

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 238

“Rest in Christ, the Ark of Grace”

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 13th February, 2005**

Text: *"But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark" (Genesis 8. 9).*

There is one word in Scripture which is very precious and exceedingly attractive to God's people, and that is the word *rest*. The Lord's people love it, either in seeking after it, longing for it, or in the possession of it. Now there is so much about it in the Word of God. We think also of those beautiful, sacred truths that we have just been singing about (hymn 1061: "Lord, I believe a rest remains"). "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" – the rest of faith in Christ, the only resting place in His Person and in His merits; and the everlasting rest which remains in heaven for all the people of God. It is an attractive theme, isn't it? Unless I am solemnly mistaken, there are a few of you here this evening and that is the thing you want, the thing you long for: to know, to possess, to enjoy that rest which remains in Christ for the people of God. So when we sang that hymn, you meant what you said and you felt it, and there was real prayer, real desire in it: "O that *I* now the rest might know, believe and enter in!"

Well, this verse I have read to you in Genesis 8 in the account of Noah and the ark here is the first mention we ever have in Scripture of the word *rest*. Of course, at the beginning we read that God rested on the seventh day, and later even in this account of Noah and the flood we have, "And the ark rested ... upon the mountains of Ararat." But this word itself, *rest*, this is the first place where it ever appears. I think you can learn a lot from the teaching that there is in Scripture when a word is used, mentioned, for the first time. The last time this word *rest* is mentioned in the Word of God: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, *that they may rest from their labours*; and their works do follow them." Now that is the last time we have this word *rest* in Scripture, and here it is the first time.

Well, you know what the context is: it is the end of this dreadful flood, the deluge, the waters are beginning to abate, and Noah sends forth the dove and the dove returns to the ark. Beloved friends, I believe this is a most beautiful illustration of the Lord's dealings with His people in love and mercy as they are brought to seek rest in Jesus and to find that rest in Jesus. Noah "sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground." When the new birth takes place, when the Lord begins to deal with a sinner in love and mercy, He puts him forth, puts him forth in a way of gracious exercise, puts him forth in a living concern about his soul and his sins and eternity. He has never known anything like this before. It is something new, something different. He has been at ease; he has been unconcerned. Now the Lord in grace puts him forth just as surely as Noah lovingly took the dove and put that dove forth, sent that dove forth.

"But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot." Neither can that sinner under the teaching of the Spirit of God, put forth in a way of spiritual concern, gracious exercise; neither can that one find any rest, find any resting place. It is what our hymnwriter says: "Still seeking rest, but finding none." "The dove found no rest for the sole of her foot." Before that you had been content in the world. You had been undisturbed. Your conscience had been at peace. You had been happy. But now there is a difference. It may have come suddenly, unexpectedly. It may have come gradually. O how sovereign God is in all His dealings! It may have been some sudden word, some sudden experience, or it may have been little by little you were brought to see that "*this* is not your rest," this world, "it is polluted." And so because you know that *this* is not your rest, you are going forth trying to find some rest for your soul. You realise now you have a soul to be saved or lost. You realise you are guilty and God is holy. You know He demands a perfect righteousness; you cannot provide it. You realise that one day you have to meet Him, stand before His face, give an account; you are not ready for it. You are reminded that one day you must die; you are not prepared. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

Again, God is sovereign in this. You do not find any two cases the same – as Philpot puts it in his beautiful, well-known letter – any more than you find two leaves the same. You remember Philpot's letter. If a man who had been abroad in Africa brought a leaf back to this country, and someone said, "That is not a leaf; it cannot be a leaf. I have never seen

a leaf like it before.” He begins to bring a standard, an oak leaf: it must be that shape. And Philpot says, “The foolishness of it, that a leaf must be one shape, one pattern!” “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” Some can tell you the very place where the Lord brought them into concern. Others cannot, but they know this: that there is a concern; and they know this: that they want to be right; and they know this: that they are seeking to be right; and they know this: that they are made to pray. O that going forth as Noah’s dove was sent forth, that going forth in a way of gracious exercise, soul concern. But you cannot find a resting place.

“The dove found no rest for the sole of her foot.” We do not want to be fanciful – you know I hate that – but I suppose before the flood came this dove had her old haunts and her old perches and the place where she used to make her nest, perhaps that cleft of the rock or perhaps at the top of that tree. Why could she not find them now? Well, because the flood had covered them – either swept them away, or because the flood had just covered them, they were all hidden out of sight. That is just what will happen to you, exactly what will happen to you. Your old perches, you cannot find them.

