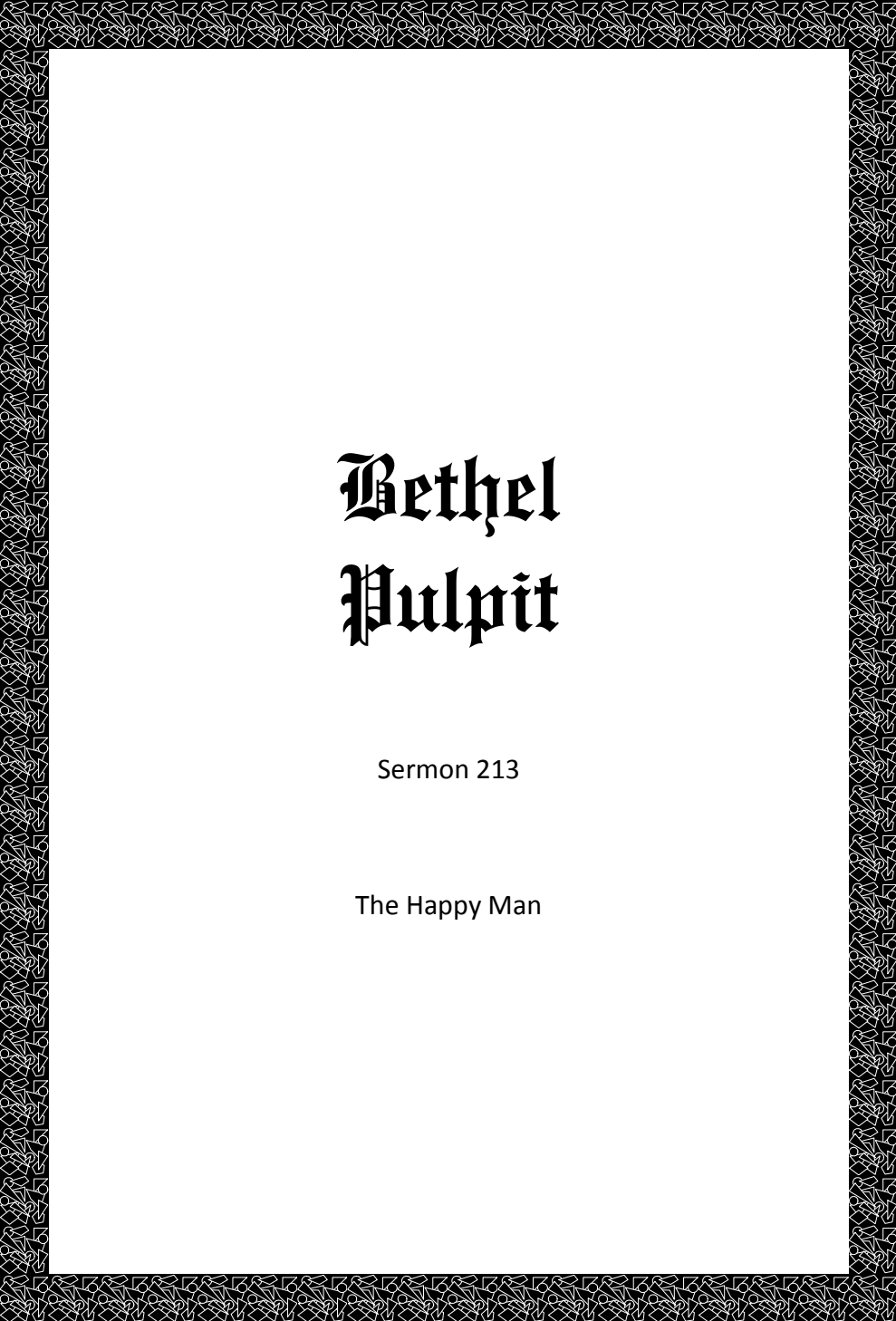




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 213

The Happy Man

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 30th June, 2002**

Text: *"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is" (Psalm 146. 5, 6).*

