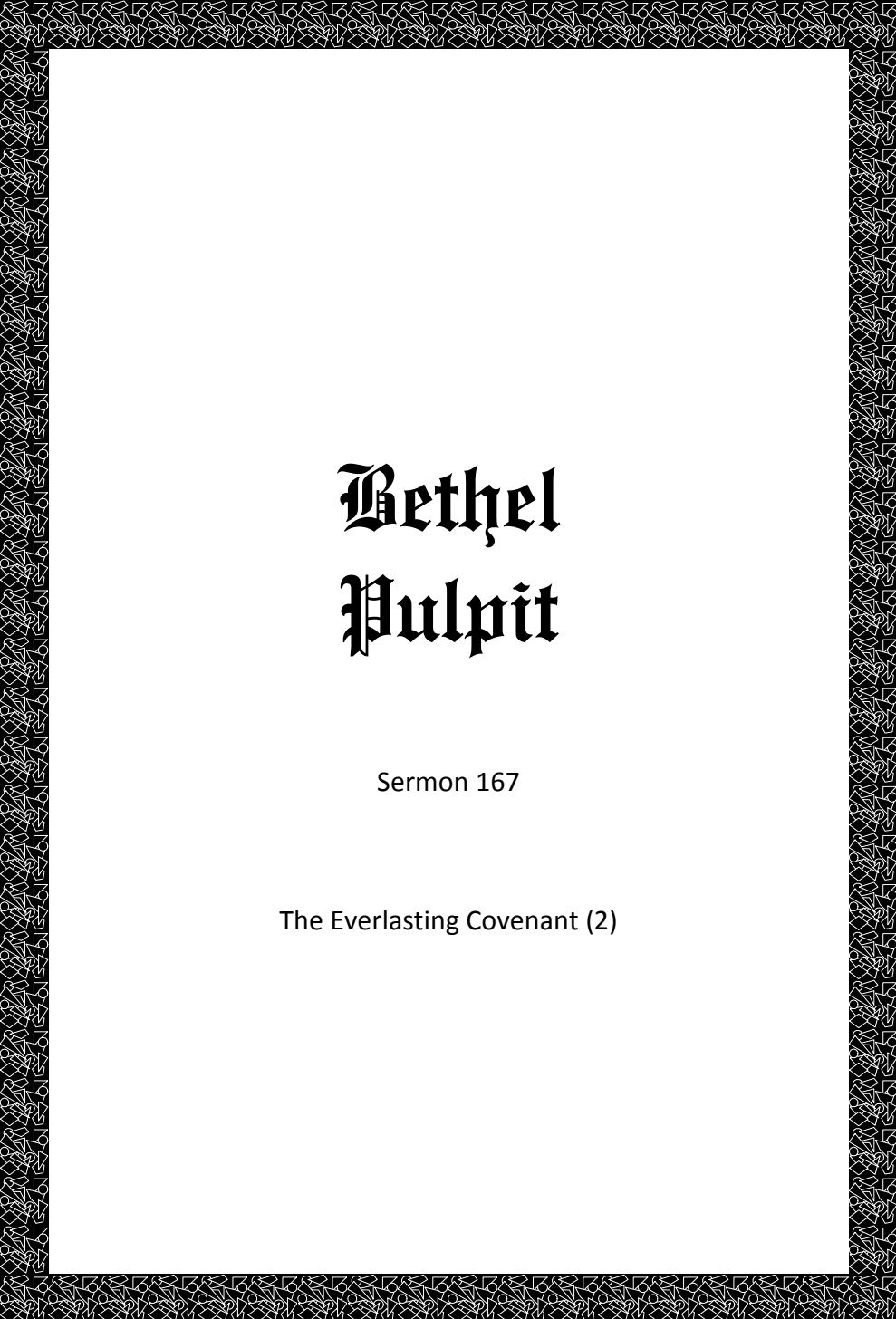




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 167

The Everlasting Covenant (2)

