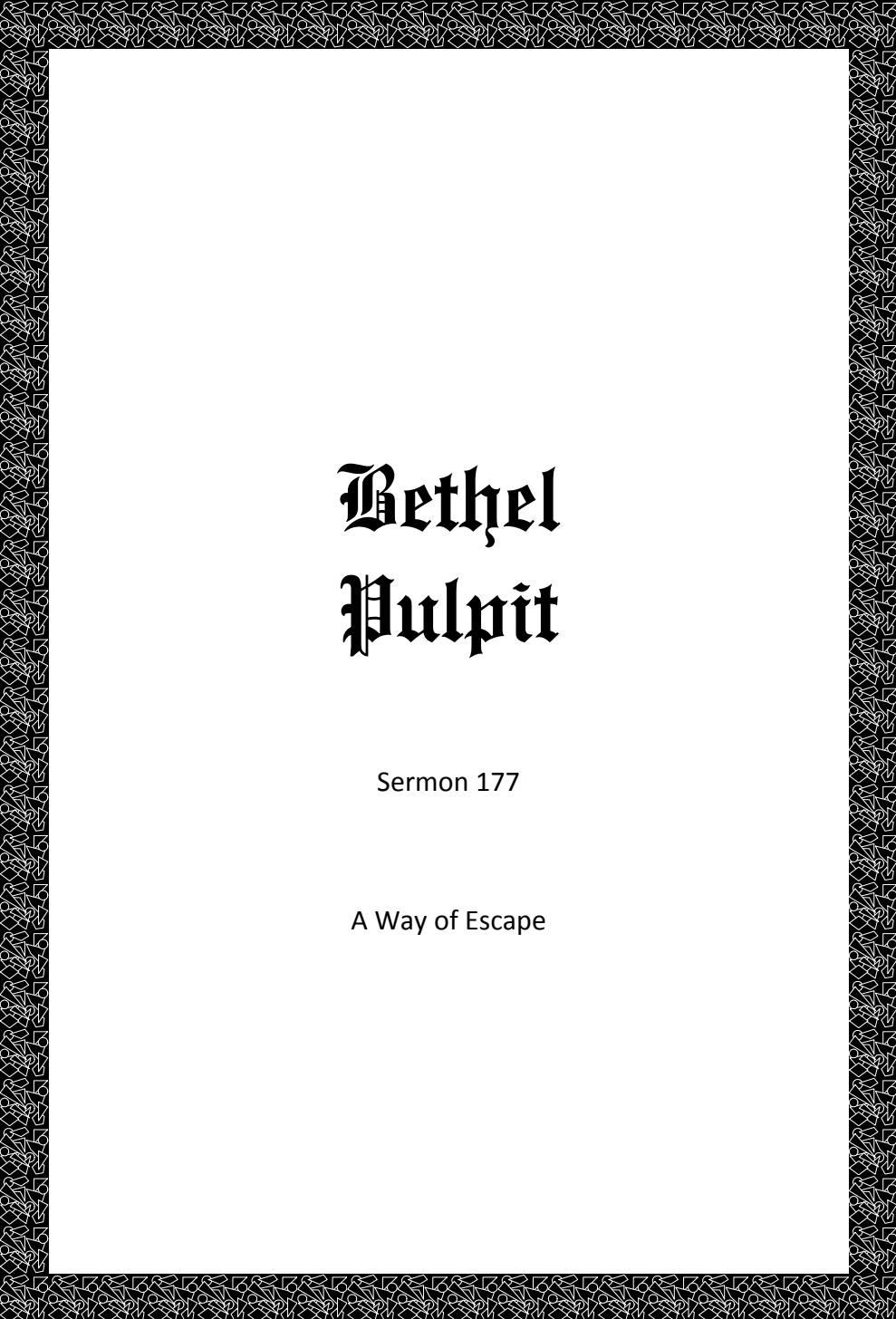




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 177

A Way of Escape

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 3rd October, 1999**

Text: *"But will with the temptation also make a way to escape" (1 Corinthians 10. 13).*

Paul is both encouraging and also warning the church at Corinth on this point of temptation. Of course you can think of this two ways in Scripture. Sometimes temptation means the temptations of Satan, the temptations of the devil. Sometimes it means the afflictions and trials and sorrows through which the people of God have to pass. If your religion is real, you will have both. You will know what it is to be tempted by Satan. You will also know something of these various sorrows and trials. The point here is that God is faithful. In one sense he is bidding them look back and he is telling them that these temptations they have had are just the lot of all mankind, and also the wonderful way God has helped them. But also you can look at it like this: that these temptations they have known so far have been mild. There are greater temptations to come, but that does not matter, because God is still faithful and "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." It is a wonderful truth, the faithfulness of God. "Tell of His wondrous faithfulness."