"Happy is he." Most people would say it should read *unhappy*. They look on the Lord's people with all their sorrows and their separation from the world, the cross they have to bear, the cross they have to carry, and in the eyes of the world it should read, "*Unhappy* is he." If you were to speak to many of God's people and say, "Do you really feel happy?" they would stumble in trying to give you an answer. Let God's Word stand: "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." And the great point is this: what is happiness? Where is it to be found? Where does it lie? Is it in the milling multitude who are flocking to Wimbledon or going to world cup matches? Is it among those enjoying exotic, expensive holidays? Is it among those making money and making wealth? So you might go on. We have to come to this:

"Whatever the wicked may say,
And those who God's mercy despise,
Although they seem merry and gay,
They know not where happiness lies."

Now pleasure, enjoyment, the world has it. We give the world a point there. The world has plenty of pleasure, plenty of enjoyment. "But, though the world may think it strange, we would not with the world exchange." We have sat where the world sits; the world has never sat where we sit. We know both sides; the world only knows one side. "And, though the world may think it strange, we would not with the world exchange." We would not exchange our saddest hours for their greatest pleasures. Do you know why? Because the world's enjoyment, the world's pleasure, can never really satisfy. That is why the wise man describes it as "the crackling of thorns under a pot." I think you have seen it. Perhaps you young people have seen it. A few dry sticks, you set fire to them and they burn so brightly and so noisily and then suddenly it finishes. That is the end.

Where is true happiness to be found? What is true happiness? Now Almighty God tells us: “Happy is he ... whose hope is in the Lord his God.” He has a hope of heaven, a hope of salvation, an everlasting hope, a hope of a blessed immortality. That is where his happiness is. The world has its pleasure, its enjoyment, but it is all the pleasure, all the enjoyment the world will ever know, and it ends for ever. There is just a black night of eternal sorrow. The Lord’s people have their sorrows, but there is a long, an everlasting day of eternal pleasure. But even more than that, you see even whilst here below, even if there were no heaven, even if there were no afterwards, the Lord’s people would still not change with the world. No joys like the joys the gospel gives. No blessing like the blessing the Lord gives. That gracious upholding in trouble, that God to go to in the hour of need, that help when everything seems to be sinking, the forgiveness of sin, the precious blood that cleanses.

O to have this burnt into our very hearts: “Happy is he” – and only he – “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” That means that if you are blessed with a good hope through grace, a good hope in Jesus, a good hope of eternal life, then you are the happy man, the happy woman, the happy boy, the happy girl. “Happy is he ... whose hope is in the Lord his God.” This hope in Jesus is worth more than ten thousand worlds. Why? Because by nature ours is a hopeless case; because by nature we are described as “having no hope, and without God in the world,” lost, ruined, guilty, yet having an immortal soul, one day having to give an account, to meet our Maker. O but to be blessed with a good hope through grace 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.” Now happy is he who has that hope, “whose hope is in the Lord his God.”

Now this is the Holy Spirit’s work in a sinner’s heart. Everybody has some kind of hope. The atheist has his hope. His hope is that there is not any God, there is not any judgment, there is not any afterwards. Professors of religion have their hope, perhaps that everybody is right, or the general mercy of God. By nature everybody has some kind of hope – perhaps that there is plenty of time. Now when the Lord begins His solemn, separating work with you and me, we are brought to feel this: the solemnity of our case. Our false, vain hopes are gone and gone for ever. We cannot find joy or satisfaction or happiness in anything here below. O to find that good hope through grace! And then the gospel is so attractive.

It points to Jesus as the ground of a sinner's hope, that a guilty sinner feeling his need, confessing his sin, fleeing for refuge, will find mercy, salvation, heaven. So the gospel is attractive. Then faith is described like this: fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us. By the blessed Spirit's enabling have you ever been enabled to do it? It speaks of urgency. It speaks of danger. O that fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us! O but for the Holy Spirit to raise us up to a sweet hope in Jesus. And it is this. I know it is a well-known word, but in all its simplicity and blessedness and depth and reality it is this, and if from an honest heart you can say it, you will get to heaven: "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." No other hope, no other refuge, no other foundation than Jesus' precious, sin-atonement blood and His law-fulfilling righteousness. Sure ground, sure foundation this!