Some of us go back to our early days. We were just like that dove. Our nest had been stirred up. We had been sent forth. We were concerned. We could not find our old nest, our old perches, our old hiding places. They had all been swept away, or they had all been completely covered. That happiness we once had in the world, we could not find a resting place there. Our old pleasures, we could not find a resting place there. And those friends, well we could not find a resting place with them. The things we used to do, and the places we used to go, our thoughts and our plans and ambitions, well some were lawful and they still had to continue, but there was no resting place there. It was “still seeking rest, but finding none.” That taking things for granted, well we could not take things for granted any longer. There was not any resting place there. And our old self-righteousness had all gone. “My best is stained and dyed with sin; my all is nothing worth.” And that going to chapel, well we began to go to chapel as we had never gone before, our necks on the stretch, but we could not just be satisfied with going to chapel. And what about those good things that other people thought about us? Well, we wanted something more than that. “What shall I do, or whither flee, to escape the

vengeance due to me?” “Still seeking rest, but finding none.” We go back to those days. It was just like Noah’s dove. “The dove found no rest for the sole of her foot.” Why? The waters were on the face of the whole earth. All the old perches and nests and resting places were either swept away or covered up. She could not find them. And neither could we wherever we went. It was “still seeking rest, but finding none.” I remember well when I was there, the awful weight of eternity. What about those things you used to love, and your friends, those pleasures you enjoyed, those games, that sport, all those things? Well, there was death, darkness, upon them all. Eternity! O but that anxious condition, that going here and there, flying to and fro like Noah’s dove.

Beloved friends, there is divine sovereignty in it. Some are there a long time and some are there only a moment. In my interest in John Kershaw, I came across the case of an old woman called Esther Ramsbottom, born in the year 1740. I longed to know if she was one of my ancestors; I think perhaps she was. But in the account, John Kershaw said she was as ignorant as a dog about religion. One day, no one knows why, she went to a prayer meeting at the house of a man called Mr. Ashworth, and John Kershaw says she was quickened into life and felt her need as a sinner. And these were John Kershaw’s words: he said, “Immediately she looked to the cross of Christ and found peace.” You think, a woman as ignorant as a dog about religion and she goes to a prayer meeting, perhaps the first time she had ever been to a service, and the Lord cut her down and immediately she was blessed with the assurance of faith.

Really to bring it nearer our own times, Mrs. Pavlik [a minister’s widow, who was a member at Bethel in her last years]. She was growing older and she had been to the funeral of a favourite aunt. O they did love this woman! As they were going from the funeral, she just heard someone say, “O isn’t it a dreadful thing that there was not the slightest hope concerning her!” It was like an arrow in Mrs. Pavlik’s heart. That aunt she loved so much, there was not a hope concerning her. She said that night she knelt down to say her prayers as she had always done but her mouth was shut. All she could feel was she was a great sinner. If there was no hope for her aunt, what hope was there for her? She cried for mercy, and immediately she found it and found full salvation in Christ. She was blessed. It was so sudden that some people wondered if it could be real. “But,” she said, “I can’t tell you anything else.” And as the years

passed by she looked back to that day as the time when the Lord truly blessed her.

We do not see so much of this today, but the Word of God is full of it. Why is it we do not hear so much of it today? Like the jailer, a vile, wretched sinner. “What must I do to be saved?” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” And immediately he is delivered. But then there are some who wait a long, long, long time. Now the mystery of divine sovereignty! And some feel it more deeply, and some not as much. But they are all brought to this: “They all declare, I nothing am, my all is bound up in the Lamb.” With all of them, the effect of the new birth, the effect of the Holy Spirit’s teaching is that they long to find that rest. There is that sense of unease. There is that sense of complete dissatisfaction with themselves, with everything here below. It is serious; it is solemn; it is weighty – not ready, not prepared – and it is that seeking for rest.

But I would tell you this, dear friend, whoever you are: if you are seeking that rest anywhere short of Christ, you will never find it in this world or the next. There is only one place you will ever find rest and that is in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. If the Lord is dealing with you, you will have to return to the Saviour, and that is what repentance is really. It is a returning from yourself. It is a returning from your sins. It is a returning from the world. It is a returning from all this false seeking here and there. Like Noah’s dove you will have to return. “She *returned* unto him into the ark.” That is the only place you will ever find rest, you will ever find peace, you will ever find salvation. “If you are returning to Jesus, your Friend, your sighing and mourning in singing shall end,” now and to all eternity.

“The dove found no rest for the sole of her foot.” Neither will you, beloved friends, wherever you are looking, wherever you are seeking it. Some seek a long time; some only seek a short time; some look here, there and everywhere; some just look in one place. But with everyone it is this: she “found no rest for the sole of her foot,” because there was not any resting place. What a lot of good divinity there is in William Gadsby’s word: “I cannot rest without my resting-place.” She found no rest, and she returned. “She returned unto him into the ark.” She returned to the only place where she could find refuge. She returned to the only place where she could find rest. And beloved friends, she found it, and so will you.

“He welcomes the weary to come and be blessed with ease from their burdens, in Jesus to rest.” That blessed promise still stands to all those like Noah’s dove seeking rest and finding none: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

O beloved friends, “There remaineth therefore a rest” – in Christ – “to the people of God.” It is a solid rest. It is a safe rest. It is that same rest that Bunyan’s Christian found at the cross. If you read through Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian, awakened to feel his need in the City of Destruction, was just like Noah’s dove, seeking rest, finding none, till he came to that place where there was a cross, and looking up at that cross, the burden rolled away from his back and at last he found rest. You remember what he said: “He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.”

