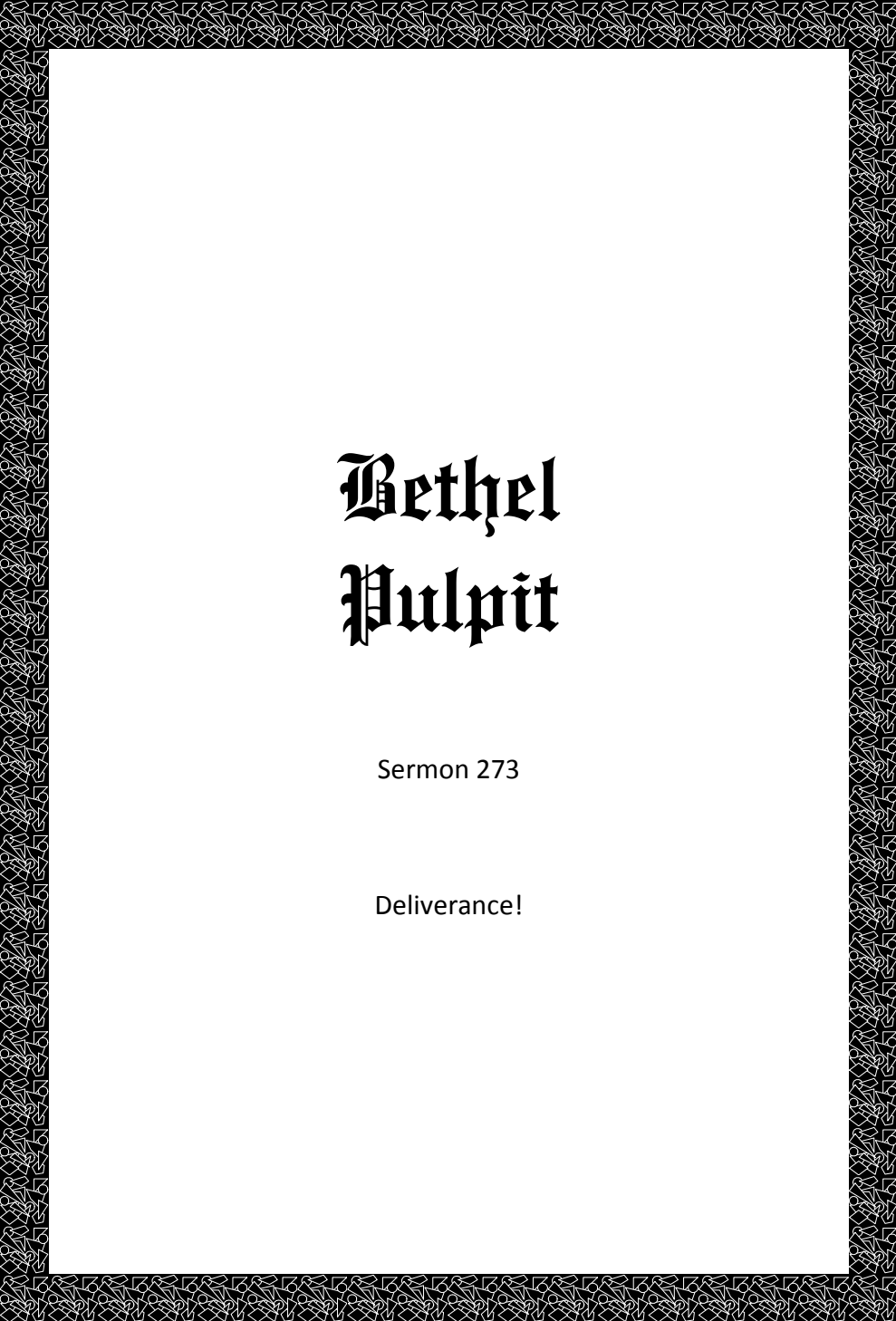




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 273

Deliverance!

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 17th February, 2008**

Text: *"For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: **who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us;** ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf"* (2 Corinthians 1. 8-11 – especially verse 10).

The Lord here describes Himself as "the God of all comfort" (verse 3). It is a beautiful title, and some of these titles of the Lord *are* beautiful. In one place, "the God of hope"; in another place, "the God of peace"; in another place, "the God of all grace." So we might go on. But here: "the God of all comfort," and what a mercy that Almighty God *is* the God of all comfort! He has a blessed ability to comfort, and the very name, one of the very names of the Holy Ghost, is *the Comforter*. He "breathes comfort where distress abounds."