But beloved friends, the way this word has rested with me this morning is like this: the Lord's most gracious ability to make a way of escape. So often we are brought into things and we cannot see any way out. We cannot see any way of escape. Sometimes they are spiritual things. Sometimes they are providential things. Sometimes we are tempted; we are drawn aside. It may be an idol. It may be some prevailing sin. Or sometimes we are just caught up with lawful things. We cannot find any way out. We cannot find any way of escape. How can we come out of these things? How can we come through them? Spiritual trials, providential things, things in our life, we want to get out of them. We cannot see any way out of them, any way through them. Now we have this very remarkable word here, that God is able to make a way of escape. "The Lord knoweth *how* to deliver the godly." Not just He *knows*: He knows *how*. "The Lord knoweth *how* to deliver the godly."

In the Word of God, we have it put in a remarkable way like this. The psalmist says, “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.” Our soul is compared to a bird. There are many, many ways you can compare our souls to a bird. It can fly aloft, but it is very weak and helpless and defenceless. “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers.” You know who the fowler is. I suppose nowadays we would say a poacher or a hunter. He wants to catch the bird, so he lays a snare. He hides the snare out of sight and puts some tempting bait. The bird cannot see the snare, but it sees the tempting bait, and is caught in the snare and cannot get free. The more it struggles, the more it is held. Our hymnwriter says, “Seldom do we see the snares, before we feel the smart.” Anything can be a snare and Satan is the great fowler. He knows how to lay the snare and keeps it hidden from sight. How many things, there is a snare in them, but we do not see the snare, but we see the bait. Satan tempts you on something where you are weak. There is the snare, but it is hidden from sight, and there is the bait and you go for it and are caught in the snare. That is you and me and so often we are caught in the snare; nor can we get free till He whose glorious name is the Breaker comes and breaks the snare. “The Breaker is come up before them.” O what an unspeakable mercy it is when “our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped”! And we could never have broken that snare ourselves.

Now this is a theme, really, which fills the whole Word of God, that the Lord is able to make a way of escape. Years ago books of escapes were exceedingly popular: perhaps how someone had escaped out of prison; how people escaped from concentration camps in Germany; sometimes how monks escaped from their monasteries; and then these amazing people who could be nailed down in a coffin and escape from it. At one time these books of escapes were exceedingly popular. I have sometimes thought that the Word of God is a Book of escapes, spiritually and providentially. Written right across so much of the Word of God you could read this, that *God is able to make a way of escape*, and only He can do it. No one else can. But these things that were “written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

It is on my mind this morning perhaps to take a rather different line from usual and to speak of quite a number of those places in the Word of

God where God has shown His most gracious ability to make a way of escape. Now who was the first person in Scripture about whom we are told that he escaped? Of course, it was Lot in Sodom. And he escaped, but it was a miracle that he did escape. He was once given a choice, and he lifted up his eyes and saw that the land was good and the situation was pleasant and he made his choice. And God says, "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." That is how he came into the snare. That is how he came to need to be rescued. He made a wrong choice. You young people, beware of making wrong choices. When there is a choice to be made, may it be in the fear of God. May it be considering what is right in His sight. May it be with a desire for what is for His honour and glory, what is according to His Word; not if it is pleasing to your eyes, not what would give you most prosperity, not what would gain you most money, not what would fulfil your ambitions.

Well, Lot made his choice, and so did Abraham. You can see that complete difference. Do not forget, Lot was a child of God. The fear of God was in his heart. In Sodom it seems he became quite prosperous and sat at the gate. But he was not honoured. He was despised and had to compromise his religion. In the end, that wicked city was given over to destruction. Lot brought this on himself. But God is able to make a way of escape. Rather than that one of His dear children, loved with an everlasting love, should perish in the city of Sodom, He sent an angel from heaven, and it seems the angel almost had to drag him out. "Escape to the mountain." We read that Lot lingered. O beware of lingering in the world! If you have taken a wrong step, beware of lingering. If the Lord reproves you, beware of lingering. If the Lord says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate," beware of lingering. If the Lord says, "This is the way, walk ye in it," beware of lingering. Lot had to come out. It was as though the angel laid hold of Lot and almost dragged him out of the city and not till then did the fire from heaven descend and consume Sodom. Now God is able to make a way of escape, even if you are in that state and you know it is because you have made a wrong choice. There is that beautiful little word, it is put in parenthesis: "The Lord being merciful unto him." That is the only way we can escape out of our difficulties and problems and trials and temptations and sins, especially when we have brought ourselves into them: "The Lord being merciful unto him."

