perfect. It was a fair covenant, because Adam was created perfect. The covenant God made with Adam really it was this. He said, Do this, and thou shalt live; do it not, and dying thou shalt surely die. Now that covenant, the covenant of works, was not made just with Adam as a person. It was made with Adam as the head of the whole human race. So it was made with you and it was made with me as we had part in Adam. So all of us are born under this covenant of works. Now you all know sadly, solemnly, what happened. Adam fell. “Sin entered into the world, and death by sin,” and the covenant of works was broken. There were those flaming cherubim to keep fallen man away from the tree of life. Now all of us are born under this broken covenant of works. It was more clearly set forth on Mount Sinai in the commandments. Do this and thou shalt live; do it not and dying thou shalt surely die. Every one of us was born under this covenant of works. It is a broken covenant, and yet mankind down the ages has

tried to find salvation under the covenant of works, by something they can do. There is no hope, no salvation, no heaven under it. All it can do is condemn.

Now there is another covenant, this “everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.”

“’Twas made with Jesus, for His bride,
Before the sinner fell;
’Twas signed, and sealed, and ratified;
In all things ordered well.”

This covenant of grace stood before the covenant of works, though it was not revealed till after. God made the covenant of grace in eternity past with His beloved Son, with the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And just as He made the covenant with Adam, and the whole human race in Adam, so He made that other covenant with His dear Son, the Lord Jesus, and with all His chosen, every one of them, in Christ. They all had an interest there. They all had a standing there. Now just as there were conditions in the covenant made with Adam, so there were conditions in the covenant made with Christ. Now the condition of the covenant of grace was that the Lord Jesus as Surety of the covenant – He became Surety, He became responsible – in mercy, in love, should fulfil everything that His Father required. He was called to obey just as Adam was called to obey. What had the Lord Jesus to obey? He had to come to earth and fulfil the covenant which man had broken, obey it completely, and then pay the penalty in His atoning death on the cross. This covenant cannot be broken because it does not depend on the sinner; it depends on Christ. So when the Lord Jesus came, we read of Him coming as the Messenger of the covenant, the Surety of the covenant, coming with a covenant engagement. He fulfilled all that His Father required, and when He cried, “It is finished,” there were many things that were finished, but one was this: He satisfied every term, every condition of the covenant of grace, “ordered in all things, and sure.” “’Twas signed, and sealed, and ratified; in all things ordered well.”

“An everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” David said, He has made it with me. He made it with Christ as my covenant Head, but He made it with me, such a sinner as me, in Christ. May some of you sweetly feel before today is finished, that although your house is not

so with God, you are able to say, “Yet He hath made with me” – that is in Christ – “He hath made with me” – unworthy, sinful, guilty, wretched me; even me, despite all my sin and all my shame; He hath made even with me, “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation.” So he saw Christ in it. He saw his greater Son in it.

O this wonderful covenant, “ordered in all things, and sure,” which is all our salvation and all our desire! The point is the certainty of it, the security of it. There is nothing unsure, nothing uncertain. It was all everlastingly secure before time had any being, and the people of God were there from everlasting, bound in the bundle of life with the Lord their God. The people of God were as safe before time had any being as they will be when at last they are landed safe in heaven. May you sweetly feel you are bound up in it. “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” In the covenant of grace as made in Christ, everything was promised: forgiveness, pardon, salvation, heaven, all the promises, the work the Lord Jesus was to perform, every blessing the people of God could ever need, every blessing God could ever give. It was all secure. Like the old Scottish woman said, “You will get the last sixpence if there is one for you in the covenant.”

“Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” So really this covenant stands as a sure and sacred and eternal promise to all God’s people in all ages despite all their sins. That is its security. It is “ordered in all things, and sure.” There is nothing that will ever take place that will take God by surprise. It may take you by surprise; it may shake you. It does not take the Lord by surprise. He knew it when He made the covenant with His dear Son, and He made full provision for it.

“Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Now there is an amazing thing concerning this covenant of grace and all the blessings in it and this eternal settlement of love and mercy upon the unworthy people of God in all ages, and that is that God has confirmed it with an oath. Now the apostle, writing to the Hebrews, puts it like this. There is no need for Almighty God to swear an oath. He is divine Truth. He speaks the truth and cannot lie. But if there are two men having an argument, and one says he is prepared to swear an oath on it, that ends the quarrel. Now what about Almighty God? It is not two

men having an argument. But to make it abundantly clear and sure to His poor, doubting, fearing, tried, tempted people, the Lord has condescended to come right down to what would happen between man and man to settle an argument. So you have it in that well-known chapter, Hebrews 6. A few of you here this morning love these eternal, divine certainties. “When God made promise by Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee.” Now this is it: “For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.” You see the point. To settle an argument a man will swear by a greater, swear by God. “Wherein God” – O this is the matchless condescension of the eternal God to poor, sinful creatures! “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel” – that is His covenant” – “the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things” – that is God’s everlasting covenant first; that is God’s solemn oath second – “that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie” – now this is it – “we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” That is the Lord Jesus. He is sometimes spoken of as the Surety of the covenant, sometimes spoken of as the Messenger of the covenant, sometimes spoken of as the Mediator of the covenant. And then follow those well-known words concerning Christ, our covenant Surety, Mediator: “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.” That is the hope of every sinner who will ever reach heaven. It is in Christ as our covenant Head and Mediator and Surety. “An everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” So that is the first amazing thing. This covenant, it stands eternally; there is every blessing in this covenant. So the first wonderful thing is, it is confirmed by the solemn oath of Almighty God.

And the second amazing thing: that it is sealed by the blood of Christ. That is where you and I enter into the covenant. That is where we see its blessings. Because all these blessings that were treasured up in the covenant of grace from everlasting, they all flow to sinners through the blood of Christ, and He sealed the covenant with His blood. I think you will find if you read through the Old Testament, all these covenants were sealed by sacrifice. You think of these covenants with Abraham. They

were sealed, solemnly ratified, with blood being shed. What of the covenant of grace made from all eternity, “ordered in all things, and sure”? The Old Testament saints must have wondered, Where is the sealing, the ratifying, of that covenant? Surely the blood of lambs and bulls and goats was not sufficient to ratify that covenant. And it remained a mystery to the Old Testament church. It remained hidden from them. Until, “The same night in which He was betrayed ... He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood.” And then He went out to Gethsemane and Calvary to shed that precious blood that He might seal the covenant of grace, that He might ratify it for ever, that every blessing treasured up from all eternity in the covenant might freely flow to sinners through the blood of Christ. So that last hymn in our hymnbook:

“What sacred Fountain yonder springs
Up from the throne of God,
And all new covenant blessings brings?
'Tis Jesus' precious blood.”

So when David said, “This is all my salvation, and all my desire,” he was not just thinking of an everlasting agreement. He was thinking of Christ in the covenant, His precious blood in the covenant. The blood of Christ is spoken of as *covenant blood*. We have covenant love and we have covenant mercy; we have covenant faithfulness. But we have covenant blood. And so we read in the closing chapter to the Hebrews of how the great Shepherd of the sheep was brought again from the dead “through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” You see, the blood of Christ is the blood of the everlasting covenant, that covenant “ordered in all things, and sure.” So that beautiful word we sing concerning the church coming up from the wilderness leaning on her Beloved in all her helplessness:

“She views the covenant sure;
Her hopes all centre there;
And on His bosom leans secure,
Whose temples bled for her.”

“Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow.”

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