So this Epistle opens up with a little doxology to the God of all comfort. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation." So we are told we are to expect tribulation. John Newton says, "Why should I complain of want or distress, temptation or pain? He told me no less." And Paul adds here, and the Lord Jesus did: "In the world ye shall have tribulation"; "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (verse 4).

That is a lovely passage. It is not a kind of irksome duty or a harsh command. If the Lord in any little measure has comforted your heart, it is not a harsh command, but it should be your delight to comfort those who are in any trouble. Some of the Lord's people have had that sweet ability to comfort those who are in any trouble. I do not just want you to think of dear, tried, tempted, aged saints. Paul was once in great trouble, cast down in great measure, but he said, "God, that comforteth those that are cast

down, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” Who was Titus? Well, just a young man, just a beginner in the things of God, but he was a comfort to the Apostle Paul. Now it is a wonderful thing if you can just speak a word of comfort. We have had them here at Bethel who could. May we still have them at Bethel who can.

“Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ” (verse 5). He saw that what he suffered was for Christ’s sake. It was according to the will of Christ, and it was in union with His suffering Lord and Head. “The sufferings of Christ abound in us.” And he knew a like measure of consolation – “Are the consolations of God small?” – flowing from the Saviour, He who was once crucified, He who “knows what sore temptations mean, for He has felt the same.”

“Our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation” (verse 7). There is a blessed promise there. May faith be able to lay hold of it. May faith plead it. And then may you prove it. “As ye are partakers of the sufferings” – not just onlookers – “partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.” So you have this little introduction, if you will, to this Epistle, God as the Comforter.

And then Paul tells us a few things about how the God of all comfort helped him. He bears a testimony and he does it for our encouragement. The Lord did it for me, he says; the Lord will do it for us. The Lord was with me; the Lord will be with us. It is a good thing if you bear a little testimony. It may be very simple; it was with the psalmist. What could be more simple than this: “I was brought low, and He helped me”? Well, some of you can say that.

“We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia.” What that trouble was, we are not told. I think it is wise that in Scripture these things are left open. If it was some trouble, you would say, “I don’t know anything about that.” But all Paul tells us about that trouble was this: “We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.” Now that is very strong language, and the Word of God does not exaggerate. “Pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but

we had the sentence of death in ourselves.” Now this is it; this is the God of all comfort; this is the God of all grace: “That we should not trust in ourselves.” All God’s dealings with you and me, whether they are in providence or whether they are in grace, are to this end: “that we should not trust in ourselves.” Why, didn’t the wise man say, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool”? Yet we will trust in ourselves. It does not just say that we should trust in God, “but in God which raiseth the dead.” That is, God who is almighty; that is, God who on the third day raised His beloved Son from the grave. That is, the power of the resurrection that can be known and experienced.

So we come to this verse: “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.” So there is a looking back here, and there is a looking forward, and then there is in between. If you will, you have the past: He “delivered us from so great a death”; and then you have the present: “and doth deliver”; and then you have the future: “In whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.”

Paul says, “Who delivered us from so great a death.” We do not know exactly what it was, but there are quite a few aspects of this, this testimony, this looking back. He “delivered us from so great a death” – the Lord not just as the God of all comfort, but as the great Deliverer. “Who delivered us.”

Really, when you go back in the Old Testament, you have it over and over again. You go to the Red Sea, Israel coming out of Egypt. “When thou canst no deliverance see.” The Red Sea – the waters of the Red Sea in front ready to swallow them up; the Egyptians pursuing behind; no way of escape on the left hand or on the right hand because of the mountains. That “Red Sea place” that sometimes you have in your life. “Who delivered us.” “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” The waters divided and Israel crossed the Red Sea, the waters of the Red Sea.

“Who delivered us.” Now you can think of David so many times in his life in the days of Saul. “Who delivered us.” You have it in one chapter and another, in one Psalm and another. And then he quotes that word: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me” – deliverance in answer to prayer.

“Who delivered us.” And perhaps especially you think of Daniel. “My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths.” “Who

delivered us.” It was an impossible case. They were real lions and he was a real man and he was thrown amongst them. “Is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” Now is He? “Is thy God ... able?” Is He “able to deliver thee?” And Daniel says, “He delivered us.” You can go right through the Old Testament. You can think of Hezekiah; you can think of Jehoshaphat; you can think of Joshua; you can go here and there. *He* “delivered us” – this almighty God, this almighty Deliverer. That is looking back in the Word of God.

But then, beloved friends, come to it in a gospel sense in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. What is it? “Who delivered us from so great a death.” Now there was never so great a death as that state in which God’s people were found by nature. It was in danger of eternal death. “Who delivered us.” O the great work of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“When involved in sin and ruin,
And no helper there was found,
Jesus our distress was viewing;
Grace did more than sin abound.”

