

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 265

Christ His People's Surety

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 3rd June, 2007**

Text: *"I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever" (Genesis 43. 9).*

As this chapter begins, there is not a more sorrowful man on the face of the earth than old Jacob. The chapter before closed with two statements almost of despair. Yet in both of them Jacob was completely mistaken. The first thing he said was, "All these things are against me." You say, Jacob, if you only knew, all these things are *for* you. This man in Egypt who seems to be behaving so strangely is your long-lost son. He is going to provide for you in your old age. He is going to deliver you and all your family from famine. These things are not against you; all these things are *for* you. Many a dear child of God in the furnace of affliction and in the flood, if not using the very same language as Jacob, has felt the same: "All these things are against me." But the time has come when you look back and you see in the Lord's sovereign, almighty, gracious hand they are all working together for your real good, just as all these mysterious dealings of the man in Egypt were for Jacob and his sons.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

All poor Jacob could see was the frowning providence, but very soon he saw that smiling face

The second despairing word that old Jacob spoke was this. He said, "Then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." But there was not a more happy old age than that of Jacob. His wildest dreams had come true, that his beloved Joseph was still alive. You read through the closing chapters of the Book of Genesis. There is not a happier deathbed in the Word of God than that of Jacob. His gray hairs were not going down to the grave in sorrow; he was going up to heaven in joy.

But poor Jacob was in trouble here. You remember his sons had gone down to Egypt to seek corn. They had met Joseph. They did not

recognise him; he recognised them. And mysteriously, wonderfully, God's ancient promise to Joseph was at last fulfilled. But he put their money back in their sacks. He kept Simeon. He said he would never see them again unless they brought Benjamin. And old Jacob insisted that Benjamin should not go. He said, Joseph has gone; Simeon has gone; not Benjamin too. But his sons protested that unless Benjamin went, there was no more corn. The man would not see their face and they would die of famine. The sons felt they must go, but Jacob said they could not go, that he would not agree to Benjamin going. It really seemed it was an impasse until Judah spoke.

One thing you notice: this is a different Judah from the one we find those years before so cruelly treating his young brother Joseph. There is a difference here. There is a change. O the wonders that grace can perform! We see Judah here offering to make himself utterly, completely responsible for Benjamin's welfare, so much so that if for any reason Benjamin is not returned, Judah is willing that he himself should die. Later in the next chapter you find how lovingly and courageously he speaks these words when Joseph talks of keeping Benjamin.

So this is Judah offering to undertake complete responsibility, promising without fail to bring his young brother Benjamin back again. "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever." And Jacob felt he could fall before that. He felt he could receive it. He felt his beloved Benjamin would be in good hands, safe hands. So he entrusted him completely to his son Judah.

So much, then, beloved friends, this evening for the background. Now I want to bring these words before you this evening in a spiritual sense. One of the great subjects of God's holy Word is the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ being Surety for His people. It is almost as if the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God spoke these words of Judah here to His eternal Father. There is so much of this subject in the Word of God. The *last* time it is mentioned: "By so much was Jesus made a Surety of a better testament." But this is the *first* time we ever have mention of this word *surety* in Scripture. I have often said this to you: take notice of the first time a word is ever used in Scripture, because often it gives you the clue to the meaning of that word right throughout the whole of the Word of God.

So leaving Jacob, leaving Benjamin and leaving Judah, I want to speak of these beautiful words in a typical sense as if belonging to the great Surety, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They are beautiful words, aren't they? "I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let Me bear the blame for ever." I would commend this as a most beautiful and precious subject to you, the Suretyship of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In all His characters, all His offices, all His relationships, He is precious to His people – there is a blessed suitability in them all – but none more than this: Christ the sinner's Surety.

What is a surety? A person who legally makes himself completely responsible for someone else, so if that person falls into debt and cannot pay it, it is the surety who has to pay. If the person must be imprisoned, it is the surety who will endure that imprisonment. Really a surety is a person who at law, in a legal sense, undertakes to do everything that is necessary for this person for whom he becomes surety. So if I were legally surety for you and you incurred a debt, you would not be punished for it; I would be the one who would be punished in your place; I would be your substitute; I would take your place.

There was a case like this in Puritan times. There was a godly knight called Sir Richard Baker. Some of his writings on the Psalms are very precious. Sir Richard was a very generous and kind man and he became surety for one or two people. Well, they incurred debts and they could not pay them, and the debts were so great that even Sir Richard could not pay them, so the poor old knight spent his last days languishing in prison and there he died. That is just a sad but simple illustration of the responsibility of a surety. That is why in a natural sense in the Book of Proverbs you have so many warnings against becoming a surety, especially for a stranger. "He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it." Naturally speaking it is the most foolish thing a person can ever do, to become surety for a person he does not really know, a person he cannot really trust.