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

I like to speak of these divine realities, these divine certainties. In the salvation of the people of God, there is nothing uncertain. And not only in their salvation in reaching heaven at last, but concerning every detail of their lives here on earth, everything is ordered and sure. It is ordered that every one of them shall be called by grace, born of the Spirit. It is ordered that each one shall be brought to Jesus. God in eternity in the covenant of grace saw all the needs of all His people. Now the supply of all those needs is ordered. Their trials are ordered, but their deliverances are also. There will not be one more trial than there will be a deliverance. Their sorrows are ordered, but so are their joys. The supply of every need, that is ordered. What strength they need day by day, that is ordered. All the help they shall ever require, that is ordered. So you might go on. The wisdom they need, that is ordered. Everything is ordered concerning the believer's life. O that wonderful fulness of grace there treasured up eternally! Almighty God saw all the grace that all His people would ever need, all the grace that you here tonight need, and all the grace you need tomorrow and next week and in the unknown way and when you come to die, and it is "ordered in all things, and sure." That is the blessedness of it. There is no uncertainty. It is sure.

In a sense, the everlasting covenant as made between the Father and His dear Son, the Lord Jesus, and made in Christ with all His people, that is the eternal plan and the eternal purpose. But when David says, "This is all my salvation," he is not just thinking of the plan and the purpose. He is thinking of Christ in the covenant, Christ with whom the covenant is made. He is thinking of Christ as His people's covenant Head. He is thinking of Christ as the Mediator of the covenant. That is the One set up in the covenant as Mediator. That is also the One through whom every covenant blessing flows. He is thinking of Christ as the Surety of the covenant, on

whom it all depends. He is looking to Christ as fulfilling the covenant, all the terms of it. “This is all my salvation.” Not just the eternal plan of God; not just the grace in that eternal plan, the covenant; but the wonderful outworking of it in the Person of Jesus, the Mediator, the Surety of the covenant. Now, “This is all my salvation.” And this covenant is “ordered in all things and sure.” There is a sure foundation laid in that covenant in the eternal purposes of God, and in the outworking of the covenant that sure foundation was laid at Calvary. This is the eternal rock on which the church is built.

O these divine certainties, this “everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure”! Everything – all the concerns of all God’s people, all their joys, their sorrows, when they are young, when they are old, everything – it is all bound up and all secure in Christ. “An everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” And you see, beloved friends, it is not just all the concerns and the fears and the trials and the deliverances, the help, all these things bound up in God’s eternal plan and loving purpose, but the people of God themselves, personally, individually, with all their sorrows, their sins, their weakness, their fear, they are all bound up secure in this covenant from everlasting to everlasting.

‘I’ve bound thee up secure,
’Midst all the rage of hell;
The curse thou never shalt endure,
For I’m unchangeable.”

“Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” “An everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” All the concerns of all God’s people in all ages bound up in it, secure, and all God’s people themselves, personally, bound up secure in that covenant. There is the everlasting safety of the people of God. That is why they can never perish. That is why not one of them can ever be lost.

I read to you this evening in Acts 11 those few verses about the vision that Peter had on the housetop at Joppa. Peter felt he could only preach to Jews and he could not preach to Gentiles. The Lord gave him this wonderful vision in which He showed him that in the true church of God there are both Jews and Gentiles. They are alike unclean but God has cleansed them. It was revealed to Peter like this. There was a great sheet knit at the four corners. I take that to represent the covenant of grace, this

“everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Peter said he saw it come down from heaven. It had a divine origin. God began it. It did not start with man. God planned it; God purposed it; God will accomplish it. This great sheet came down from heaven and Peter saw that fastened up inside it were all manner of creatures. Some were flying fowl, some were wild beasts, and some were creeping things. All of them were unclean, yet all of them were cleansed in the blood of Christ. “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” I take this to be a beautiful representation of the church of God, Jews and Gentiles, all bound up secure in that “everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Peter makes a beautiful comment. He says, “It came *even to me*.” And that is what some of you long for tonight, for covenant blessings, covenant favours, to come down from heaven, to come right where you are, right into your heart. “It came even to me.” None of these creatures were very attractive – wild beasts, creeping things, flying fowl. Perhaps you can read your title there. But they were all cleansed in the blood of Christ. There is no merit, no worthiness here.