“Who delivered us.” And how did He deliver His people from “so great a death”? Why, He came into this world. He became a real Man. He was born at Bethlehem. He lived His life in obedience to the law that He might work out that everlasting righteousness His people needed and which should be theirs. But then especially He delivered His people by suffering and bleeding and dying for them, bearing the curse, going down into the chambers of death and of the grave, making atonement for their sin, opening the precious fountain in His precious blood. And the blood-bought church of God in heaven to all eternity will look back to Calvary and say, “He delivered us.” “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.”

“Who delivered us.” When the ransom price was paid, when the Saviour cried, “It is finished,” when He bowed His head in death, that was deliverance, and there was a voice from heaven: “Deliver [them] from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.” “Who delivered us.” And the evidence of it: His glorious resurrection from the dead; His own deliverance and the evidence of the eternal deliverance of all those for whom He suffered, who stood in eternal union with Him.

“Who delivered us.” That is looking back. You come to it personally in the life and experience of the people of God. Born into this world of sin and wickedness and woe, every one of us needs deliverance, and it is “from so great a death.” We are dead in trespasses and sins, unable to deliver ourselves, not even able to feel our need. As we are born into this world and grow up as sinners, the one thing we need is deliverance “from so great a death,” and that is by the new birth, the quickening work of the Holy Spirit breathing divine life into the hearts of sinners who are dead in sin. It is the great theme of the Epistle to the Ephesians. He says, “In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” That is “so great a death.” It is not an innocent death. If we can use such an expression, it is an active death. It is a death that is hateful to God. It is a death of disobedience to Him. It is a death of rebellion against Him.

“Who delivered us from so great a death,” in the new birth. “You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” And so, delivered from this great death, you feel your need and you begin to move, and you begin to act. You begin to pray; you begin to repent; you begin to believe. You have to flee from this world as a city of destruction. Lazarus was literally dead, and when the Lord raised him to life, “Lazarus, come forth,” well immediately he came out of the grave. “Who delivered us.” Lazarus was delivered from “so great a death” literally. Sinners saved by grace are delivered from “so great a death” spiritually, and they can no longer remain in the world or in their past life or their false hopes. They can no longer remain in that grave. They come out, even if falteringly, hesitatingly. “Jesus, save me, or I die.” “But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).”

“Who delivered us.” Do you understand some of the paradoxes of the gospel? You have to be in them to understand them. It is only those the Lord has delivered from death who feel they need to be delivered from death. The dead cannot feel anything. A dead man cannot feel anything. He cannot feel that he is dead; he does not know he is dead. “The dead know not any thing.” A sinner dead in sins does not know he is dead, does

not feel he is dead, but once he is delivered from that death, he begins to feel things and he begins to feel that he wants to be delivered. He wants to be delivered from sin. He wants to be delivered from hell. He wants to be delivered from the curse of a broken law. He wants to be delivered from the guilt of sin and the power of sin. He wants to be delivered by an almighty Saviour. He wants to be delivered by the blood of Christ. He begins to pray for it, and the substance of his prayer is, "Lord, deliver me. O in Thy love and mercy deliver me."

The time comes when the Lord does deliver him. It is only the Lord Jesus who can, and He is so sovereign. With some it seems to be immediately; some seem to wait a long time. With some it is a clear deliverance and with some not so clear a deliverance. But it is always on the ground of the Saviour's finished work, always through mercy, through blood. And the time comes, raised up to a good hope in Jesus, when that sinner can sweetly feel, "He delivered me." I trust that many of you here tonight can say it: "He delivered me," and may you be able to testify of it. Like that little slave girl in the terrible days of slavery: she was snatched away from parents, home, loved ones, everything. She was there in a slave market and all kinds of people came. She wondered what was going to happen to her. Some, if they were not wanted, were killed, and some thrown into dreadful conditions. She was full of fear. A kind gentleman came, and she did hope he would be the one who would buy her, and he did. He paid the price and bought her and took her away to a comfortable home, and she was so full of delight, she could not help shouting out, "He delivered me!"

Do you ever sing the song of deliverance? "Raised from the dreadful power of sin, the law's tremendous curse." Do you ever sing the song of deliverance? If Moses and Miriam did on the banks of the Red Sea, how much more so those redeemed by grace and saved by blood!

"Let Zion, in her songs, record
The honours of her dying Lord
Triumphant over sin."

"Who delivered us." Then in the life of a believer, there are many deliverances, and at times there is "so great a death" in trouble, in tribulation. What does Paul say? "Pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves." "Who delivered us."