God also is able to make a way of escape. Now the next thing I want to speak to you about is Israel at the Red Sea. There was no way of escape, no possible way of escape. You know those things in your lives: “When thou canst no deliverance see.” You remember the situation, don’t you? The children of Israel leaving Egypt and now Pharaoh with his mighty army is pursuing them. You have the Red Sea in front of them, ready to swallow them up. There is no way forward. They cannot go back because there is that great army seeking to destroy them, and on either side the mountains hemming them in. Do you know what it is to come to the Red Sea place in your life? Perhaps you have been there. Perhaps you are there this morning. Perhaps none of you are there this morning, but there will come a time in your life when you are there. There is no way forward, no way back, no way to the right hand or the left. Moses looks back and forward, to the right and the left. You say, “Moses, look up.” “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” God is able to make a way of escape, even from Pharaoh. I suppose it was in the most unlikely way that God worked. Perhaps Moses had thought, Perhaps something will happen to the Egyptians; perhaps they will turn round and retreat. But this great sea, ready to swallow them up. The Lord spoke and completely divided the waters of the Red Sea. “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.”

God is able to make a way of escape. Now the next thing that rested on my spirit was Daniel. How was it possible that he could escape? Daniel was the opposite of Lot. He did not come into his predicament through compromising and making a wrong choice. He came into it through refusing to compromise and making a right choice. They were forbidden to pray to any god except to the king. Daniel opened his windows toward Jerusalem. You say, “Daniel, you are being a bit too particular, a bit too strict. You can pray in secret without opening your windows wide.” Daniel opened his windows three times a day and prayed “as he did aforetime.” It was the king’s sentence that he was to be thrown into the den of lions. Where is going to be the way of escape?

With Daniel it was perhaps harder than anywhere else in Scripture. He had to go right down into the lions’ den. He had to be thrown right down there where the lions were. Do not forget, you children, they were real lions, lions that would tear people in pieces. Do not forget, you children, you know the end of the story; Daniel did not. Perhaps Daniel

was hoping that the king would think of some way that the law of the Medes and Persians could be altered, but he did not and he could not. Sometimes it is not just the eleventh hour, but the twelfth hour when deliverance comes. “Is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee?” Is He? Is thy God able? God is able to make a way of escape, even for Daniel, even from the lions’ den. You see, those lions could not bite Daniel. The lions cannot bite, the furnace cannot burn, the sea cannot drown, unless the Lord gives them leave, gives them His permission. God is able to make a way of escape. Perhaps some of you know what David meant when he said, “My soul is among lions.” Things that are going to tear you in pieces. But is thy God able to deliver thee? God also is able to make a way of escape. Now Daniel’s God is still on the throne. He still lives. He still reigns. He is still almighty. He still says, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.”

God is able to make a way of escape. Then I thought of Jonah. (I am speaking to you this morning in rather a different way from usual.) Now what about Jonah? I think perhaps Jonah was the most impossible case in Scripture. You think of being swallowed by a whale, of being three days and three nights in the belly of a whale. If ever since creation, since God first made man, there was a hopeless case, it was Jonah in the belly of the whale. Well, Jonah called it, “the belly of hell.” Now again, Jonah knew he had come there through his own fault. It was through his disobedience that Jonah was swallowed up by the whale. He refused to obey God. People used to say that quaintly in former days: “Watch that you do not land up in the belly of a whale.” In other words, beware of the sin of disobedience. It is not pleasing in God’s sight.

You say, Is it possible that Jonah can be set free? What an amazing thing that Jonah prayed in the belly of the whale: “Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again”! That second look, and that second look will never, never, never be in vain. “Yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple.” And the Lord commanded and the whale vomited up Jonah on dry ground – not in the sea, but on dry ground. It was a complete deliverance. It was not in the sea, and he had to swim the rest of the way. When the Lord delivers you, it is a complete deliverance, a complete way of escape. God is able to make a way of escape, even though some of you

feel your case is as bad as Jonah's, even though some of you feel you have looked and looked and it has been in vain. "Yet I will look again."