Bunyan saw this: that all the rest that God’s people ever know comes to them through Christ’s sorrow. O there was no rest for the Saviour on the day of atonement. There was no rest there at Calvary. “The Man will not be in rest, until He have finished the thing this day.” O but the blessed Redeemer did finish the thing that day and then rested in the grave. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Have you ever seen the Lord resting in the grave? Have you ever rejoiced with Him that His sorrows are for ever ended? Have you ever thought that “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied”? “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” O the place where the Lord Jesus rested! But His holy soul was resting in the bosom of His Father in heaven, body and soul for a little season separated, both standing in everlasting union with His divine Person. O but that rest of the Saviour in heaven for all eternity! He sat down. “After He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever,” He “sat down” – the Saviour’s rest. And Bunyan says, “He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.”

How many have found a resting place in the cross of Christ, “the wounds of Jesus, for my sin,” and like Bunyan’s Pilgrim, gone on their way rejoicing. Have you ever learnt that song:

“Blest cross! Blest sepulchre! Blest rather be
The Man who there was put to shame for me”?

“But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark.” O but she found a resting place there, and so will you!

“In the ark the weary dove
Found a welcome resting-place;
Thus my spirit longs to prove
Rest in Christ, the Ark of grace.”

And not just at the beginning: again and again when you are tormented by sin, assailed by Satan, when you feel your need, when you are harassed, when there are so many things in your life, “Return unto thy rest, O my soul.” You say, “What! Can you leave it?” “Return unto thy rest, O my soul.” You will find no other resting place but where your soul first found rest. “Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.” “In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.”

“But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark ... then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.” If words mean anything at all, Noah was waiting to welcome her, and the Saviour in heaven is waiting to welcome these returning sinners who can find no rest in this world for the sole of their foot. Noah “put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.” It seems to me reading this account that the poor dove was really weary with her wanderings. She had been here and she had been there and she could not find any resting place and she was returning. But reading it, it almost seems as if, well, could she really get there or was she going to come short? Would she never reach the ark? Would she never find that place of safety? She found it nowhere else.

Unless I am mistaken, I think there are quite a few of you here this evening and you are just like Noah’s dove. You are weary. You have been seeking all these resting places and have not found them, and you are returning to the ark, but it is just as though you cannot get there. “O that I now the rest might know, believe and enter in!” That is just what Noah’s dove wanted to do. She wanted to enter in, but it was as if she could not enter it. She could not just get there.

I read to you those two chapters in Hebrews (chapters 3 and 4), of that rest which remaineth in Christ for the people of God. “Let us

therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.” Do you know why she did not come short of it? Do you know why she did reach the ark? Do you know how she did enter into that rest? Because Noah reached out his hand and pulled her into the ark. And that is just what the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ does with these weary doves who are longing to enter in and feel they cannot. He puts forth His loving, gracious, almighty hand and pulls them in. “Draws them to His loving breast; there they find the gospel rest.”

“He put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.” So what about that prayer, “Draw me, we will run after Thee”? She cannot just get there; she is weak; she is weary. Then, “Draw me.” “Draw me to Thy loving breast, there to find the gospel rest.” Then I can enter in by faith to that rest which remains in Christ for the people of God. Noah “put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.” I have often mentioned this over the years, because it was something I never forget. It was Mr. Foster preaching at Haslingden one week night and in his prayer he quoted this verse. O but the weight! He said, “*Pull, Lord; pull, Lord.*” I thought, what a prayer! And that is just what we need. “*Pull, Lord.*” Like Noah, he “pulled her in unto him into the ark.” There is strength here. There is nothing feeble here, nothing helpless. It is this tried, almighty arm which is not shortened that it cannot save, which can reach right out to this weary dove that is returning, that fears it shall never enter. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”

O but Noah “put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.” Now there are just two things. The first is the loving welcome. I believe Noah was as pleased to receive that dove back into the ark as the poor dove was to arrive. When you think of the willingness and the love of the dear almighty Saviour, that kind, affectionate, loving welcome as the poor dove approaches the ark. “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God” – here by faith in Christ and then in heaven eternally. “O that I now the rest might know, believe and enter in!”

So first of all, as the dove at last reaches the ark, that kind, that loving, that gracious welcome. And then the other thing, the second thing. Well you know what it is: the safety, the security of Noah’s dove in Noah’s arms and in the ark. O the blessed safety, the eternal security of those who

like that poor, weary dove have returned to Jesus, returned to the Ark of grace; those sinners, though unworthy, being so lovingly, tenderly, graciously drawn into the ark and held safe and held eternally secure. “Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His loving breast.” O may those of you like Noah’s weary dove returning to the ark sweetly find that loving welcome and then to all eternity know that blessed security. “Safe in the arms of Jesus.”

“He put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.”