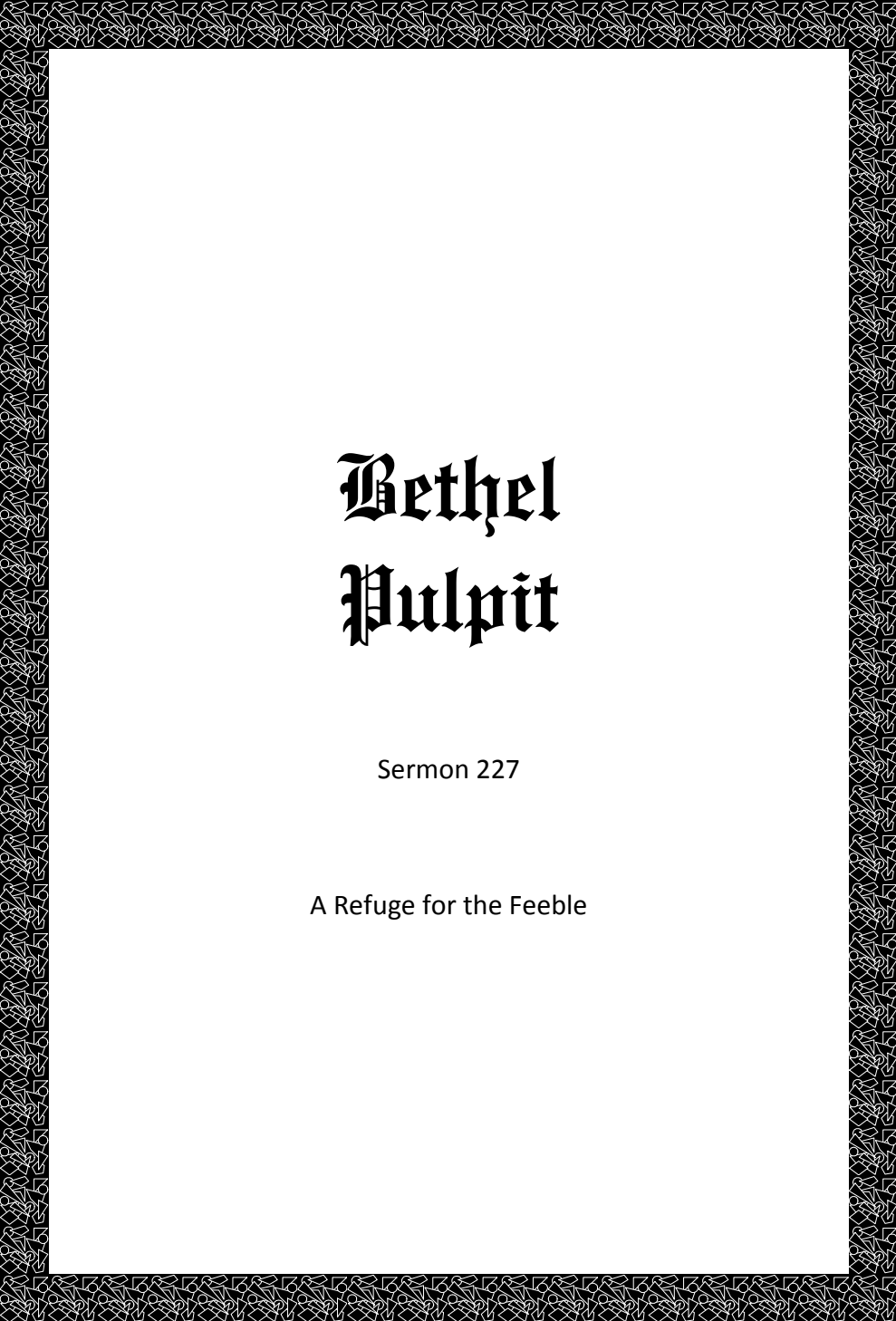




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 227

A Refuge for the Feeble

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 15th February, 2004**

Text: *"The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks" (Proverbs 30. 26).*

If your religion is real, you are sure to find something somewhere in the Word of God which fits your case, sometimes in very unexpected places. Whatever be your state or case, you will find that somewhere in the Word of God that case is described. Now what about this: "feeble folk"? Not just weak – feeble; not just helpless – feeble. What a mercy that there are these passages in the Word of God! The Lord deals with us, not as we ought to be, or as we should be, but as we really are. And God's people at times feel to be so weak and helpless and feeble. I know good Dr. Doddridge sings,

"Now let the feeble all be strong,
And make Jehovah's arm their song;
His shield is spread o'er every saint,
And thus supported, who shall faint?"