Well then, the Son of God as His people's Surety. O blessed be His name, in eternal love undertaking to do everything for His poor, lost, ruined, guilty people, everything needful to deliver them from hell; everything needful to procure their pardon; everything needful to bring them safe to heaven at last. So there is a greater than Judah here, He who

according to the flesh sprang out of the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7. 14); He who in the Book of the Revelation is described as “the Lion of the tribe of Juda.”

“I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let Me bear the blame for ever.” This was the undertaking of the dear Son of God in the covenant of grace. Before the world had any being, God the eternal Father looked forward into time and saw the whole human race lost, ruined in the Fall, and He chose out a people and loved them with an everlasting love and determined that one day they should be brought to heaven. But in what way? How could they come to heaven? So He gave them into the hands of His beloved Son, and His beloved Son in love received them, and there from all eternity He was set up as the Surety of His people. They were all put in His hands. They were all safe. Really the people of God were as safe, secure, as sure of reaching heaven when they were put in the Surety’s hand as when at last they shall be safely landed there.

And if Jacob looked on his son Judah and felt that confidence, that he could leave his beloved Benjamin in Judah’s hand to bring him safely home, how much more did the eternal Father look with confidence on the Son of His love as He undertook all the cases of that multitude that no man can number – and they were all impossible cases, every one of them! O it will be a wonderful thing if tonight by faith you can see your case there, you can see your case in the hands of your Surety, you can see the eternal Father placing you here, viewing you with all your sin and ruin and guilt, and yet seeing that you will be sure to be brought safe to heaven. So if there are debts to be paid, the Surety must pay them. If there is imprisonment, He must undergo it. If there is banishment, if there are stripes, He must bear them.

“This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
He pity ne’er withdrew.”

“I will be Surety for him.” The Saviour knew what it would cost Him, but O the love that filled His heart! “I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let Me bear the blame for ever.”

So we pass on. We see the Son of God incarnate, born of a virgin, made under the law, made of a woman, Jesus coming into this world. We see Him coming with a suretyship engagement; that is, He had a multitude of sinners that no man could number that He was carrying on His heart. “Behold ... His work before Him,” and He knew what that work was before Him. He knew what it would cost Him. But, “He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.” These poor souls for whom He is Surety, God demanded a righteousness. They had not got it. So He lived that holy life as His people’s Surety that His glorious righteousness might be reckoned to their account. And then the sins must all be atoned for, and the debts they owed to divine Justice, they must be paid.

“I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him.” And you see it in the Garden of Gethsemane and you see it at Calvary: the Father requiring of His beloved Son as His people’s Surety all that they owe. “Of My hand shalt thou require him.” And there in the garden and on the cross how solemnly and how sacredly did the Lord Jesus walk out that word: “He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it”! When you get home, read John Berridge’s solemn hymn [Gadsby’s, number 148]:

“For wretched strangers such as I,
The Saviour left His native sky,
And Surety would become.”

But there, you see, at Calvary He did everything His Father required, everything His poor people needed. There He fulfilled that suretyship engagement to the last jot and tittle. He died and was buried. He rose triumphant from the dead as the open evidence that His Father in heaven was completely satisfied. The Surety was free; the Surety leaves the prison. And so in the Surety the whole blood-bought church of God is saved with an everlasting salvation. But do not just think of it as a legal transaction. See the agony and see the blood. And see that death upon the cross. Faith delights to come there. What a blessing it has been made to many, and may it be made a blessing to many tonight:

“Since Thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,
And then again at mine.”

That is where the salvation of the church of God stands.

“I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him.” Now beloved friends, when the Surety rose triumphant from the grave and entered heaven, that was not the end of His suretyship engagement, because do not forget it was necessary He should do everything for their pardon and acceptance, but it was also necessary that He should actually bring them all to heaven, each one of them, every one of them. So that means that His engagement is that every single one for whom He died shall one by one be brought to feel their need, brought to confess their sin, brought to flee for refuge to Him, and brought to find eternal salvation in Him. And that suretyship engagement is still being fulfilled. It has been fulfilled with a few of you here; I believe it is being fulfilled at present with some of you here; and I pray that it will still be fulfilled here at Bethel. As if the Saviour says, Father, this sinner, with no interest, no concern, but he is one I undertook to bring to Thee in glory. I undertook for him in the covenant of grace, and now the time has come.