If I were to ask you who had the most escapes in Scripture, what would you say? I could not help thinking of David. Again and again and again he was in impossible places, and yet he escaped. I thought of that time when he went down to Gath, a foolish, a ridiculous thing to do, to flee even to the land of the enemy. And yet God made a way of escape for him. I thought of that time when, after Saul had hunted him as a partridge on the mountains for so many days and months, there came a time when Saul and his army were there. Now at last he had got David and it was impossible for David to escape, yet at that very moment a message came to Saul that the Philistines had invaded the land. Saul had to go, and David escaped. The Philistine invasion was appointed by God when poor David was about to meet death and destruction. But O the Lord's blessed ability to make a way of escape!

And then that other time when David went out into the land of the Philistines. Like us, he did not learn. He kept acting foolishly again and again, doing the same thing a second time. There he was pretending to be a good Philistine, a loyal Philistine, acting evilly, sinfully, telling Achish the king of the Philistines how he abhorred his own people. We read that word, "And Achish believed David." But God did not! You would think David would be cut off, cast away, because of his sinfulness. But the time came when there was war between the Israelites and the Philistines, and David as a commander of part of the Philistine troops had to go to battle against the Lord's people whom he knew the Lord had eternally loved. Do you believe the Lord is able to make a way of escape, David? The Lord did, and David did not have to do anything in it. You will find in all these things the sinner did not have to do anything; the Lord did it all. The lords of the Philistines began to complain: is not this David, the one who slew Goliath? We do not want him going into battle. What if he should desert? What if he should become a traitor? So Achish sent for David and lovingly and kindly dismissed him. "David, you have been like an angel of God unto me and I am so sorry I cannot send you to fight against these Israelites. But my people would rebel if I did." What kindness of God to His dear, erring, sinful child!

God is able to make a way of escape. I will only mention one other case, and that is Jehoshaphat. King Jehoshaphat, good, godly, gracious man, always getting into trouble through his own fault, because he would not say, *No*. Now you young people, you girls and boys, you have to learn with the help of God to say, *No*. Half the problems in Britain today are because people do not say, *No* when they should say, *No*. Well, a wicked king asked Jehoshaphat to go into battle with him. Jehoshaphat should have said, *No*, but he said, *Yes*. And his conscience pricked him. He said, “Is there not here a prophet of the Lord?” And the prophet from the Lord came and prophesied death and destruction, victory for the enemy. King Ahab said, Smite him on the cheek. Put him in prison on the bread of affliction and the water of affliction. So King Jehoshaphat sat in state on his throne, and the prophet, a godly man, was thrown into jail for speaking the truth.

But now, in battle, here is a child of God, Jehoshaphat, and the enemy are seeking to kill him, specially to kill just the king. And there came a time when he was all alone, completely surrounded by the enemy. But Jehoshaphat cried out unto God, “and the Lord helped him; and God moved them to depart from him.” O the love and the mercy of the Lord! God is also able to make a way of escape. You say, Even for this man who has compromised, who has sinned? Yes, when a child of God calls out, even despite his sin and guilt and backsliding, the Lord is still able to deliver.

And then of course at a later date you find Jehoshaphat, this time not through any fault of his own, with that great army coming against him, Moab, Ammon, the inhabitants of Mount Seir, three armies, and he stands there helpless with all Israel and their little ones. What did Jehoshaphat do? There is no way of escape here. This is the end. He casts himself completely on God. Some of you know that in your predicament, to cast yourself completely on God. “We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee.” He confessed his complete weakness and helplessness: “We have no might.” He confessed his utter foolishness, his lack of wisdom: “Neither know we what to do.” And O beloved friends, you can never, never, never perish with this upon your mouth and upon your heart: “But our eyes are upon thee.” And what followed was that all Jehoshaphat

had to do was to praise and bless God in the valley of Berachah for his deliverance.

All these little incidents are the Holy Ghost's own commentary on this word that *God also is able to make a way of escape*. I do not bring these things forward just as points of interest or Bible stories, but may they be a help, may they be an encouragement to you in some of your problems and your difficulties and your perplexities. You cannot see any way out, that the Lord is able to make that way. "For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace." God also is able to make a way of escape.

I said to you at the beginning that at one time in this country books of escape were exceedingly popular, especially during the war and just after the war. If I remember right, there was one book that was popular and it was called, *The Great Escape*. But what really is the great escape? Sinners deserving hell escaping from it. That lovely little hymn we sometimes sing: "They with wonder tell how they escaped from hell, and hope in glory to appear." Now that is the great escape, if you and I, as sinners deserving everlasting punishment, through the love and kindness and mercy of God at last should escape from a deserved hell.