But these "feeble folk."

Some of you feel it because you have grown old, hoar hairs are upon you, the grasshopper becomes a burden. "Feeble folk." I know that some of you feel it because of the sorrows and troubles that you are enduring, and some of them seem to go on a long time, and some come suddenly and are sharp, and they weaken you. "Feeble folk." There are some because of illness and affliction, and you are disappointed because there is not the improvement. "Feeble folk." And then spiritually. We feel we cannot do anything right. We cannot do anything to fit ourselves, to prepare ourselves for heaven. "Feeble folk." But if we are feeble, Satan is not feeble; Satan is strong. We are feeble folk before Satan's temptations. If we are feeble, our sins are not. The more feeble a person grows, his sins do not grow more feeble. O "feeble folk." And the many fears concerning tomorrow and next week and the unknown way, the things of this life, our pilgrimage, our journey, the Christian warfare. We find these things too much for us, like Elijah: "The journey is too great for thee." We painfully have to realise what feeble folk we are.

Well, these conies of Proverbs 30 are a very beautiful illustration of the people of God in all their weakness and helplessness and feebleness. The wise man here speaks of four things which are “little” but “exceeding wise,” and he mentions the ants, the conies, the locusts and the spider. “The conies are but a feeble folk.” These conies are small, rabbit-like creatures, perhaps more like our hamster or our guinea pig. Some have called them rock badgers, but they are not really like badgers or even like rabbits in the general sense because they are completely incapable of burrowing. These little conies are the weakest and feeblest of all kinds of animals. It is said they are so timid that they are afraid of their own shadow. If they see their own shadow, they run away. They cannot make homes for themselves because they have no power or strength. They have weak little paws. But you see, “little” but “exceeding wise.”

“The conies are but a feeble folk, *yet* make they their houses in the rocks.” Now in four things they are very typical of the people of God: their weakness, their wisdom, their homes, their safety. These little conies are terribly weak, but you try to catch a coney or let anybody try even to see a coney! Their weakness, their wisdom, their homes, their safety. “The conies are but a feeble folk, *yet* make they their houses in the rocks.” God has blessed them with wisdom. They are not like most creatures that can make their own little homes. The bird makes its nest. The rabbit makes its burrow. These little conies are so weak and their little paws are so weak that they just have not any ability at all to make a home for themselves or to make a refuge for themselves. But God has blessed them with wisdom. They live among the rocks and they find where there is a crack or a crevice or a hole in the rock. They cannot make it; they cannot make a hole in the rock; they cannot even make a hole in the earth. But they must have a home. It is already there, already prepared for them. They enter in and they make their home in this cleft of the rock.

Now what a picture of the Lord’s people! “The conies are but a feeble folk, *yet* make they their houses in the rocks.” We cannot make ourselves a refuge for our souls, a refuge from sin, a refuge from the storm, a refuge from Satan, a refuge from the wrath of God. O if we are blessed with wisdom we will realise that like the poor little conies, we have feeble hands, weak hands. We cannot do anything to fit ourselves or prepare ourselves for God, to make ourselves right for eternity, to prepare ourselves for heaven. It must be a home provided; it must be a refuge provided. O but there are thousands who are never blessed with this

wisdom, and you and I, by nature, think we can manage ourselves. But if born again of the Spirit of God, it will be this: “What shall I do, or whither flee?” Where can I find a refuge for my sin-smitten soul? I am not fit to die. I am not fit for eternity. I cannot make myself a home. I cannot prepare myself. I cannot make myself a refuge. It must be something that is completely prepared for me, something that is completely done for me. That is the poor conies, “feeble folk.” O but their wisdom! They seek that rock, and they enter in that rock, and they make their home in that rock, and they are secure in that rock.

I do like the language of John Kent, and I am sure some of you do: “I’d to this Rock for shelter flee, and make my refuge, Lord, in Thee.” No other hope, no other refuge, no other hiding place but the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But the coney did not do it; the coney did not prepare it. You and I did not do it; you and I did not prepare it. O they make their houses in the rock. That is the religion which will take you to heaven: *in the Rock*.