Well, "Happy is he ... whose hope is in the Lord his God." That is true happiness. It is happiness here when you are raised up to a sweet hope in Jesus. You will say, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And it will bring you joy and peace in believing. I do not want anyone to think I am trying to preach this evening that the world has its enjoyment and pleasure, and that is all it has, and God's people are nothing but miserable and then their happiness is to come. The best is before them, O but the happiness at times they know while here below! O that word we read this evening: "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord." Now why are they happy? Why are they happy amidst all their sorrows? Because they have a hope; because they have a God; because they have a Father; because He is in heaven; because He is almighty; because He is in control; because He hears and answers their prayers; because He makes everything work together for their real, eternal good.

"Happy is he" – and only he – "that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Now how many of you can come in here and believe I am speaking about you this evening, because either I am or I am not? Or is it something like this? There is a Ruth here – that this people might be my people and their God my God! O to know this happiness of a good hope through grace. O to know this happiness of having God for my God. Dr. Ryland says, "I must have all things, and abound, while God is God to me."

“Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” But you can take a slightly different view of this word *happy*. You know I do not profess any knowledge of the original languages, but I am told that this word *happy*, in various other places is translated *blessed*. So to be blessed is to be happy, and to be happy is to be blessed. Now I understand that the Hebrew word for happy is the word *asher* (or a similar word). We read of Asher this evening in Deuteronomy 33, and Asher was given his name because his mother was happy, and she called him *Happy*, Asher. And this is the word here. It is the first word that comes in the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms begins with this word: “Blessed is the man.” And you have it coming again and again, either happy or blessed, either blessed or happy. It comes twenty-five times altogether. This is the last time it appears in the Book of Psalms. That would be a profitable meditation for you (wouldn’t it?) the blessed man, the happy man in the Book of Psalms. For instance, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Another one: “Blessed is the people” – happy is the people – “that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.” So *blessed* is he. That is the meaning of it. “*Blessed* is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” So the happy man is the man whom God has blessed, and the man that God has blessed is the truly happy man, the eternally happy man.

Let me just say one other thing on this point of happiness and blessedness. Almighty God has a gracious ability to turn sorrow into joy. Now there have been all kinds of scientific achievements during this century and the last, and people can turn all kinds of things into all kinds of other things, but no-one has ever learned the secret yet of how to turn sorrow into joy. Now that is what the Lord can do. He whose first miracle was to turn water into wine can turn things into other things, and He can turn sorrow into joy, and He can turn your sorrow into joy. Didn’t He say it to His sorrowing disciples, “Your sorrow shall be turned into joy”? “Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” It is the happiness the world cannot give, and it is the happiness the world cannot take away.

“Happy is he” – blessed is he – “that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” It is a wonderful thing if we have this good hope through grace, this hope that can never perish, this hope that can never be destroyed, this hope which will stand every storm

and stand at last. Happy is he, and happy will you be, and happy will I be, if we come to our last moment on earth with a good hope through grace in Jesus. “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.” Now I am taking this verse the opposite way round, the latter part first. So first of all, happy is he who has this blessed hope in Jesus – not a presumptuous hope, not a take-it-for-granted hope, but a hope based on the mercy of God, the promise of God, based on the blood of Jesus.

But then the second thing. “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help.” Well, what a wonderful thing for a sinner to *have* God, to have God for his Helper, to have God for his hope. What a wonderful thing for a sinner to *have* something he did not bring into this world, for a sinner to *have* something that God gave him. Have you a sweet hope that you *have* something God has given you, you *have* something you did not create yourself, you *have* something you did not bring into this world? “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help.” It is a wonderful thing if we have God for our help.

