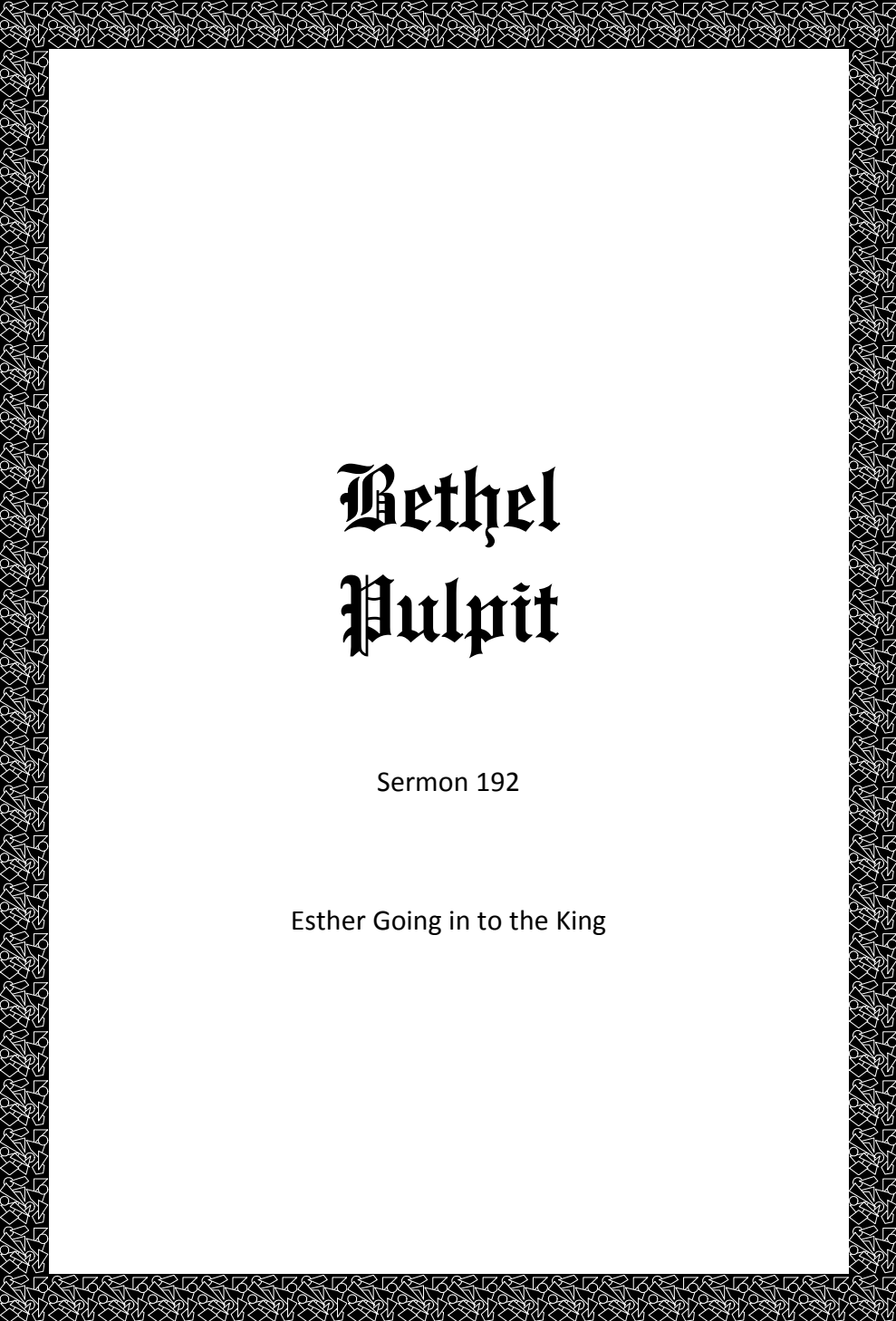




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 192

Esther Going in to the King

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 25th February, 2001**

Text: *“And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4. 16).*

The name of God does not appear at all in any place in the whole of the Book of Esther. Strange thing, that, a Book of the Bible and yet God's name is not mentioned from beginning to end! But His hand is seen on every page. His hand is seen in almost every verse, in almost every line. The mystery of divine sovereignty; the mystery of God's providence; God on the throne; God in control, ordering everything after the counsel of His own will; nothing taking place by chance or accident; so much hanging on so little. Really, the Book of Esther is one of the best commentaries we can have on the precious truth of the providence of God, God in control, things not happening by chance or accident, not Satan in control, not wicked men, but God performing in time everything that He purposed in eternity past.

And so this blessed truth of God's providence is a wonderful comfort to us today. It is a terrible day we live in. We do not know whatever we are going to hear next. There seems to be one tragedy, one disaster, one calamity after another. Wicked men wax worse and worse. Evil abounds on every hand. But to know that God is in control of every movement of every rolling planet, all important events among high places of all the nations of the earth, and coming down to “my life's minutest circumstance.” “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” “Not one by force or chance can fall without your Father's leave.” Do you believe it, beloved friends? If only we believed what we do believe! “We know” – we certainly cannot see it, we certainly do not always feel it, but – “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” What did William Gadsby write? (I have never understood why he did not put it in his hymnbook.)

“There's not a particle of dust can fly,
A sparrow fall, or cloud obscure the sky,

A moth be crushed, or leaf fall from a tree,
But in submission to His wise decree.”

Now do you believe it, the providence of God, God in complete control, making everything, *everything* work together for the honour and glory of His own name and for the good of His people?

Now the Book of Esther is a wonderful commentary on this. The other two parts of Scripture which especially give us a gracious commentary on the doctrine of divine providence: one, the life of Joseph. You see so much hanging on so little. Everything that seemed to be going wrong was really going right. Every step downwards was a step upwards. Then the life of Daniel, that long life with so many things, yet the Lord was in control.