But Peter saw two things that were very precious. One is that that great sheet knit at the four corners was fastened secure, and really what binds up that covenant of grace and all the Lord’s people in it is the everlasting love of God to sinners made known in Jesus, the cords of God’s everlasting love. O to see that great sheet! It needs to be a great sheet because they are all great sinners who are in it. But it is a great covenant and a great God and a great Saviour and great love and great mercy and they are all bound up secure and it is those cords of eternal love that can never, never be broken.

“Its bonds shall never break,
Though earth’s old columns bow;
The strong, the tempted, and the weak,
Are one in Jesus now.”

It is a wonderful thing if you and I have a sweet hope of being bound up secure, in Jesus, in the covenant of grace.

The second wonderful thing is this. Peter said, “And the vessel was received up again into heaven.” And there was not one single creature left behind, not the wildest of those wild beasts left out of it, not one of those creeping things escaped. There was not a single one. “The vessel was

received up again into heaven,” and every single creature was safe and secure and eternally blessed in that great sheet, the covenant of grace, “ordered in all things, and sure.” O to be blessed with an interest in that everlasting covenant! It is the sureness of it. It is the certainty of it. It is this, that it will stand. And it is right outside the sinner. Your fears cannot shake it. It is “ordered in all things, and sure.” “This is all my salvation.” If it was not of grace, if it was not in Christ, if it was not secure, then some of us must long since have perished and made shipwreck of faith. But, “ordered in all things, and sure.” All the promises, “ordered in all things, and sure.” The perseverance of the people of God, “ordered in all things, and sure.” The answer to their prayers, “ordered in all things, and sure.” Their safety, “ordered in all things, and sure.”

“Although my house be not so with God.” Now here was David. He had so many things as he looked back, looked around, looked within. His house was not as it should be, not as he would have it. *Yet, yet*. “Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant” – in Christ – “ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation.” And David realised that all his sin and all his sorrow and all his disappointment could never affect his standing in Jesus. It could never affect his union with Jesus.

There are a few of these in Scripture : *although ... yet*. (I do not really intend to dwell on them tonight.) As if on one side there are these dark, gloomy, solemn things. *Yet*. There are many of them in Scripture. They are very beautiful really. I will just mention one of them to you this evening, and that is Habakkuk. Everything going wrong in Israel. Everything going wrong with the people of God. It was a farming community and everything was failing: the harvest of the fields, the harvest of the orchards, and when they went among the flocks, that was worse. “*Although* the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: *yet* I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” Now there are quite a few in Scripture. I just give that one as an example. *Although*, and then this wonderful *yet*. You can never get beyond it, never sink beneath it, despite all your sorrows and sins and fears. “Yet He hath made with me” – such a sinner as me, that is in Christ, my covenant Head – “He hath made with me an everlasting covenant,

ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation.” Now David proved it.

I was thinking of a few of the Old Testament saints. Look at old Jacob. His house was not so with God. Everything seemed to be going wrong. He had lost his beloved Joseph, and then there was the famine. He thought he was going to lose one of his sons after another. He said, “All these things are against me.” “My house be not so with God.” He said, “Ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.” But there was “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure,” and Jacob lived to prove that all things worked together for his real good, that the end of the thing was better than the beginning. When he came to die, he had nothing to do but die. He had not a cloud in his sky. O that “everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure,” and Jacob proved it.

The first sweet revelation of the everlasting covenant to Jacob was at Bethel when the Lord made that precious promise to him. And do not forget, all the promises are covenant promises. They are all “ordered in all things, and sure.” But this was it with Jacob: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.” *All places*. Jacob did not know some of those strange places he would come into, did he? And when the Lord first raised you up to a sweet hope in His covenant, you did not know some of these strange places you would come into. “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.” And Jacob lived to prove that although his house was not so with God, yet He had made with him “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.”