So it was with the dying thief. Christ undertook to be his Surety in the covenant of grace and time is fast ebbing out. He is soon going to be in eternity. It seems he is lost for ever. Is it possible? But you see, “Father, I will be Surety for him” – for the dying thief, for Manasseh, the chief of sinners. “I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let Me bear the blame for ever.” So one by one He is gathering them to Himself. There was one ungodly man and right at the end of his life, the Lord dealt with him, and before he died he had clear views of the reason for it. He said to those around, that the Saviour will be able to say, He was given to Me, and I have not lost him. You remember the Saviour’s prayer in the garden: “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory.”

“I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let Me bear the blame for ever.” Now the great point personally, beloved friends, is that *you* need a surety; *I* need a surety; and unless we have one, we can never get to heaven. Why? Because there are so many things we cannot do ourselves, but the Surety is one who does *everything* for us – a perfect Saviour. Gadsby puts it like this:

“Jesus is His name, and Christ;
He my Surety is and Priest;
He has saved my soul from sin,
And I stand complete in Him.”

Let me ask you a loving question. How many of you this evening see a beauty in the suretyship of Christ? How many of you feel what a wonderful thing if Christ were your Surety, if all *your* concerns, all *your* sins, all *your* affairs were in His gracious almighty hands? Well, in a sense the work of faith is this: a guilty sinner venturing on an almighty Saviour and seeking to lay your concerns in His hands.

“My soul into Thy arms I cast;
I trust I shall be saved at last.”

The Lord will not be offended with language like this.

In Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Word of God (176 verses), there is one verse, if you read through the whole psalm, that somehow seems to be out of place. The psalm is all about the Word of God, but suddenly David says, “Be Surety for Thy servant for good.” It is a beautiful verse; it is hidden away there. Perhaps it will drop into a few hearts this evening as your prayer: Lord Jesus, be Surety for me for good. I do not deserve it; I am unworthy; I am sinful; I cannot handle my own case; I cannot manage it myself; but I see Thou art the Surety of Thy people, and I see all of them are lost, ruined sinners by nature like me. Then on mercy’s ground, on the ground of Thy precious, sin-atoning blood, Lord Jesus, be Surety for me for good. And if you are enabled by the Spirit of God to pray that from your heart, you will receive an answer. “I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let Me bear the blame for ever.”

I think all of you are familiar with the case of good Hezekiah. He was nigh unto death. He had the sentence: “Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.” And Hezekiah did not feel ready; he did not feel right. I wonder how you and I would go on if tonight the messenger of death came to us: “Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.” In the thirty-eighth chapter of Isaiah you have some of the most solemn, awful language in all Scripture. Hezekiah ends it like this: “O Lord, I am oppressed.” Well he might be, and well might you and I be if

the sentence of death faces us, and if we feel we are not ready, not fit to die. “O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.” In other words, be everything to me and do everything for me. But if you look at the margin of your Bible, I think you will find that the literal wording given is, “O Lord, I am oppressed; be Surety for me.” So those two scriptures are really one and the same: “undertake for me”; “be Surety for me.” I do not know whether you have noticed that the rest of the chapter contains some of the highest language in all Scripture, most triumphant language. “The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day.” “Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.” O the difference grace can make! It was in answer to that prayer: “O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.”

“From the oppressive weight of sin,
Lord Jesus, set me free.
Blood and righteousness divine
Can rescue even me.”

“I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.” And this brings us to the conclusion of the whole matter. There is the suretyship engagement of the Son of God in eternity past. There is fulfilling His office as the Surety in His death and resurrection. Then there is His suretyship in heaven, one by one bringing those for whom He died to His feet as sinners saved by grace. And what remains is this: that all of them for whom He became Surety and suffered as Surety and died as Surety and rose again, they must be brought safely to heaven. Only then will He give back His suretyship into His beloved Father’s hands and say, Here they are, Father. Behold Me and the children that Thou hast given Me (Heb. 2. 13), and not one is lost. There will not be one vacant seat at the wedding supper of the Lamb. Sometimes you go to a wedding and at the reception there is an empty place. Someone was unwell or they cancelled the day before and there was not time to fill that place. There will not be any empty places at the marriage supper of the Lamb. “Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.” There will not be one vacant place. There will not be one sheep, one lamb missing from the fold. There will not be a single jewel missing from the Saviour’s crown.

“He will present our souls
Unblemished and complete
Before the glory of His face,
With joys divinely great.”

From being young, this has been a really sweet, blessed, attractive subject to me: Christ His people’s Surety. I hope it will be to you. I hope the dear Holy Spirit will reveal it to you. But more than that, above all that, beloved friends, I hope you will be blessed with a personal interest. “I will be Surety for him; of My hand shalt Thou require him: if I bring him not unto Thee, and set him before Thee, then let Me bear the blame for ever.”