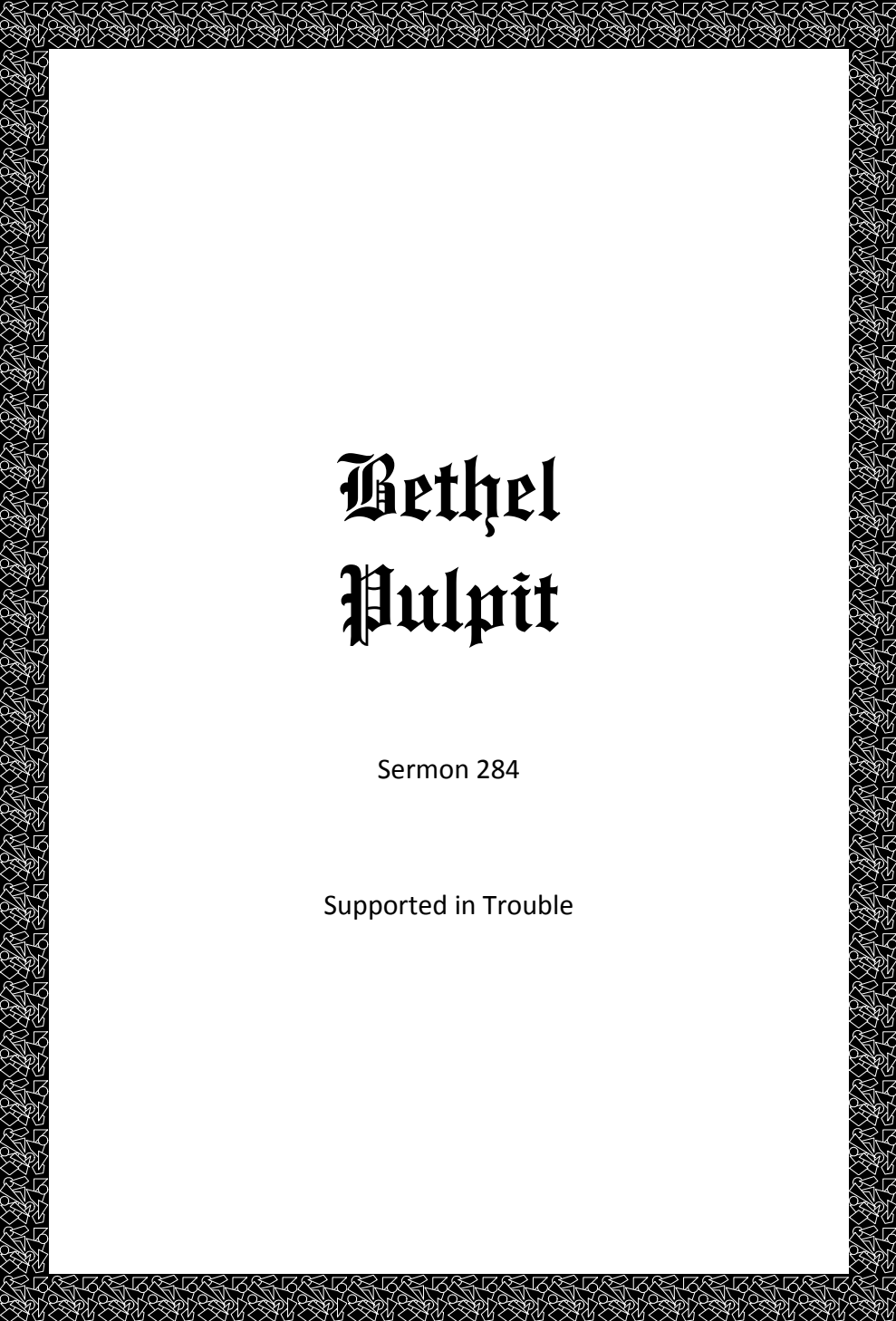




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 284

Supported in Trouble

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 1st March, 2009**

Text: *"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me: Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me" (Psalm 138. 7).*

Constantly I seem to be thinking these days about all the sadness and sorrow and trouble and difficulty that there is amongst us as a congregation, and that is why I seem to be led so often to speak to you of the Lord's gracious answer to those of you who are walking in the midst of trouble. That describes a lot of you this morning: walking in the midst of trouble – some personally, some concerning your families and those you love, some concerning your health, some concerning your providences and the future, some concerning your never-dying souls. It seems that at present so many of us have been brought to walk in the midst of trouble.