And then I just mention Joseph. His house was not so with God, was it? When he was so ill-treated by his brethren; when he had to leave home; when he was sold as a slave; when he was tempted and accused by Pharaoh’s wife; when he was thrown into prison. Now his house was not so with God. Yet there was a “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Joseph was to be brought safely through. Joseph was to be blessed. Joseph was to be exalted. “Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him.” But O that “everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure”! And Joseph lived to prove that the Lord had not

left him nor forsaken him. And Joseph lived to prove that the end of the thing was better than the beginning.

“Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” There is a very beautiful token of this, of course, in the rainbow. You remember that after the flood, the Lord gave a token to Noah, and that was that the bow would be in the cloud. He said it would be a token of the covenant that he made, even an everlasting covenant. Let us be clear, literally and naturally with Noah it was a covenant that the world would never again be drowned with water. But there is more to it than just natural things there, isn’t there? Joseph Hart comes to the root of it. He says, “But something greater lies there yet.” He ends up that beautiful hymn, “Those lively colours shine to show that heaven is surely mine.” In the Revelation we read that the rainbow surrounds the throne of God in heaven. It is completely encircled by covenant love and mercy. “It shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth” – that is when your house is not so with God, when that cloud comes over the earth, that cloud in your circumstances, that cloud in your soul; your house is not so with God. “It shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud ... and I will look upon it.” You will look upon it, but the Lord says, “I will look upon it,” and I will remember my covenant. Never forget that the Lord in all His dealings with His people in all ages works according to that one rule. We are told, “He will ever be mindful of His covenant.” You may forget it; I may forget it. We do often when the cloud is over the earth. “Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” Do not forget when you look at the rainbow, the Lord is looking at it. “He will ever be mindful of His covenant.” He will always remember it. If He will ever be mindful of His covenant, He will ever be mindful of His dear people in the covenant. “Yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.” “The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless us.” “Although my house be not so with God,” it can never interfere with God’s purpose. It can never cancel out His love and mercy. It can never destroy the safety of one child of God. It can never allow Satan to triumph.

“Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Well, David, Noah, Jacob, Joseph, but what about you here tonight? There are some of

you here (aren't there?) and with a heavy heart you have to say, "My house is not so with God – not as it once was, not as I wish it were. My house is not so with God." With some of you, it may be all the changes that have taken place with you, the disappointments. Perhaps you are no longer in your own home. Perhaps you are in things you never expected. Your house is not so with God, not just as you would have it, not as you wish it would be. With some of you, it is your health. Once you were well, once you were strong, but now you are not feeling very well. You are growing old. There are the problems, the pains, the weakness. Your house is not so with God. Some of you, well, it may be things in your own family, and as you think of your family concerns, there is not a word in Scripture that explains it better than this: my house is not so with God. Now the Lord knows all about it. O but may you sweetly be enabled tonight to look that other way and to see this "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure," to feel that the Lord still loves you, to feel that His mercy abideth for ever, to feel that when He has tried you, you shall come forth as gold, that He knows the way you take. O may you, like David, be enabled to look away from everyone and everything else to this blessed covenant in Christ. May you see your everlasting salvation eternally secured there, and may you feel that this balances it all.

To bring it closer, "Although my house be not so with God." As you look in your heart and see your unworthiness, your vileness, your sin, your guilt – my house not so with God. You look back over your little life, and as you consider what you are and what you have been in your early days and since the Lord raised you up to a hope in His mercy, you feel ashamed of it all, like one big, black blot. "And, had I not Thy blood to plead, each sight would sink me to despair." But this is covenant reality and covenant certainty, that we *have* the blood of Christ to plead. "Although my house be not so with God." My sin, my unworthiness, my guilt. "Although my house be not so with God; yet" – in Christ – "He hath made with me" – even such a sinner as me – "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation."

You know, beloved friends, in a word it is this: "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Of course, one day the mountains *literally* shall depart, and the hills *literally* shall be removed. I am thinking of the Lord's

second coming and the end of time, when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the judgment day and a long eternity are ushered in. “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed.” But then as you take it more figuratively, there are many times in our lives when our house is not so with God, when our mountains depart and when our hills are removed. There are some things in our lives, and we think they will always be there. We think they are sure. We think they are solid. We think they are certain. And then even these mountains depart and these hills remove. You do not know what you might lose. You might lose your husband, your wife, your father, your mother, your children. You might lose your health. You might lose your job. You might lose your reputation. You do not know what you might lose, but you will never lose your God, and God will never lose you. God never can lose you, because you are bound up in covenant.