I always like it when the Scripture says, “The God of Jacob.” Why do I like that? Well, poor old Jacob was always blundering, faltering, failing, backsliding, making mistakes, yet God was still his help, still his Helper. “The God of Jacob” – the God of all grace. “The God of Jacob” – the God of poor sinners. “The God of Jacob” – He who said, “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.” And He was faithful to His promise. Didn’t Jacob come into some strange places and some unexpected places? O but happy was Jacob that he had such a God for his help. If ever there was a stormy passage, it was Jacob’s. If ever there was a complicated journey, it was Jacob’s. Yet you come to the end of his life in Genesis 49. He has not a single cloud in his sky. Sin forgiven, peace with God, and incredible as it seems, all those things in his family made right. He has Benjamin still, and he has Simeon still, and he even has his beloved Joseph whom he thought was gone for ever. Have you ever noticed, going through Genesis 49, he suddenly stops as if he looks beyond the veil? He says, “I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.” It is as if there was nobody but the Lord with him there on his deathbed, and he says, “I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.” And then he gathered his feet into his bed, and he had nothing to do but die. “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

“Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help.” Well, we do need help, don’t we? But you all know what I am going to say, because I say this to you so often. When we come to this word *help* in Scripture, do not just think of a little aid, a little assistance. It is almost the same word as *salvation*. “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his *salvation*” – salvation from sin, from death, from hell. “Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” Saved by grace; saved by the blood of Christ; saved from a lost eternity. Now happy is he that has this, who knows this, who possesses this. It is all in Christ. “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help,” his salvation.

But then take it as it stands: “his help.” We need it, don’t we? I am sure that prayer belongs to many of you: “Lord, help me.” We have to pray it continually. “Lord, help me.” So much of the experience of God’s people is needing help, seeking help, praying for help, receiving help. “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help.” So we need Him to help us in so many ways. We need Him to help us by upholding us, keeping us, preserving us. One or two of you have mentioned that word at a prayer meeting recently: “Preserved in Jesus.” It is a good word, and we need that help, to be preserved in Jesus. “The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.” We need His help in hearing and answering our prayers. There are times when we so painfully feel our helplessness. Then we say, O we do need the God of Jacob to be our help. And then there are times like Peter when we are beginning to sink and we say, “Lord, save me,” and that almighty arm of the God of Jacob is reached out to uphold us. That is a good word: “The arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob” – not just the God of Jacob; the *mighty* God of Jacob. O in all our weakness and helplessness and need to have the arms of our hands made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob! We need His help in leading and guiding, directing our steps, teaching us. O we need His help in so many ways. But especially when we are in trouble, when things go wrong, or seem to go wrong, and when we are perplexed and when we are sad, O to find the God of Jacob for our help then. The wonder of it, the mercy of it!

“Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is” – which in all its beautiful simplicity and suitability to us means this: that our God is almighty, that the One who is our hope is almighty,

that the One who is our help is almighty. There is nothing too hard for Him. There is nothing that He cannot do. With Him, our God, nothing shall be impossible. He “made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is.” This is one of those many, many places in Scripture where we are reminded that God is the Creator, that He created heaven and earth. It was an easy thing for Him to create heaven and earth. “He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” But it is not just knowing the story of creation in Genesis 1. It is that, the fact, the reality of it, but it is this: this God to whom we pray, this God we seek to serve, this God who helps us, He is the One who created the world; He is the One who is almighty, and He is still almighty, and He will ever be almighty. It is a beautiful truth, so simple and yet so suitable. If only you could see it tonight. “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help,” that God “which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is.” This means the help He gives you is divine. It means the help He gives you is almighty. It means He can help when no-one else can help. It means He can uphold when no-one else can uphold. It means when we say, “The eternal God is thy Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms,” these are the arms which hold up the universe. “Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is.”

