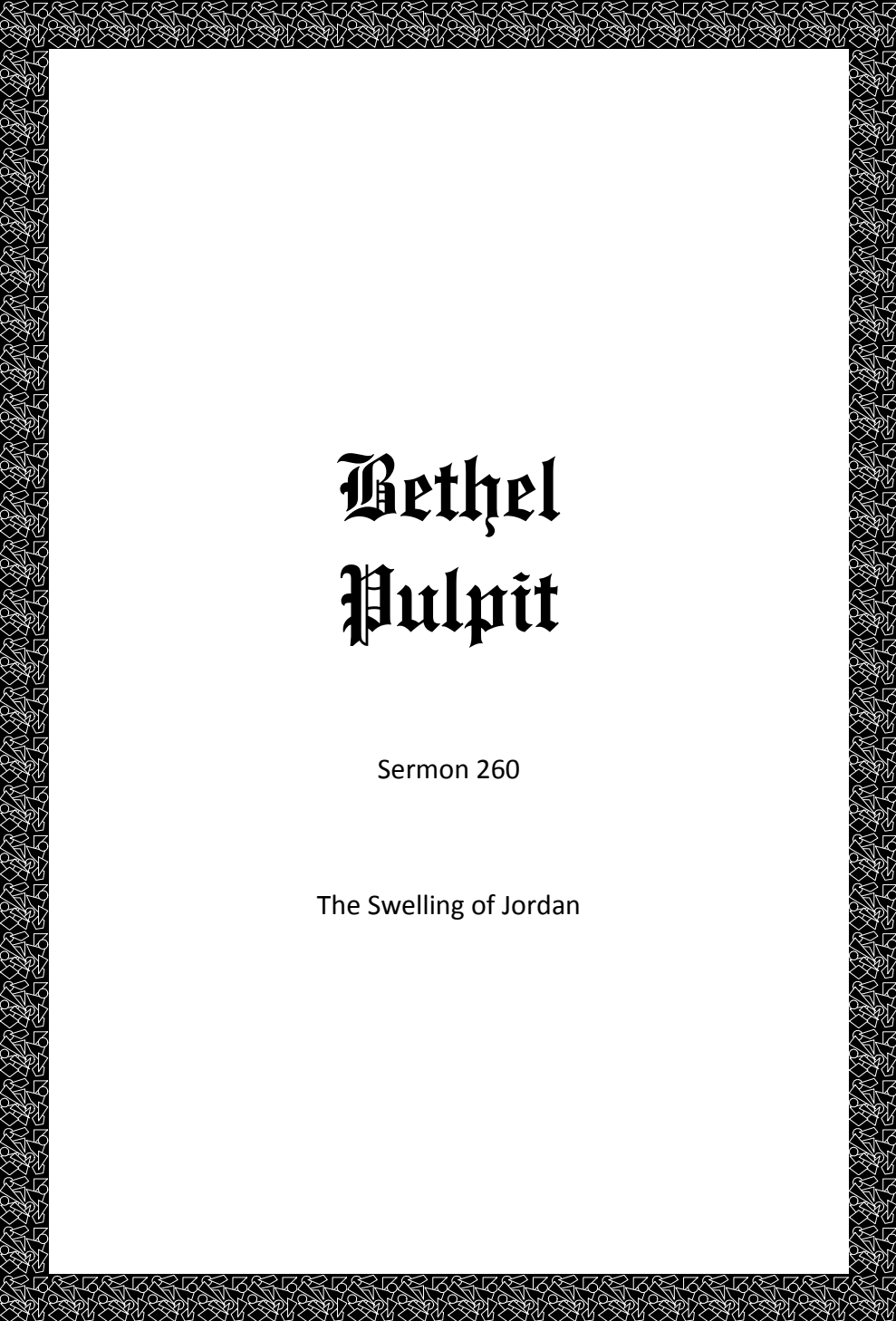




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 260

The Swelling of Jordan

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 4th February, 2007**

Text: *"How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12. 5).*

In the whole of Scripture there is not a more important question than this: "How wilt *thou* do" – *thou* – "in the swelling of Jordan?" Because all of us must come there. When I was a young boy, on our way to chapel we passed a wayside pulpit, and this was what was written on it: "We may travel the sea of life without Christ, but what about the landing?"