“Although my house be not so with God.” “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” It is covenant love. It is covenant mercy. It is covenant faithfulness. It is covenant blood. It is covenant salvation. It is all bound up secure. There is nothing uncertain about it. But sometimes with a child of God, the mountains shall depart, the hills be removed – those mountains of your soul’s experience, and those hills, those hill Mizars. You look around, and there seems to be a cloud, there is darkness. You try to think how the Lord blessed you, but it seems to be gone. The Lord will have it so because He will never allow you to make a saviour of your experience. I would speak graciously and carefully. You must have an experience – there is no heaven without an experience of the Lord’s love and dealings – but the Lord will never let you make a saviour of your experience. It must be Christ. “This is all my salvation.” Sometimes as you look back and look around, those mountains, those hills, where are they? It seems everything has gone. “Yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant.” Those mountains may, they shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness, everlasting kindness, covenant kindness in Christ, “My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall

the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” Now you are on solid ground here.

“The ground feels firm and good;
And, lest we should mistake the way,
He lines it out with blood.”

“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.” That is Christ. With David, as well as the everlasting covenant of grace, there was another covenant made with him personally, that one of his sons should always sit on the throne of Israel and at last one of them should come who was the promised Messiah, and David here looks forward to Christ. He looks up to heaven, and also looks forward. He sees the everlasting covenant, but especially he sees Him who should be Israel’s true King, the One promised, the One who would be the Mediator of the covenant. And he said, “This is all my salvation.”

That is a good way to come to the end of our life, and I hope there are many here this evening, perhaps feeling so much wrong without, so much wrong within, your house not so with God, but you can look at Christ and see in Him all you need and all you desire, His mercy, His love, His righteousness, His precious blood, His intercession. And from an honest heart you can say, “This is all my salvation.” I have no other hope, no other trust but Christ. If this foundation be destroyed, what shall I do? But it is “ordered in all things, and sure.” It is to be on the Rock. It is a good foundation.

“This is all my salvation, and all my desire.” Now surely many of you can come in tonight looking at the covenant of grace “ordered in all things, and sure,” and looking at all these wonderful blessings of the covenant, and feeling your need of them, especially seeing Christ in the covenant of grace, and say, “This is all my desire.” If only I might be saved at last with an everlasting salvation. If only I might be forgiven, pardoned through the blood of Christ. If only Christ might be mine. “This is all my salvation, and all my desire.” How many of you this evening, thinking of the Lord Jesus, from an honest heart can say, “The desire of our soul is to Thy name, and to the remembrance of Thee”?

“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.” This is the point we find hard to speak about: “Although He make it not to grow.” You see, when we set out in the Christian life, we had such good hopes, such fair pretensions. We thought we would run the race with zeal and patience. We thought we would know much of the love of Christ. We perhaps thought we would be good Christians. And now we look back and it is this: “Although He make it not to grow.” It seems just a complete failure, nothing but sin, nothing but emptiness, failure, in everything. “Although He make it not to grow.” We have not seen what we wanted to see in the church of God. We have not seen it in our own hearts, in our own lives. So many things we longed to see in ourselves, we have never seen. So many things we wish we did not see, we have seen them. There is just this grief and sorrow and ruin and shame. That is what it means and that is what David felt and that is what we feel: “Although He make it not to grow.” Yet right across it all, we see free mercy, sovereign grace, abounding over sin. It is completely outside the sinner, his faults, his failures. Though they grieve his heart, they can never affect his salvation, never affect the “everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” They can never affect his standing in Christ. O the wonder of these divine realities, these divine certainties, secured in Christ from everlasting to everlasting, bound up in covenant despite all our sin, sorrow, ruin and woe, and heaven secured in it. The wonder of it!

“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.”

(The morning sermon on the same text was published last month.)