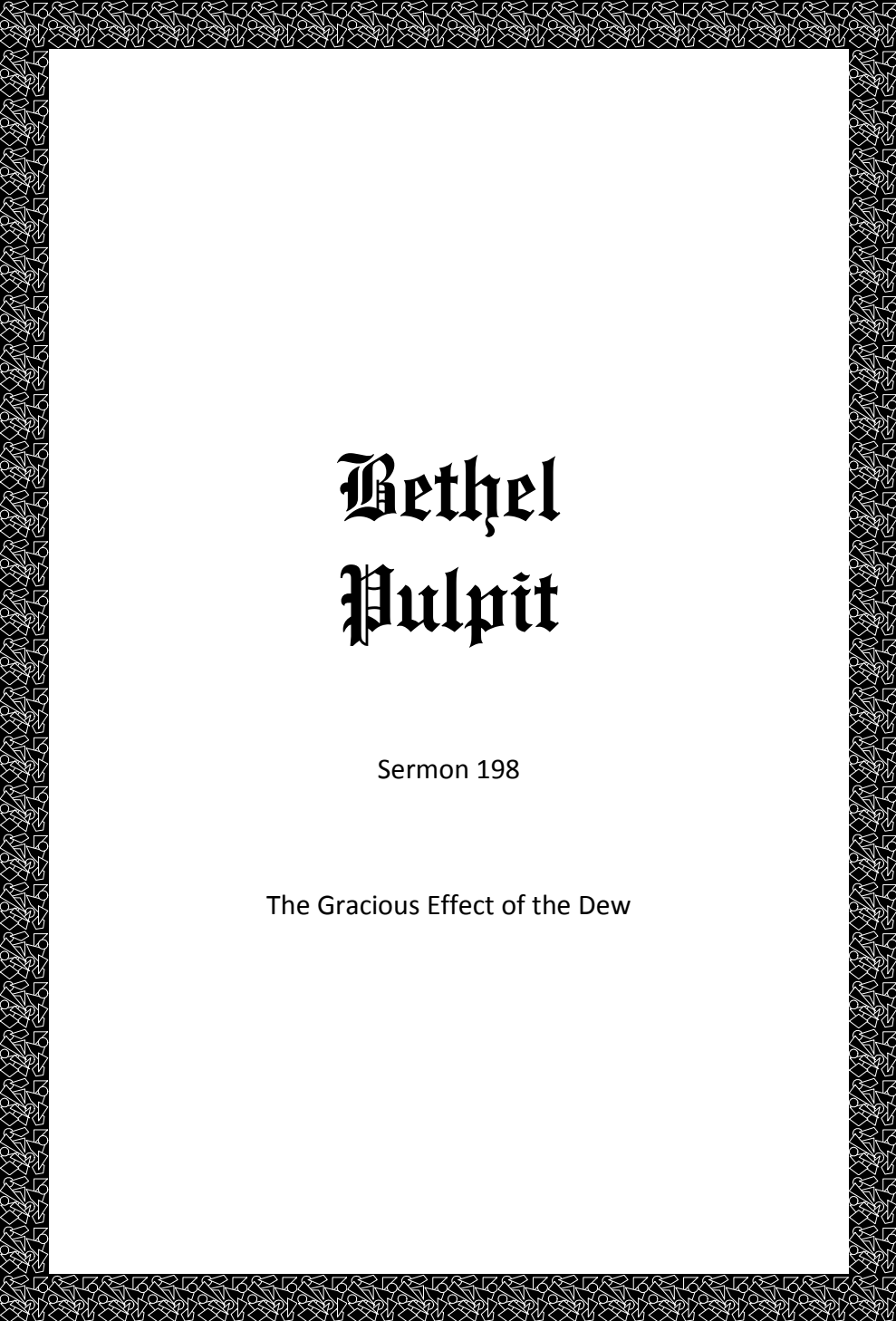




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 198

The Gracious Effect of the Dew

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 18th November, 2001**

Text: *"I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon" (Hosea 14. 5).*

No doubt all of you will have noticed the "gentle terms" that the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ uses when He speaks about Himself. Our hymnwriter says,

"But O what gentle terms
What condescending ways,
Does our Redeemer use
To teach His heavenly grace!"

These gentle terms. "I will be as the dew unto Israel" – so gentle, coming so silently, having such a gracious effect – the dew.