“His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfils some deep design.”

In the Book of Esther we have the Lord’s ancient people, the Jews, in captivity in Babylon and there is an evil, cruel plot of this wicked man Haman. He is going to obliterate them all, destroy them all. It is incredible that at just that very moment the person who is queen is a Jewess belonging to the Lord’s people who are about to be destroyed. “Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” The impossibility of it, that one of these Jewish exiles, a Jewish girl, should be queen over this great empire! Even the king did not know she was a Jewess. Wicked Haman did not.

But how often many things unfold step by step! This Mordecai who had brought up Esther as her foster father had done a wonderful thing at one time, warned the king of an attempt to assassinate him, but the king had forgotten all about it. He has never been rewarded. Yet the very night before Haman is coming to demand that Mordecai be hanged on the gallows, the king could not sleep. Why couldn’t he sleep? Why this particular night? There must have been all kinds of diversions a monarch could have had, but he decides to look at a history book. Why that book? Why does he open at that page? And he read that his life was once saved by this man Mordecai, this one who is going to be hanged the next day. O

if only we believed what we do believe, that there is this wonderful, divine providence encircling us, encircling our lives. So the next day when the king said, “What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?” wicked Haman thinks, I am sure it is me. But it was not Haman, and before the day is ended, he is hanging on the gallows. It is Mordecai the Jew. And then all these strange happenings we read of at the beginning of the Book, I know we cannot understand them, but God overruled them so that Vashti was no longer queen and Esther was.

O but the hand of God seen on every page, in every event, so much hanging on so little! Perhaps some of you this morning look back over your little lives and you see that event, that unexpected event, or that letter you received, that telephone call, it changed your life completely. So much hanging on so little. Mind you, there are so many times when we cannot understand the providence of God. His way is in the sea, and His path in the mighty waters, and His footsteps are not known. We cannot understand what He is doing, but if only we could find that resting place, and perhaps some of you need it this morning: “We cannot, Lord, Thy purpose see, but all is well that’s done by Thee.” So this amazing Book and this amazing commentary on the providence, the sovereignty of God, so that the Jews were spared, the Jews were delivered and their enemy, Haman, hanged on his own gallows, and the persecuted Mordecai put in the place of honour.