Beloved friends, we are here on this little earth for a short time, some longer, some shorter. God has created us, placed us here, that we might honour and glorify His name. He is our Creator. He has a perfect right that our lives should be lived to His honour and glory. He is a holy, holy, holy God. He has a perfect right to demand that we live holy, holy, holy lives. But do we? When our little lives are ended, then we have to give an account. Our spirit shall return to God who gave it. We shall have to appear personally before His judgment seat. We shall have to give an account of the deeds done in the body. The swellings of Jordan will end our little stay upon earth. The swellings of Jordan will bring us into the great unknown, a never-ending eternity. "It is appointed unto men once to die." That is an appointment we cannot be late for, we cannot break, we cannot fail to keep. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." By nature we live as if we are going to be here for ever. Yet it is only a little while, even with the longest. Even Methuselah! It was only a little while. But then eternity; that can never end. The swellings of Jordan, the cold, deep, dark river of death. It will usher us into that great unknown, into eternity, to receive God's righteous sentence, "Come, ye blessed," or, "Depart" – for ever.

In Christian theology, Christian vocabulary, Jordan, the River Jordan, has always been counted as typifying death. The children of Israel having journeyed through the wilderness, before they could enter Canaan, they had to cross over Jordan. So in Christian vocabulary there has always been this comparison: the day of death, the swellings of Jordan.

"Death! awful sound! the fruit of sin,
And terror of the human race;

Who, except Jesus smiles within,
Can look the monster in the face?"

Perhaps some of you think it is very morbid this evening. Well, if a little child were running towards the end of a cliff and going to plunge over to be killed, it would not be morbid if you told him, if you shouted to him, if you tried to stop him. Beloved friends, this is not just for aged people. Some of us in our early days, the Lord caused us to stop and to stand still and to face this question and to try to answer it: "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" These things were made very real. These things were made very solemn to us. But if only we each might realise how little a time we are here upon earth. God has placed us here and He seeks His honour and glory. But we have not glorified God. It was a heathen king to whom that word was spoken: "And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." Have you glorified God in all your life? Have you walked consistent with His holiness? Have you obeyed His holy, righteous law? It is because we are guilty, because we are sinners, there is this fear, this trembling as we think of the swellings of Jordan.

Now, "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" I take it the exposition of the verse is something like this: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?" In other words, the little things in our lives, the things that annoy us, that trouble us, that irritate us, if we cannot manage those, how are we going to manage when we come to greater things, harder things? "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" In other words, if sometimes *life* is too much for us, then what will *death* be? "If in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

I believe, in the spirit of it, every sinner saved by grace is brought to face this question. Now how many of you can answer it this evening: "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Do you ever think about it? "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" Do you ever think of it? Do you ever wonder how you will stand? Do you ever realise that by nature you are not ready, not prepared? Have you had to pray that the Lord will prepare you? Have you ever seen that the only thing is to find a refuge in Jesus?

“Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide;
O receive my soul at last!”

“How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” Those of you who are familiar with Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* will realise at the close of Part I he has a lot to say about this. Christian and Hopeful saw in front of them this wide river, and so dark, and so deep, and though they were godly men they both trembled; they were both afraid; and they asked a question. They asked that question, Is there no other way to the Celestial City, no other way of reaching it, apart from going through that river? And the answer was, There is no other way; you must go through that river. There are just two who have been exempted. One was Enoch; one was Elijah. But apart from that, all the human race must go through that deep, dark river until the day when the trumpet sounds and the Lord returns. You remember when they came there, Christian said, “I begin to sink. I fear that I am going under. I am going to be overwhelmed.” And Hopeful said, “Be of good cheer, my brother; I feel the bottom, and it is good.” At length Christian, as he struggled on, did find that the bottom was good.