So by faith we are brought to consider the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages. A question for some of you young ones. Where does that word come in Scripture: the Rock of Ages? I think if you search right through the whole of Scripture you will not find that expression comes anywhere. Toplady found it in the margin of Isaiah 26, verse 4. Now it is not in Scripture itself, but it has become one of the best-known phrases in the gospel vocabulary. “Rock of Ages, cleft for me; let me hide myself in Thee.”

“Yet make they their houses in the rocks.” You will find that in Holy Scripture there are many, many descriptions of the Lord Jesus, many character-offices, many relationships, many characters that He bears. I think you will find that the one which comes more than any other is this: the Rock. You have it constantly in the Psalms: the Rock. Of course, I am sure there is a reason, humanly speaking, why we have it so much in the Psalms. David knew what rocks were and he knew what caves were. He knew what it was to be hunted. He said he was hunted like “a partridge in the mountains.” He knew what it was: he and his followers could find a hiding place in the rocks. You have it so often, the Lord compared to a rock, and in the New Testament as well as the Old. The Rock foundation on which the church is built; the Rock, the refuge in which the people of God hide. “Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers” – these clefts

in the rock – “and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.”

You might say, But why is it especially that the Lord Jesus is so often compared to a rock? You say, We perhaps think of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb in all His tenderness, or the Shepherd in all His love. A rock? I suppose the point about a rock is strength, stability. A rock is not easily moved. A rock is not easily shaken. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” The Rock. O but a sinner needs a hiding place from the anger of God against sin. He needs a hiding place from divine wrath. He needs a hiding place when he comes to die. Like the poor coney, he cannot create it, he cannot make it, he cannot burrow in the earth. O but to see the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages.

So often we speak and sing of sheltering in His wounded side. Now what does that mean? I take it really to mean this. The point about a rock – if you want a hiding place some of those sheer rocks you perhaps see in the Rocky Mountains of America, there is not hiding place there for a coney; the sheer face of the rock. But if there is a little hole or a crack or a crevice. We see the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ the Son of God from everlasting. That is the sheer rock. O but we see the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ at Calvary, stricken, smitten and afflicted, a sorrowing Saviour bleeding, dying, bearing His people’s sins, putting them away by the sacrifice of Himself. That is not the sheer rock; that is the cleft rock. That is where the sinners’ hiding place is, to shelter in His wounded side. But it is really this: realising no hope in myself as a sinner, to flee for refuge to a once-crucified but now risen Saviour, the Rock of Ages, and to seek mercy through His precious blood, and so by faith to enter into the cleft of the Rock, there to be saved. The conies make their house in the rock, and O may you and I make our house in the Rock. “I’d to this Rock for shelter flee, and make my refuge, Lord, in Thee.”

“The conies are but a feeble folk, *yet* make they their houses in the rocks.” But you see, beloved friends, it is not just at the beginning of a work of grace, when we are first brought into real concern about our sins and our souls and our standing for eternity. Throughout the whole of our Christian life we are so weak and so helpless and so feeble. O but to find this home in the Rock! You see the wisdom with which these little conies are blessed. “Be Thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort.” These little conies are so weak, but they are blessed with wisdom

to realise their weakness. They are in danger from savage beasts that are about and they are specially in danger from birds of prey like the eagle. But they are so fearful and so weak and so poor, they have only one ground of safety. It is to flee to their little hole in the rock. The first sound, the first shadow, and they have disappeared. They are in their hole in the rock. They like to come out because they are creatures that love the light. They love sunlight, to bask in the sun, but they never go far away from their home in the rock. The first sound and they have disappeared and are back in their home in the rock. Their weakness is their strength. They have not any power to fight against a bird of prey or a savage beast, but their wisdom is to know it, and their safety is in flight. The first sound of danger and they are not there; they have disappeared. Though their home is actually in the cleft of the rock, they dwell among the rocks all the time. They do not venture far away. They are creatures of the rocks. They are never far from their home. “Feeble folk.” O but their wisdom! If only you and I lived closer to Christ; if we lived closer to the Saviour; if only you and I, as soon as temptation comes or danger threatens, we disappear, fleeing for refuge to the Saviour! “I’d to this Rock for shelter flee, and make my refuge, Lord, in Thee.”

“The conies are but a feeble folk.” The apostle once said, “When I am weak, then am I strong.” That seems a contradiction or a paradox, but we know what he meant. When these conies are weak, they are strong. Why? Because they have been blessed with wisdom not to stay, but to flee to their homes in the rock. And the opposite is true: when we are strong, we are weak. If we think we can manage by ourselves, we have no need to seek God’s help, no need to depend, it is then we are a prey to every danger. O but our weakness, our strength. “Feeble folk.” And the Lord will bring us at times to feel what feeble folk we are. Why? So that we will continually cling and cleave to the Saviour, continually flee to Him for refuge in prayer.