Now what about Esther? When we think of the Book of Esther, perhaps we talk more of providence and Mordecai and the king and not so much of Esther. She was an amazing woman. She was not ashamed to be identified with the poor, despised people of God. She had this simple, poor upbringing. She lost her father and her mother. Her cousin Mordecai brought her up as if she was his own child. Now suddenly, mysteriously, she is exalted. She was queen of the mightiest empire on the face of the earth. In a sense, you could say she was the greatest woman on earth. But she did not forget her obscure beginnings. She did not forget that she belonged to the people of God. Sadly, solemnly, many people there have been, perhaps from a poor home, a godly home, with a loving upbringing, and one of the children has become an eminent person. He does not want to know anything about his old home any longer and forgets his old friends. We see it so often. Now there was something in the paper a year

or two ago about some woman who had become very great in the eyes of the world, a “pop singer” or something, and she was writing dreadful things about her poor parents who lived in Accrington. Now mercifully the national newspapers took their side. It appeared they were a godly old couple and they were heartbroken. Even worse than forgetting them, she was writing articles despising them, mocking them. I hope if any of you girls and boys become eminent and famous you do not forget your poor fathers and mothers.

In one sense, Queen Esther reminds us of Henry of Navarre. Many of you listened to a talk recently on the Huguenots, the godly in France who were so persecuted. Again in the mysterious providence of God, one of the Huguenots became King of France. Very sadly and very solemnly, he renounced his old religion and joined the Roman Catholic Church, but he never forgot his old friends and his family and relatives, and when he became King of France, the first thing he did was order an edict that the godly in France should worship God exactly as they wished. There could be no more persecution, no more putting them to death.

O but Esther, the loving concern she showed for Mordecai, the kindness she showed, and O the bitterness of her heart when she heard that the people of God were going to be destroyed! In a later chapter (8. 3), when she spoke to the king it says that she spoke with tears. O do you ever pray to the Lord with tears for those you love, those in their sorrow, those in trouble, for the persecuted church of God? In a sense Esther was like Ruth with Naomi. “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” – even if I am the Queen of the Persian empire. Or like Moses: “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” – even if she was the Queen.

But here Mordecai lovingly, faithfully, graciously asked her to do the hardest thing she had ever been asked to do in her life: that she should go in to the king and she should plead on behalf of the people of God. Now do not misunderstand the situation. It was not like things today. These ancient eastern monarchs, a whim or a fancy, and someone’s head would be rolling, or someone hanged on a gallows for nothing, even if it was their own wife. We think of our own country in more modern times

when one queen after another was executed, put to death, by her own husband. And Mordecai sent her this message: “If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” But she said, If anyone goes into the king’s presence unbidden, then it is the sentence of death, even if it be some eminent person, even if it be the queen. And she said, For some reason, the king has not asked to see me for thirty days. This was a different climate, a different culture. She feared it would mean her life.

But there is grace reigning here. For the honour and glory of God, for the good of His people, she is willing to risk her life. She said, “I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” That is grace. O these godly women there have been down the ages, but none rising higher than Queen Esther when she was willing to risk her life if only it might be that the people of God might be spared! “So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” But she had one request, and it was a good one: that Mordecai should gather all the Lord’s people together to pray for her. Now we know looking back over all these years the good success she had, that the king smiled on her. He extended his golden sceptre to her. He said, “What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.” We, looking back, know her good success. Do not forget she did not, poor, fearful, trembling Esther, as she ventured that day with all the weight and the burden of the honour and glory of God and the concerns of the church of God resting on her poor, frail shoulders. I know we are not called to risk our lives, but the Lord solemnly speaks of being willing to lay down our lives for the brethren. There is not much of that today, laying down your life for the brethren, denying yourself, being willing to go that second mile, anything for the honour and glory of God and the good of His beloved people. O that there were more Esthers about today!