Now beloved friends, in order to understand this aright, there is one point which is exceedingly important, and that is the value, the preciousness of the dew in some of these eastern countries, these hot climates. It is something that is exceedingly precious. That is the great point of this promise, and the analogy here. It is something long awaited, something dearly loved, something so precious. I understand there are some parts in Israel and the surrounding countries where perhaps for months at a time there is no rain that falls, but night by night there is a very copious dew, and that dew maintains life. That is how precious it is. If there were no dew, everything would wither, everything would die. Now then, beloved friends, you see how precious it is to a believer. You see how precious it is to our souls, for the Lord Himself to visit us like the dew from heaven. Otherwise everything will be dry and arid and dead. But when the dew comes, O the softening effect, the reviving effect, the fructifying effect! Things begin to grow. There is fruitfulness where before there was barrenness. There is life where before there was death. There is softness instead of hardness. There is a time of reviving, of refreshing.

So the Lord kindly says, "I will be as the dew unto Israel." And often this is through His Word, through the gospel. So it is when the gospel comes with that sweet, bedewing effect. People talk about dry

doctrine, and if doctrine is just dry, that does not help, that does not profit, does it? But that was a beautiful Scripture we read this evening in Deuteronomy 32: “My doctrine” – and in all its fulness that is the precious doctrine of Christ and Him crucified – “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, My speech shall distil as the dew.” Now of course, there is a difference between the rain and the dew. You can see the rain falling. You can hear the rain falling. The dew comes so softly. It comes unseen. It comes in the night. How do you know it has come? By the effect. And perhaps there is a point of gracious experience here, and some of you little ones in Zion are tried on this point. You feel you have received nothing from heaven. Well, it may not be the rain, but it may be the dew. The rain is so marked, so clear. You can see it. You can hear it. But the dew comes so quietly, so silently, unseen, unobserved. But how do you know it? Well, does it have a softening effect on your spirit? Does it have a reviving effect? Does it make you alive in the things of God?

This is a wonderful promise. The dew, so valuable, so precious. “I will be as the dew unto Israel.” Especially through the preaching of the everlasting gospel, the preaching of the cross, the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. Here is this longing, thirsting soul and when the gospel comes with softening, refreshing, sweet, bedewing effect, then there is the difference. Then this will satisfy you. Especially the doctrine of Christ crucified.

“Here I’d sit for ever viewing
Mercy’s streams in streams of blood;
Precious drops my soul bedewing,
Plead and claim my peace with God!”

I suppose years ago when I tried to speak on this word, “I will be as the dew unto Israel,” I spoke on the various blessings of the gospel and how they come as the dew, but do not forget, the Speaker is the Lord and Saviour Himself. He says, “I will be as the dew,” not just send the dew, not just give My blessing as the dew. “I will be as the dew unto Israel.” Now pray for that, that the preaching of the gospel here might be attended with that dew from heaven. If it is not, it will not profit your soul. If it is not, it will not revive the drooping plants. If it is not, it will not refresh the garden. If it is not, it will be dry and hard and barren and dead. O but the difference when the preaching of the everlasting gospel is attended with that dew from heaven and when it enters into your soul and when you

know the softening, reviving, refreshing, healing! There is life where there was death before. There is growth where all was barren, the ground soft where everything before was hard.

Now it must come from heaven. It is not something we can do, something we can work up, something we can accomplish. Pray for that heavenly dew to attend the preaching of the Word. Pray for the heavenly dew to distil upon your own soul. Our hymnwriter says, “He smiles, and my comforts abound; His grace as the dew shall descend.” It is something you cannot see. It is something you cannot hear. O the gracious, lasting, saving effect! There is heaven in it.

“I will be as the dew unto Israel.” He is speaking of backsliding Israel, Israel who has sinned, Israel who has turned from Him, but Israel now returning. “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away.” And then: “I will be as the dew” – the Holy Spirit’s work in sweet, bedewing power, bringing peace and hope and joy and salvation; the Holy Spirit’s work revealing the Saviour; the Holy Spirit’s work applying the Word with sacred power, the Holy Spirit’s work leading you to Calvary to behold the Lamb of God; the Holy Spirit’s work shedding abroad the love of Christ in your heart. Now do seek the dew. Do not think of this as just some kind of poetical figure. These are vital realities. What is all our worship and all our singing, all our reading, all our preaching?

“Without Thy sovereign power, O Lord,
No sweets the gospel can afford;
No drops of heavenly love will fall
To cheer the weary, thirsting soul.”

Now pray for it in our solemn assemblies. Pray for it under the preaching of the gospel. Pray for it in secret, that it might not just be the word, the empty word, the barren word, the dry word, the dead word, but that it might come with this gracious, divine, enlivening effect, the heavenly dew, as the Lord Himself brings the word to you “in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.” With Israel in the wilderness, it was when the dew fell that the manna was there. The manna was only found where the dew fell. And that heavenly manna to feed your souls, you will only find it where the dew falls.