“Then let our humble faith address
His mercy and His power;
We shall obtain delivering grace,
We shall obtain delivering grace,
In the distressing hour.”

“Who delivered us.” The promise is sure to all His people. “Who delivered us.” Let me appeal to you. How many of you this evening in greater or less measure can look back to your spots and your places, and you can bear this testimony humbly: the Lord delivered me? Paul once said – he gives a great catalogue of his troubles, but then he said, “But out of them all the Lord delivered me.” Some of you this evening can go back to that day when the Lord delivered you out of nature’s death and blindness and that state of unconcern. Some of you can go back to that day when the Lord delivered you from your fears and raised you up to a sweet hope in Jesus. And then those times in your life, that dreadful sorrow, that awful bereavement, that deep disappointment, and you can look back now and say, “The Lord did deliver me.” It is a wonderful thing if any of us this evening in any little measure can look back and say, “He delivered us.”

“Here we raise our Ebenezer;
Hither by Thy help we’re come.”

“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day.” That is the past.

Then we have the present, and we can each fill that in ourselves this evening, where we are, where we are not, what we are feeling, what we are thinking. But this word stands: “Who ... doth deliver.” He has not lost His power to deliver. He has not changed His mind. His promises will not fail for evermore. He did deliver, even though it was “so great a death,” and He “doth deliver.”

We have a very similar passage to this, extremely similar, in the Old Testament in the life of David when he was only a boy. You remember that he volunteered to go and fight against Goliath, that great giant who was defying the hosts of the living God. David was moved with a desire for the Lord’s honour and glory, and he went with just his five pebbles from the brook and his sling in his hand. David spoke language very similar to this. He looked back. Paul looked back here. He had “so

great a death,” but he looked back and said, “Who delivered us.” And David looked back. There was a time when he was attacked by a lion and by a bear and with God’s help he was able to overcome then. He knew it was not his own strength. He was able like Paul to say, “The Lord delivered me.” “The Lord ... delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear.” He could bear that testimony. But what about this: “And doth deliver”? You say, David, you have something *now*. You have a giant to fight. “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver.” “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” Now that is good divinity. What the Lord has been, He is now and He ever will be. There is no change in Him. What He did, He can still do. What He has promised in the past, He still promises today. In a gospel sense it is this: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” “The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” The Lord who did deliver me, He will deliver.

“Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver.” And then you have the unknown way; you have the future; you have tomorrow. Paul did; we do. Paul did not know what awaited him. He knew this is a world of sin, a world of sorrow. But this was his hope and his confidence and his resting place: “In whom we trust that He will *yet* deliver us.” That word *yet* – it means the Lord’s arm is not shortened that it cannot save. It means His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. It means that His mercy has not died out. It means He has not forgotten to be gracious. *Yet*. “In whom we trust that He will *yet* deliver us,” despite our sins, despite the depth of our sorrow. “In whom we trust that He will *yet* deliver us.” And beloved friends, it is not trust ill-grounded. Trust in Christ was never ill-grounded. Wasn’t it Bunyan who found comfort in that word: none ever trusted in the Lord and were put to shame?

“Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.” In a word it is this: “He who has helped us hitherto, will help us all our journey through” – the past, and the present, and the future. “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.”

And then there is just one other word to conclude, and perhaps you think it is not necessary, and perhaps it takes you by surprise, but the Lord

has put it there: “Ye also helping.” What! Does Almighty God need help? “Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.” What does that mean in its simplicity? Does God need help? Of course He does not; He is almighty. But it does mean this: that the Lord uses means for the comfort of His people, for the deliverance of His people, and the means that the Lord has chosen to use: prayer; our own prayers and the prayers of our friends. God could deliver without that, but He has chosen to deliver in answer to the believing prayers, the all-prevailing prayers of His beloved people. He works by means. He could have done without David – He could have slain Goliath by a thunderstorm – but He used him; He used a pebble. He used Gideon’s pitcher and a lamp. He used Samson’s jawbone. He delights to use little things. He works by means, and if you understand me aright, He delights in prayer. He has determined to do it, but, “I will ... be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.”

He delivered us from so great a death; He doth deliver; He will yet deliver. “Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.” There is no fatalism here. There is the wonderful privilege of prayer. There is the mercy seat sprinkled with blood. There is the throne of grace. There is the wonderful promise: “grace to help in time of need.” Then beloved friends, pray on, and the Lord will honour your prayers and the Lord will answer your prayers. And what does he say? That “thanks may be given.” “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.” Do not forget Almighty God has added it. God has added it: “Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.”