You know what the bottom is: the Rock of Ages. And that is your only hope and my only hope for when we come to the end, to have our hope firmly secured upon the Rock of Ages, because all Jordan’s swellings can never move that Rock, and can never overwhelm a sinner who is on that Rock. But it is a solemn thing if we are not on the Rock, if we are in our own standing, if we just have to do with sinking sand. “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” Have you a sweet hope, sinner, that by faith your feet have been fixed on the Rock, of necessity fixed on the Rock, because you have no other ground on which to stand? The Lord has solemnly taught you that you cannot stand on any other ground, and you have a sweet hope amidst all your sins and fears and woes that you have been brought to stand upon Christ the Rock of Ages. Then your standing can never be moved in the swellings of Jordan. It will be farewell to friends and earthly comforts and everything here below. They will not be able to help us then. Every vain hope, every false hope will be swept away.

I believe – and I want to speak lovingly and affectionately – in our chapels there is a lot of take-it-for-granted religion. That will all be swept

away in the great day. There is a lot of resting on the good opinion of other people. That will all be swept away in the great day. There is a lot of trusting in the prayers of the godly. That will all be swept away in the great day. All our supposed goodness, all our chapel attendance, all our prayers, everything, all these things are going to be swept away. If we have nothing else, then we will be swept away, and swept away and swept down for ever. Now, “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan,” when all these things are being swept away?

To go on a little bit further with Christian and Hopeful, Bunyan said that all they really lost in the river, the garments of their mortality. O how swiftly, rapidly, unencumbered with a body of sin and death, did they ascend to the Celestial City to receive the eternal welcome. But Bunyan concludes like this: there was a man called Ignorance who had been following along all the time with Christian and Hopeful. He had not the slightest difficulty getting over the river. There was a ferry boat waiting for him and the name of the man who owned the ferry boat was Vain Hope. Ignorance got over so much more easily than either Christian or Hopeful. He got over without the slightest trouble. Vain Hope took him across. Boldly he went up to the gates of the Celestial City. Bunyan said he never saw the lord of the city come down to meet him, but when he confidently knocked at the door, they asked him for his certificate. That is another question: have you and have I a certificate, sealed with the solemn oath of God and sealed with the blood of Christ, which, if it were demanded, in all our unworthiness and sin we could hand it in? But Bunyan said that Ignorance fumbled about in his bosom. He had no certificate. He was bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness, and Bunyan said, “Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven.” That is how *Pilgrim’s Progress* ends. Mr. Frank Gosden used to say, “What an unspeakable mercy that there is a way to heaven from the very gates of hell!”

But, “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan,” when it sweeps everything away? But you see, it is a wonderful mercy that there are some things which even the swellings of Jordan can never sweep away. A sinner’s union with Jesus, that eternal union with Jesus, that can never be swept away. The promises that you have locked up in your heart, that you plead, on which you rest, they can never be swept away. “The Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever,” that can never be swept away. And come closer: that little, trembling hope of a child of God, that is

sometimes so weak, and sometimes tossed about and sometimes racked with fear, that little hope that anchors in Christ, that can never be destroyed in the swellings of Jordan. What an unspeakable mercy! There is a lot of good divinity in the old hymn:

“Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
When the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
While your anchor holds within the veil.”

“Which hope we have 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.” The hope of every sinner saved by grace is cast within the veil. “Into that within the veil.” What is there within the veil? A dear Saviour, Jesus the Son of God. A great and glorious High Priest, ever living, ever interceding, presenting the merit of His death, “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.” And that is where our anchor, hope, is cast: not in anything in this sinful world, not in anything in our own hearts. But that anchor which is cast within the veil, it can never be swept away; it can never be destroyed. The swellings of Jordan cannot move that.