“I will be as the dew unto Israel.” But there is a power in it, an effect in it. I always remember something an old friend of mine at

Haslingden told me. He wanted a pair of very stout, strong boots. He wanted to walk up in the hills, and sometimes they are boggy and marshy. He went in a shoe shop and told them what he wanted. They showed him some boots which were standing in a few inches of water. The water was not penetrating. He bought the boots, and was told, "Those boots will keep everything out except the dew. You cannot stop the dew from penetrating." He thought, and I thought, what a lesson there! This dew from heaven can penetrate the hardest heart. This dew from heaven can enter where nothing else can. So pray for it, seek it, plead for it, under the reading of the Word, the preaching of the Word, in your prayers, that the gospel might come to you under the sweet, bedewing influence and power of the Holy Ghost. Then it will do you good and then it will profit you – a hard heart softening, a barren heart reviving, something springing up where there was nothing before, life where there was death.

"I will be as a the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily." Did you know that God compares His beloved people to a lily? The Lord Jesus says, "I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys." Then turning to His beloved people He says, "As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters." That is how the Lord Jesus looks on His sinful, guilty, unworthy people. He views them as the lily, pure, spotless, white. "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it ... that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." In Christ, pure as the lily. So Israel is compared to the lily. God's people are compared to the lily. That is how dear you are to the Saviour. That is how precious you are to the Saviour.

"As the lily among thorns." I do not think there is a greater contrast in all Scripture than this: a lily and thorns. That is the difference between the way the Lord Jesus looks on His beloved people, the objects of His atoning love and blood, and how He looks on the world. "The lily among thorns." But the point is, it is not just there is a lily, not just there are thorns. The lily is *among* the thorns, and sometimes the thorns hurt it and prick it. If your religion is real, if you belong to the blood-bought church, you have to be different from the world. It is a solemn thing if someone cannot tell any difference between a lily and thorns. But how can you tell the difference in so many places between the church and the world? There is such a coming together, such a conformity. Beloved friends, you are called to be different. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will

receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” You are called to be different, but it is not just *any* kind of difference. It is the difference between the lily and the thorns. I suppose the Lord could have said that His church was like a tree growing in a field. There is a difference between the tree and a field. But He did not. A lily and thorns. Your difference from the world has to be a difference of beauty, a difference of fragrance, a difference of attraction, that even the world might look on you and see something different, see a beauty though it cannot understand it. What a standard this is, that the church of God, the true Israel, is to be as a lily among thorns! “As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters.”

“I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily.” The church of God is always as the lily. Every true believer on the Son of God is always as the lily. If you are a true believer, you are as the lily. But, “He shall *grow* as the lily.” There is going to be a blossoming. We might be as a lily – if we are God’s people we are as the lily – but is there any blossoming? Is there any growth? Is there any progress? Is there any beauty? Or is it this: sometimes you see a lily, and perhaps it has been there in the vase and really beautiful, but after a week or two there is not the same beauty? It begins to wither (doesn’t it), and in the end it begins to die. In the end you have to get rid of it. There is not the same beauty, the same attraction. Now is that the church of God? Is that us as a church? Is that us as a group of churches, a denomination? Is it you and me personally? The lily, in Christ the lily, but is the beauty of our sanctification not just as spotless white? Is it not just as fresh? Is it beginning to wither? Is it beginning to die?

What about the fragrance, the heavenly fragrance? There should be a fragrance in a believer’s life. Now one of the chapels I have been to, in the minister’s vestry they have an old photograph of an old deacon. I believe he was a jailer in the prison. It says, “In fragrant memory” of this old man. You can see him with his long, white beard. I wonder if any people will have fragrant memories of us! But we have them here, haven’t we? How many we have known and loved at Bethel and we have the fragrant memory of them!

What is it that makes a lily blossom and makes it grow? When the heavenly dew descends upon it. O the lily needs the dew. It needs to be refreshed. It needs to be revived. It needs the dew from heaven. It needs

the Lord's love. It needs His mercy. It needs His visits. It needs His tender care. The Lord has promised it. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." O do seek that dew. Only as we know the dew, the dew from heaven, the dew resting on our branch, only so can we ever grow, can we ever blossom. It is only then there is the fragrance of Christ. It is only then there is the beauty. There is a similar word, though the analogy is different, where the church is not compared to a lily but compared to a vineyard: "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." You can say the same concerning the lily. "I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily." "I the Lord do keep it." The Lord's watchful eye on His beloved people. The Lord's watchful eye over every sinner saved by grace. "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment." We do not realise it, the Lord's eye upon us every moment, but He never slumbers or sleeps. "I will water it ever moment." He is not going to let anyone hurt it. He is not going to let any damage this lily or destroy it. "Lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