Now God also is able to make a way of escape. O you see the plan of salvation. You see the covenant of grace. You see God from all eternity making a way of escape whereby poor, lost, ruined, guilty sinners could be delivered from the pit of destruction for ever to be with Him in glory. O but God making this way of escape, that His own beloved Son should come into this world to suffer, the Just for the unjust, that there might be a way of escape, that He might bring us to God; that ye who sometimes were far off might be made nigh by the blood of Christ. O that way of escape that was brought about through the sin-atonement sufferings and death of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on the cross! For Him there was no escape. It was an easy thing for Him to escape, but He had bound Himself in love to go to Calvary. When they came to arrest Him in the garden and He said, "Whom seek ye?" they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I am He," was the reply, and they fell helpless to the ground. It happened twice. But as they came the third time to seize Him, He ensured that all His beloved disciples should escape, but there was no escape for Him – though it was an easy thing for Him to escape. He said, "Let these go their way." There was no escape from the cross for the Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ because He had bound Himself in covenant love and promise, covenant undertaking. There was no escape for the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But, “Let these” – My followers – “go their way.” The passport of the whole church of God to heaven, the everlasting sentence: they shall escape, and no one can ever stop them.

God also is able to make a way of escape. But then to come to it personally. When the new birth takes place, when a sinner is brought into real concern about his sin and his soul and a never-ending eternity, the great point is this: is it possible for me to escape? How can it be? I have sinned against God. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” I have broken His law. That law demands the curse. Is there any way of escape? Is there any way of pardon, that God might be righteous and pardon? Is there any way I might be exempt from punishment?

“What shall I do, or whither flee,
To escape the vengeance due to me?”

I wonder if that has been the great question with some of you, if that is the great question with you this morning: “How can I escape?” You know, there is a solemn word: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” Now there is a great salvation in Christ through which sinners escape. O but beware lest you neglect that great salvation. For how shall you, how shall I escape if we neglect that great salvation? O but there is a way of escape through the Person and merits and finished work of our dear Immanuel, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God is able to make a way of escape even for this sinner, even for you, even for me, as we stand before a holy God, self-condemned and abhorred. How can we escape? How can we be delivered?

Then to see the wonderful plan of salvation. As you have been listening to me this morning, I do not know whether you have noticed one thing, or whether you have not noticed it, but all these different escapes I have been trying to talk to you about, why did they escape? How did they escape? Well, in a word it is this: *because they were rescued*, every one of them. They escaped because they were rescued. It was not some escape they engineered themselves like some of those amazing escapes we read about, people making underground tunnels by night and things like this. With every one of them, it was impossible for them to make a way of escape. But God was able to make a way of escape, and it was this: they

were rescued. Like the little old hymn: “He rescued me.” That is the only way you and I can escape, if the Lord Jesus in love and mercy comes right down into our sinful lives and He rescues us.

I want you children to listen to me. A story was told about the African jungle (whether this really happened, or was just given as an illustration, I do not know). A little boy fell down into a pit and could not get out. The people gathered round and asked questions, why he was so silly, did he not notice it? Night was coming on. There were wild beasts about. Some of the people gave him a good scolding. They said, “You should never have fallen into that pit. It was completely your own fault.” Some said, “Why don’t you climb out?” The little boy said, “I can’t.” Then someone came and got a big stick and held it down and said, “You hold that and we will pull you out.” The stick just broke in pieces. It was getting nearer nightfall. The little boy could not help himself at all. In the end, a big man came along and said, “What is all the crowd, all the fuss?” They told him and so he jumped right down into the pit and got hold of the little boy and pulled him out. That is a very simple story, but that is what salvation is, and what the everlasting rescue is. You and me, poor, lost sinners down in the pit of corruption. We can do nothing to get out, and it was our own fault we got in. But O for a greater than ourselves to come right where we are and take us in His everlasting arms of grace and mercy and pull us right out of the pit, so that we can sing, “Thy love was great, Thy mercy free, which from the pit delivered me.”

Well beloved friends, I do not know why but I suppose this is a different kind of sermon from what you usually hear, but I speak, I hope, by the Spirit of God. May it be made a help and encouragement and a blessing to some of you in your trials and problems and perplexities, in providence and in grace, that God is able to make a way of escape.