There are many, many things in the Word of God about trouble but this says, "the *midst* of trouble." Like those three Hebrew children in the burning, fiery furnace, they were in the midst of it, but they proved the blessed reality of this verse: "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ... Lo, I see four men loose ... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

"Tis expressed in words like these:

'I am with thee,
Israel, passing through the fire.'"

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble." Perhaps some of you are going to say this: But we are not in the midst of trouble, and how does this word affect those who are *not* in the midst of trouble? I believe the time will come when those of you who are not now in trouble, and perhaps have never known much trouble, when in future days, future years, the time comes – then some of these things, many of these things you heard from this pulpit, the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of remembrance will bring back to you for your comfort and consolation.

When I was a boy, I went to an anniversary service in the next town to us. I never saw the minister before or since, and he preached from, "The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it." Now I cannot remember at the time being particularly affected in any way,

and looking back I am not certain whether I was even spiritually interested at the time. But years later and over many years, again and again and again it was not just the text, “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it,” but it was as if I could see the dear man standing there in the pulpit. I can remember him at this moment just as he was, though that was the only time I saw him, and the very things he kept saying: “Have you got any hard causes? They are not too hard for Me; bring them to Me; bring them to Me. I will hear them; I will answer them.” And that sermon which did not affect me at all at the time has come back to me time and time again in the midst of difficulties and problems over the years. “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.”

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble.” There is the trouble in sorrow, circumstances, bereavement, loneliness, old age, affliction, illness, fear of the future, difficulties concerning work, disappointment. And then God’s people are often in trouble when they feel their hearts are hard, when they feel far off, and it seems the Lord hides His face and they see not their signs, and sometimes they feel with John Newton,

“Hardly, sure, can they be worse
Who have never heard His name.”

They have not much access, not much of a spirit of prayer. They do not know much about union and communion. And there are others who say, “Oh that I were as in months past!”

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble.” But it is to be *in the midst* of it; and it is to be *walking* in it. Usually if you are in something, if you are in a dark wood and you start walking, after a time you come out. But here this is walking in the midst of trouble, and not getting out of it, and still in the midst. “Though I walk in the midst of trouble.” Beloved friends, there is a background to this Psalm and there is a background to all David’s Psalms. David did not write them just like, say, Wordsworth wrote a poem. David wrote his Psalms out of his heart, his very experience. This dark, black background. “Though I walk in the midst of trouble.”

If you want the background to Psalm 138, read the first Book of Samuel and the second Book of Samuel, the life of David. Really you could put this heading over David’s life: “Walking in the midst of trouble.”

David knew more trouble than most. You think of how he was terribly treated by his wife Michal, and you think of how he had to flee from his home and wander in the dens and caves of the earth; how Saul hunted him like the partridge upon the mountains, when he felt there was a step between him and death. It was a life of trouble before he became king. And the death of his beloved friend Jonathan, and worse than that, when his other beloved friend, with whom he took sweet counsel as they walked together to the house of God, Ahithophel, turned against him. In the hour of David's greatest need, his closest friend proved to be an enemy. That is perhaps something you younger ones know; that is one of your troubles. Lots of young people have troubles with their friends. Perhaps that friend has turned against you, or deserted you, or said, "No" to you. Then perhaps David's greatest trouble providentially: his own son Absalom whom he loved so dearly, he not only turned against him, not only was rebellious, but he was seeking his life to kill him. And as David thought of these things, more than anything else the time when he was left to himself and fell into open sin and when he dishonoured his God and disgraced his profession.

Now there is a dark, black background to this Psalm. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble." But there is a lot of good divinity in this word *though*. David liked it; it comes in a few times. *Though*. It is not the end. There is still something. *Though*. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble." So often he puts a *yet* in. Well, the very verse before this, "Though the Lord be high" – the most high God – "*yet* hath He respect unto the lowly." It is a wonderful word, this *though*. It is not the end. There is still something in store. There is still a gleam of mercy. "*Though* I walk in the midst of trouble." *Though*. Let me just mention two others. "Yea, *though* I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me." That is a blessed *though*. And the other one, equally well-known, when David was dying: "*Although* my house be not so with God" – so many things wrong in the kingdom, in the family, in his very heart. "*Although* my house be not so with God; *yet* He hath made with me" – even such a sinner as me, that is in Christ – "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire." There is a resting place there.

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou." During the week, this word has been so much with me. When I visited the Bethesda Home, in the rooms of a few of our old people I read these few verses to them.