So I read to you that very well-known and very beautiful Psalm, Psalm 121. You have the very same point there. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” O lift up your eyes to the eternal hills because you will not find anything in your own heart or in the world to meet your need, but seek as enabled by the Spirit of God to look up. I take it that Psalm, one of the songs of degrees, was written when the pilgrims were journeying to Jerusalem to worship. With holy anticipation they lifted up their eyes towards Jerusalem, to the hills, what they were going to find there, the temple, the sacrifice, the high priest, the blood. There was something to lift up their eyes to. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, *which made heaven and earth.*” It is the identical truth we have here. It is the very same truth we have here. “The God of Jacob for his help ... which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is.” Most of you girls and boys are very familiar with the one-hundred-and-twenty-first Psalm. I hope God will burn it in your heart. I hope the Lord will teach you out of it. When I was at school I think almost every English girl and boy had to learn the one-hundred-and-twenty-first Psalm off by heart, so I learnt it and

never forgot it. But I do not think in those days I had any idea what it meant.

O but to enter into it! How often we read it. It is sometimes spoken of as the *travellers' Psalm*. You are setting out on a journey. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." There is a greater journey, a greater pilgrimage, the journey of life. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." But may you girls and boys be graciously taught it, in your exams, and when you have trouble and difficulty at school, and when there is Satan's temptation and there is not time to go aside by yourself to try to pray to God. If only you can lift up your eyes to the hills from whence cometh our help. There is a lot of real prayer in that "upward glancing of an eye, when none but God is near." Now Psalm 121 and this beautiful verse here both contain the same truth. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord" – this almighty God, it is divine help, it is almighty help – "the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

"Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is." Perhaps some of you are wondering why this evening I read to you that passage in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 4. 23-37). Well, the early church was in trouble, great trouble. They were being persecuted. They were being threatened. They were forbidden to preach. And when they heard about it, they held a prayer meeting. This is one of the prayer meetings of the New Testament. It was a blessed prayer meeting. "And when they heard *that*" – when they heard all about this persecution and all these terrible things. "When they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said." What did they say? Well, they said these exact words from Psalm 146. They started their prayer like this: "Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." Right at the beginning of their prayer they were reminded that though their case was too hard for them, it was not too hard for their God. Though it seemed impossible, it was not impossible. The God to whom they were praying was almighty. The God who was going to be their Helper was almighty. It will be a wonderful thing if when we meet for our prayer meetings, when we meet for worship, when we pray for great things, we have believing views of this: that this God to whom we pray is almighty. Well, they said, "Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is." And then they cast

themselves completely into the hands of this gracious, almighty God. “Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word ... and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy Child Jesus.” Do you know what happened? The very place was shaken, “and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.” And they found the Lord heard and answered their prayers.

O that tonight, now, and as we go home, and during this coming week, and with all our sins and sorrows, and all our perplexities and trials, we might view this twofold thing. First of all that our God is the God of Jacob, so merciful, so kind, so gracious, so full of compassion. He will not break the bruised reed. He will not quench the smoking flax. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.” But then also, may we view that the God of Jacob is almighty. He is the One who “made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is.” O may we again tonight hear Him saying, “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me?” Well then, “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.”

“‘Cast,’ He said, ‘on Me thy care;
'Tis enough that I am nigh;
I will all thy burdens bear;
I will all thy needs supply.’”

O to view those two things, that God is the God of Jacob, all-gracious, and that God is the Creator, almighty. And so this is the One who hears and answers prayer. This is the One who saves with an everlasting salvation. This is the One who upholds, who keeps. This is the One who delivers, commands deliverance for Jacob. This is the One on the throne. This is the One in control. This is the One who makes all things work together for our good and His glory. O but to see that *this* God, the God of Jacob, *this* God, the almighty Creator, “*This* God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death.” Because do not forget there is a covenant interest, a covenant possession in this verse: “Whose hope is in the Lord *his* God.” O that it might be “in ties of blood, and nothing less, we claim Him as our own.” “Happy is he” – blessed is he, despite all his sins and sorrows, his fears and his woes – “happy is he”

– blessed still is he and shall be eternally – “that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is.”