"My Beloved is gone down into His garden." Why? "To the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." That is the death of a believer. A lily in the Lord's garden here on earth, and the Lord watches over it day and night lest any hurt it, and at last He comes down to gather lilies that He might plant them afresh to bloom for ever in that paradise above where "everlasting spring abides, and never-withering flowers." "He shall grow as the lily." That is the only secret of real growth, real prosperity, in the church, in ourselves personally, when we grow as the lily because of the grace, the love, the mercy, so kindly bestowed by the Lord through His Spirit.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon." This at first sounds a little bit strange. It does not seem to fit in the analogy. It does not seem to fit in the comparison. I take it the point is this: a lily is a thing of beauty; a lily is a fragrant thing; but the Lord would not have us think that Israel is a thing of nought, a thing of weakness, a thing that is easily blown away, a thing that is easily plucked up. I suppose if you end with the comparison of the lily, well the lily does not seem to have much root. This lily, beautiful, fragrant, O but the roots! His roots shall be as Lebanon. I suppose that there were no such roots as the roots of the mighty cedars of Lebanon. How strong they were! How deep they went into the earth! How far they stretched! And when

there was a terrible thunderstorm, those cedars of Lebanon still stood. That little lily needs the dew and when the dew comes, it is fragrant and it grows, but what about the storms and the tempest? Now it is not uprooted. It is not blown away. Why? Because the roots of the church of God, the roots of the true Israel, are as Lebanon.

Now I would say this, beloved friends (I have often said it over the years): seek a religion with good roots. How the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself emphasised this in the solemn parable of the sower! There were some plants which seemed good. The growth seemed good. But “because it had no root, it withered away” and died. And so will every plant that has no roots, and so will every religion that has no roots. It will wither away and die. Now seek a religion with good roots.

“He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.” The roots are vital. But look, beloved friends, you cannot see the roots, can you? They are vital, but they are out of sight. You cannot hear those roots growing. They are not making a lot of noise, but silently, out of sight, those roots are being cast forth. Now that is a good religion, to be a plant of the Father’s right-hand planting, to have those good roots – not a lot of noise, not a lot of talk, not a lot of bustle, not something that is seen on every hand, but something hidden away. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” Those are the roots of vital godliness, and it is a precious, precious word, isn’t it? If only some of you had the witness of it in your heart. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” That hidden, secret life of grace, which is in the roots. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” It cannot be uprooted. It can never be destroyed.

Now seek good roots. You want to be as the lily; you want to be blossoming; you want to be fragrant. But seek those good roots, something unseen, something out of sight, faith in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, living nearness to Him, union and communion with Him, something going on between God and your soul. Seek that religion with good roots. You see the comparison here, the heavenly dew, and this beautiful little plant. But lest any should think it is a thing of weakness, O those roots, those mighty roots, like Lebanon. And I think of where you see that dear child of God, so tender-hearted, so gentle, so pure, so fragrant; but if you were to see the secret, those mighty roots, those roots like the cedar of Lebanon.

“I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.” There are two things with the roots. The first

is this: that they hold the plant securely in its place. Well, Job was able to say amidst all his trials and sorrows, "The root of the matter is found in me." There may be many things we have not got, but it is a wonderful thing if the root of the matter is found in us. When the Lord plants a sinner, He uproots him out of the world, and then He transplants him in better soil and gives him good roots. He shall "take root downward, and bear fruit upward." They reach down into the soil and fasten and secure the plant. O the security of the Israel of God, under the sweet influence of grace, growing as a lily, that work out of sight, those roots. How often the Apostle Paul takes it up. "Ye, being rooted and grounded in love." He says it to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. They say if a tree has really good roots, when the wind blows, it just fastens those roots more securely down in the soil.

But the second thing: those roots reach down in the soil and what do they do? Well they draw in all the life, all the nourishment, all the food they need. If there were no root, there must be death. O this religion with good roots, which out of sight reaches out after the Saviour, reaches out after Christ, goes right after Him, goes right down in the soil. And then there is something flowing. It is like that wonderful, ancient vine at Hampton Court: not much to look at, but no vine more fruitful. They say over the years those roots have gone deeper and deeper and they even reach as far as the River Thames. However dry the summer is, there is a full supply there. "Happy souls! who cleave to Christ by pure and living faith." That was Ruth's religion. She was a lily among thorns. She knew the sweet, bedewing influences of grace. "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." And she clung and she clave to Naomi and she clung and clave to Naomi's God. Now happy soul that clings and cleaves to Christ by true and living faith. It is to live upon His fulness, that wonderful fulness of grace.

Well then, beloved friends, here we have the secret of real prosperity, the only secret of real prosperity in our hearts, in the church of God. Apart from this, death, dryness, barrenness, withering. But this beautiful little plant, so lovely, so fragrant, and yet all these deep, deep roots, reaching out, clinging, cleaving to Christ. And then the dew from heaven descending upon it, and the bringing forth of fruit to everlasting life. It is a picture of real religion. It is not just something poetical,

something sentimental. It is a picture of real religion. We say, “Be this religion mine.” May it be ours in the church of God. May it be mine personally.

“I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.