So you might go on. The love of Christ to sinners. “Many waters cannot quench love.” The faithfulness of God in a trying hour. His glorious promise: “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.” “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” Whatever your fears, whatever your hopes, if centred in the Person and finished work of Christ, then you will stand in the swellings of Jordan.

“And when through Jordan’s flood
Thy God shall bid thee go,
His arm shall thee defend,
And vanquish every foe;
And in this covenant thou shalt view
Sufficient strength to bear thee through.”

“How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” But may it be solemn. May it be real. May it be a cause of concern. May it not be taken for granted. May there be many prayers ascending. But above all this: “When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I”

– to have that rock foundation, to have a good hope in Jesus which is as an anchor of the soul.

“How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” I read to you this evening those two beautiful chapters, chapters 3 and 4 in the Book of Joshua. The children of Israel were wandering for forty years in the wilderness. They knew that one day before they could enter the Promised Land, before they could enter Canaan, they had to cross over Jordan, and I think they must have hoped that when they came there, the waters of Jordan would be low. When they got there, Jordan overflowed its banks at that time. It had never been deeper. The impossibility of it! The many fears that Joshua had and the children of Israel! “Ye have not passed this way heretofore.” There was no bridge, there was no ferry, there was no boat, and there was a great multitude. “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.”

Now you remember what happened. It was God who did it. It was God who made a way. It was God who silenced their fears. It was God who divided the waters of Jordan. What was it? The holy ark of God, the ark of the covenant, which in all its fulness represented the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, now that had to go first, the priests carrying it, and the children of Israel had to follow behind at a distance, a long way behind. There must not be any presumption. There must not be any irreverence. Also, they must be able to see the ark going before. “When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.” There Jordan was in flood – the swellings of Jordan – and there this people who must pass through safely if they are ever to reach the Promised Land, the land which flowed with milk and honey. And then you see the wonder of it. Never forget that holy ark represented Christ. The ark went before, and as soon as the priests stepped down into Jordan, the waters of Jordan divided and the whole Israel of God passed over safely into the Promised Land, and not till then did the waters of Jordan flow on!

What does it mean? What does it signify? Well, “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” By faith we see that the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has gone before. “When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them.” There is not a step they have to tread but He has gone before. And in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross at Calvary, we see our great High Priest step right down into the swellings of Jordan. “All

Thy waves and Thy billows,” He cried, “are gone over Me.” But passing through the swellings of Jordan, He took the sting from death and the victory from the grave for all His beloved people. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” And He made a way for all the redeemed to pass safely through Jordan into the Promised Land, into heaven itself. O but,

“The waves of swelling grief
Did o’er His bosom roll,
And mountains of almighty wrath,
Lay heavy on His soul.”

Never forget that in His baptism the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ literally went down into this same Jordan. He was immersed in it, to set the example for all His beloved people, but also to foreshadow His deeper baptism of suffering even to death in the swellings of Jordan at Calvary.

“Down to the shades of death
He bowed His awful head;
Yet He arose to live and reign,
When death itself is dead.”

And beloved friends, this is our only hope, your only hope, my only hope. It is “looking unto Jesus.” It is “to keep our eyes on Jesus fixed.” It is as sinners to rest our only hope, our complete dependence on Him, and then following our incarnate God right down into the waters of Jordan, through Jordan into the Promised Land, into heaven itself. “Following our incarnate God, possess the promised rest.”

“How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” Our only hope, our only plea, if Jesus the Son of God has gone before and in dying abolished death for His people, and in dying opening up a new and living way even through the swellings of Jordan into heaven itself. It will be a wonderful mercy if when you and I come there the Holy Spirit has prepared us, if we have a refuge in Jesus, if we are on the Rock, if we have an anchor cast within the veil. And then following Him who was symbolised by the holy ark of the covenant, if when you and I come there we can with an honest heart say the words of the hymn:

“Nor fear to cross that gloomy sea,
Since Thou hast tasted death for me.”

Now what a mercy and what a wonder and what a prospect! “How wilt *thou* do” – *thou* – “in the swelling of Jordan?”