But this morning when I went in my study, it seemed as if I came to a stop here: “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou.” You could put a stop there; you could end the text there. “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou.”

“The gospel bears my spirit up;
A faithful and unchanging God,
Lays the foundation of my hope,
In oaths, and promises, and blood.”

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou” – almighty God. He is still there. He is always there. He is on the throne. He is in complete control. “My times are in Thy hand.” “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou” – a faithful God. “Tell of His wondrous faithfulness.” Thou, a gracious God, an almighty God who is making all things work together for my good, an all-wise God, a God who still loves me. “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou.” But especially, immutability, no change, no variation. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” Now this is it: “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou.” He is still there. He is ever there. He always will be there. He is on the throne of grace. He is still on the throne of grace.

“Thy mercy-seat is open still;
Here let my soul retreat.”

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou.” It is a wonderful thing. It is the foundation. There is a foundation here. There is a sure foundation. Beloved friends, I said there was a background to this text; there is. But there is a foundation to it, and there is a foundation underneath it, and it is a foundation that God never changes. Now your black background will change, and sometimes it will change for the better, but this foundation can never, never change.

The Apostle Paul was once walking in the midst of trouble. Especially with him it was in the church of God, things going wrong, apostasy, people turning back, disappointments with people he thought well of. He was walking in the midst of trouble. “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure.”

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou.” And really we could end the text there. But the Lord in His love and mercy has a lot more to say to us and to those of you who are walking in the midst of trouble.

He has some very beautiful things, some very blessed things. We will try to look at them with the Lord's help. May they be a comfort to you. We do need the Holy Spirit to "breathe comfort where distress abounds."

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me," give me new life. That is what reviving is. When we think of this word *revival*, we tend to think of the church of God. Well, there is an application here also to that. The church of God today is walking in the midst of trouble, enemies without and within, Satan opposing, all this militant atheism, and then the low state there is. How few really profess the Lord's name! How few are brought into the sweet liberty of the gospel! The church of God is walking in the midst of trouble. A wonderful thing if this promise be proved: "Thou wilt revive us." "Wilt Thou not revive us again: that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me," give me new life, give me new strength so that I do not sink, so that I do not fall, so that I am able to press on towards the mark, so that I can continue in my pilgrimage. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me." David is certain here; he is very confident. Usually David is praying for it, but here he is in the midst of trouble, but he says, "Thou wilt revive me." But spiritually, when we are in trouble because our heart is hard and we feel the darkness and the bondage and the Lord hides His face, and we are plagued with unbelief, and we do not feel the nearness. It is a beautiful word, a beautiful promise: "Thou wilt revive me" – fresh life, new life. Paul wanted it: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection." That is the reviving: the power of His resurrection. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

"Thou wilt revive me." O beloved friends, may we prove it, prove it personally, prove it in our midst as a congregation, prove it in the church of God, prove it in the denomination. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me." It means one thing: that the Lord is not going to leave you to sink in the midst of your trouble.

"His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through."

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me.” Now David has not finished yet. “Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” Well there was Saul, and there was Doeg, and there was Shimei. One of the old divines said if you read through the Book of the Psalms, you do not have any of these people mentioned by name, these evil men, Saul and Doeg and Shimei and Ahithophel. But he said that like a shadow you can see them flitting backwards and forwards behind so many of these Psalms. “Mine enemies.” “Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” I do like the eighteenth Psalm, the bit at the top before it begins. David wrote it “in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.” And that day will surely come.

“Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” Have you ever noticed – if you get your concordance when you go home, there is one expression we have over and over again in the Word of God? It comes in a lot of places, and especially comes in the Book of Deuteronomy (26. 8), what the Lord does, or has done, with His “mighty hand” and “outstretched arm.” Especially when that word is mentioned it refers to Israel being brought out of Egypt, the Passover night, the Red Sea – the impossibility of Israel’s case and the complete destruction of their enemies, how they were all swallowed up in the waters of the Red Sea, Pharaoh and his army, and the Israelites went over on dry land. “Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies” – Israel’s enemies then at the banks of the Red Sea. A mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

O but beloved friends, do you ever come to the Red Sea place in your life? Are any of you at the Red Sea place in your life this morning? You know what I mean: no way forward, no way back, no escape on the right hand, no escape on the left. That is where Israel was on the banks of the Red Sea – Pharaoh’s army behind, the banks of the Red Sea in front, great mountains on either side. Have you ever come to that Red Sea place in your life? If Moses looked forward, if Moses looked back, if Moses looked to the left hand, if Moses looked to the right hand: “When thou canst no deliverance see.” Do you know what Moses did? He looked up and heard a voice from heaven: “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” There was nothing Moses could do, nothing Moses had to do. God did it all. A mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

“Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” Now then you girls and boys, you younger ones, you must realise that today Christianity in general has thousands of enemies. You think of a little girl speaking of Jesus at school and being in trouble. You think of a nurse offering to pray with a patient and being in trouble. So you might go on. You think of this dreadful campaign on the London buses. You think of all the atheism. You think how the media are lined up against any vestige of Christianity.* God will have the last word. God will overthrow all His enemies.

“Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” It is a solemn thing to set up the thorns and briers against almighty God in battle. He says, “I would go through them.” It is a terrible thing to cast yourself against the thick bosses of the Almighty. Who was that man, eminent in his own eyes and in the eyes of the ungodly, that dreadful atheist in the eighteen hundreds, and his boast was that he had made the whole of Europe to laugh at God? Terrible boast, wasn’t it! And you know what happened when he was dying. He said, “I am afraid now that God is laughing at me!” “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” Puny man setting himself against almighty God. So you young people, do not be perturbed about all this. “The wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain.” It is a wonderful word, that. It means two things. There is the terrible wrath of the ungodly, and God will do one of two things. He will either stop it, or if He does not stop it, He will make it serve His own purpose for the honour and glory of His name. You realise that, that God uses even Satan to fulfil His purposes. You knew that, did you?

“Great is the mystery, truly great,
That hell’s designs should hell defeat.
But here eternal wisdom shines,
For Satan works what God designs!”

“The wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain.”

“Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” In a word, “He bindeth the floods from overflowing.”

“Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” I do not know whether any of you here are familiar with a book

that the older people in our chapels used to be very enthusiastic about. It was called *The Dialogue of Devils*, by John MacGowan. The old people used to love it. I am not very familiar with it, but I understand that in that book, MacGowan pictured the day the Saviour died and all the devils in hell rejoicing that at last they had triumphed, and then he pictured an almighty arm stretched out from Calvary right into the depths of hell when the Saviour cried with a loud voice, “It is finished,” to overthrow them and their plans and their projects for ever.

“Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” But our hymnwriter says,

“Mighty enemies without,
Much mightier within.”

And some of you no doubt feel that old nature arise, your sin and unbelief and the temptations of Satan and the world. “Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies.” “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

“And has He not His promise passed,
That thou shalt overcome at last?”

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me: Thou shalt stretch forth Thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me.” It is a good conclusion. I take it by the Lord’s *right hand* we are to understand the right hand of His grace. I have always taken it like that: His right hand of grace and His left hand of providence. You older ones remember dear old Mr. Gurney [a former deacon at Bethel, Luton, who died in 1979], and how in his affliction the Lord blessed him with that word: “His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me” – the right hand of grace, the left hand of providence. We need both.

“Thy right hand shall save me.” Salvation is the great thing, to be saved by the blood of Christ from sinking into hell, to be “ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.” “Thy right hand shall save me.” And so that prayer of every grace-taught soul, every newborn soul. You want the Lord to save you. You cannot save yourself. You do not merit it. You do not deserve it. You realise salvation is all of grace.

“Thy right hand shall save me.” But David here is thinking of his enemies. He is thinking of his troubles. He is thinking of his providences

day by day. And it is a wonderful thing if the Lord saves us there. “Thy right hand shall save me.” But we need that saving continually. We need saving from our fears. We need saving from indwelling sin. We need saving from falling. We need saving in the hour of temptation. We need saving from our unbelief. We need saving in difficulties and problems and sorrows. We need saving when we are ready to fall, when we are ready to sink.

“Thy right hand shall save me.” And again, David is definite. If you asked David why, I think he would say this: Despite all my sins and fears, I know my God, and I know His right hand is almighty. I know He is a gracious Saviour, and I know that He will never fail me, and never leave me, and never forsake me, despite all my sins. “His right hand shall save me.” It is a wonderful thing to say these things in a way of testimony, but David is able to say them even to his God. “I know Thy right hand shall save me.” The Lord will not be displeased with this. The Lord will not call it presumption. The Lord is pleased when His people speak like this.

“Thy right hand shall save me.” It is a mighty hand. So I read those few verses about Peter walking on the water, and then he heard the wind and saw the waves and he was fearful, and he began to sink. “And beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.” And that prayer availed, and it always will avail. There was this almighty hand reaching out to save him. “The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.”

“Thy right hand shall save me.”