“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.” What a prayer that is of David: “When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.” Is there anyone here this morning, and your heart is overwhelmed within you – things within and things without, thing you are concerned about, things in your soul, your family, your business, your health, your circumstances, the unknown way? “When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.” “O lead me to the Rock that’s high above my head.” The point being

the greatness, the glory, the grandeur of an almighty God and Saviour. “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.”

“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.” A few people here remember a few years ago when we visited Israel and it was at Caesarea Philippi that we just managed to see the conies. It is strange we saw them there, because it was at Caesarea Philippi, not far from where we saw those conies, where the Lord Jesus heard Peter’s magnificent confession and said, “Upon this Rock I will build My church.” But we had a terrible job to see any conies, until we just about saw a coney’s nose peeping out of its hole. They are so timid and so fearful and so frightened, it is almost impossible to see them. The first sound, the first shadow, even if they see their own shadow, they are up and off, they flee. They have no strength, but they are blessed with wisdom. It is hard to kill a coney. It is hard even to see a coney.

“Feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.” So there is the beginning of a work of grace, a sinner fleeing for refuge to Jesus. “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.” There is sinner throughout the whole of his life and pilgrimage, and those special times of weakness and those special times of need, and the only strength you can find is not in yourself but in Christ as you are enabled by prayer, by faith, to flee for refuge to Him. O to be blessed with that wisdom to cling and cleave to Him!

But perhaps thinking especially of the solemn hour and article of death, O how many people are trying to make a refuge, a foundation, a home. But like the little conies, we are not able to do it. There is only one hiding place will do in the swellings of Jordan, and that will be to be found sheltering in the Rock of eternal ages. “I’d to this Rock for shelter flee, and make my refuge, Lord, in Thee.” It is a sinner resting on the precious blood, the merits, the work of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.” So their weakness, their feebleness, but their wisdom, the God-given wisdom they have naturally, the God-given wisdom the Lord’s people have, made “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” – not to trust in self. And then their homes, their dwelling place: in the cleft of the rock. O but their safety! It does not matter how weak; it does not matter how feeble; it does not matter how helpless they are. Once they are inside their home in the rock, there they are safe, there they can

dwell secure, and there no wild beast can touch them, and there no bird of prey can reach them.

It is a similar analogy to the dove. “O My dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs.” Its safety is in flight. It does not fight with that eagle; it flies immediately to its home in the rock. When the storm comes, it does not wait. As soon as the storm begins to fall, it flies for refuge to its nest “in the sides of the hole’s mouth.” We think of that expression, “O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove that maketh her nest in the sides of the hole’s mouth.” O but the safety of these little doves in the rock, the safety of these conies in the rock, and the safety of the Lord’s people in Christ. It is a beautiful truth, the everlasting safety, the security of the people of God. “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” Satan cannot reach them. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” O this wonderful hiding place in the merits of the Saviour!

“On Him almighty vengeance fell,
That must have sunk a world to hell;
He bore it for a chosen race,
And thus became their Hiding-place.”

The safety, the eternal security of the people of God in Christ. And those special times of need: bereavement, sorrow, illness, affliction, fear, the unknown way. O but,

“Dear Refuge of my weary soul,
On Thee, when sorrows rise,
On Thee, when waves of trouble roll,
My fainting hope relies.”

And no sinner ever fled for refuge to Jesus in vain. Well, these little things, exceeding small but exceeding wise. The great thing, if you and I are found numbered amongst them, identified amongst them, so weak, so helpless, so feeble, but safe, eternally secure in Jesus.

“The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.” I would desire there might be many here like these feeble conies who shall blessedly find your home, your salvation, your security in the Rock of Ages.

Great Rock , for weary sinners made,
When storms of sin distress the soul,
Here let me rest my weary head,
When lightnings blaze and thunders roll.

Within the clefts of His dear side,
There all His saints in safety dwell.
And what from Jesus shall divide?
Not all the rage of earth and hell.

Blessed with the pardon of her sin,
My soul beneath Thy shade would lie,
And sing the love that took me in,
While others sank in sin to die.
O sacred covert from the beams
That on the weary traveller beat,
How welcome are Thy shade and streams;
How blest, how sacred, and how sweet!