“I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” Now I want to look at this subject from an absolutely, completely different point of view. The people of God, pondering on this verse, have always thought of it as being a type of a sinner feeling his sin

and guilt, and dare he go in to the King? Dare he go to the Lord seeking mercy, seeking pardon? He does not deserve it. He is so unworthy. He fears he will not be received, and yet he must venture. He comes to that point that if he stays away, well he must perish, and if he goes in, then the worst that can happen is that also he will perish. And so a sinner under a sense of guilt ventures to the blood-sprinkled mercyseat, ventures before the almighty King of kings in this spirit: "And so will I go in unto the King, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." And the wonderful thing is that no sinner ever perished there. No sinner ever perished seeking mercy for Jesus' sake. No sinner ever perished pleading the blood of Christ. But O this venture of faith, and to many as they really feel the awfulness of their condition, the solemnity of their condition, it is a venture.

"So will I go in unto the King, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." Now the Lord is King, a greater King than Ahasuerus, a more mighty King than Ahasuerus. Why, we are told that King Ahasuerus reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over one-hundred-and-twenty-seven provinces. But this King is the Lord God who omnipotent reigneth. He is the Lord God who created all things by the word of His mouth, One who is eternal, omnipotent, almighty. Popular religion today does not realise sufficiently the greatness of our God and King. O do we tremble before Him? Do we realise how great He is and how insignificant we are, how holy He is and how unholy we are? It is that venture. "I will go in unto the King, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." Of course, this has been immortalised in that most beautiful hymn by Edmund Jones:

"T'll to the gracious King repair,
Whose sceptre mercy gives;
Perhaps He will receive my prayer,
And then the suppliant lives.

"I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For, if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.

“But if I die, with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die (delightful thought!)
As sinner never died.”

Then, “I will go in unto the King, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” Now there is one great difference, and that is that a sinner concerned about his sin and his guilt and a never-ending eternity has two things. He has a sweet invitation: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And he has a sweet promise: “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” So poor, perishing sinners who fear they may perish, and fear they deserve to perish, are sweetly invited and they are sweetly welcome. “So I will go in unto the King, which is not according to the law” – but which is according to the gospel – “and if I perish, I perish.” Now are there any perishing sinners here this morning? Then I would encourage you to venture.

“Venture on Him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude;
None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good.”

If you stay away, you must for ever die. Now I would encourage you to go in unto the King as a perishing sinner; but at the Saviour’s feet, none shall perish there.

“So will I go in unto the King, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” Now a few words on the good success of Queen Esther. You notice that the first thing she did, she put on her royal apparel. You can see the point naturally. She wanted to appear as attractive as she could when she went in to the king. She thought that she might gain his ear and get her request. So she put on her royal apparel. Well, we cannot venture to the Lord making ourselves look as attractive as we can – we have to go just as we are – only in that sense, to plead the righteousness, the blood of Jesus. This is the royal apparel of all the people of God and we can go and we can plead it. But she had her royal apparel which marked her relationship to the king, a token of his love towards her, the evidence of her royal status.

I like to think of that old story. There was a nobleman in the Middle Ages who loved to dine with the king each night. He dearly loved his monarch. The noblemen had to put on their princely apparel. They were not allowed in otherwise. Daily it was his delight to converse with the king he loved so much. One day, he came to get his princely apparel, and it was all dirty. He thought he could not go in like that, and he was sad, for he loved to talk with his king, but he knew that no nobleman could go in with dirty garments. Then suddenly he thought: in the corner was a table for beggars, and whatever they wore they were welcome, and at the end of the meal the king would talk kindly with them. "Well," he thought, "I cannot go as a prince, but I shall go as a beggar, and I know I shall be welcome at the beggars' table." Many a dear, tried, tempted child of God dare not go in as a child, you dare not go as a saint, but you can go as a beggar and sit down at the beggars' table, and it is *come and welcome*.

"The wretched and forlorn,
Are welcome to the feast of grace,
Though goodness they have none."