

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 308

The Most High Ruleth

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 6th March, 2011**

Text: *"The most High ruleth" (Daniel 4. 17).*

Just a few words, very few words, but beloved friends, they are vital. This is our God, your God, my God, and He rules. He rules in heaven; He rules on earth. Why, as you come right to the end of holy Scripture, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth." He is in complete control. He is almighty. He is omnipotent. He is on the throne. With Him nothing shall be impossible. "This God is our God for ever and ever." And may we as a congregation ever have clear, believing views of the greatness of God. One complaint the Lord made to His ancient people was this: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." That is unbelief, and that is general religion, to think that God is such an one as ourselves. In another place the Lord complained to His ancient people how they minimised Him: "They ... limited the Holy One of Israel." Never put a limit on God.

Now here we have it. We have it in the hymn we have just been singing (number 4, Gadsby's); we have it right through the Book of Daniel. Perhaps some of you say, The Book of Daniel is a mysterious Book. Well, it is. Some of it is very hard to be understood. Perhaps some of you say, When I think of the Book of Daniel, what I think of is those two stories, the burning fiery furnace and the three Hebrew children, and Daniel in the lions' den. Well, if those are the only two things you really think about in the Book of Daniel, each of them is a beautiful commentary on this: "The most High ruleth." The king was determined to have his own way, determined to destroy Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He threw them into a burning fiery furnace. But he did not rule; it was the most High who ruled, and the fire did not burn, and He delivered them. And just the same with Daniel. There was another mighty king but he did not rule. It was God. Daniel's enemies were determined that these lions should destroy Daniel, but the lions did not bite.

"The most High ruleth." Now you have it from the beginning to the end of the Book of Daniel, but especially in this chapter. You have this great, this mighty King Nebuchadnezzar (the one who at last acknowledged the words of the text), the greatest king in all the earth. Do

not forget, these are not fairy tales. This is a real king ruling over a real kingdom, a great man, a mighty man. But he had to learn that it was almighty God who ruled, that in a moment He could bring him down to nothing. And then he proved that in a moment God can restore him.

A strange thing, this mysterious dream he had of a wonderful tree like one of the cedars of Lebanon. It was going to be cut down, destroyed, yet there is going to be the stump, and one day the stump was going to grow again. None of the magicians or astrologers could explain it, but Daniel could.

Nebuchadnezzar, this great, mighty king was this tree. He was going to be cut down in a moment, despite all his pomp and his glory. But there was still going to be a stump and he was going to be raised up again and himself make this confession, that it was the most High who rules and not himself. You see this great man, and under the powerful, afflicting hand of God he suffered from dreadful insanity, which I believe does exist, though very rare, even today. If you young ones are interested, you can look up and find the name given to it [lycanthropy], where a person can think he is an animal and behave like an animal – which Nebuchadnezzar did till seven times had passed over him (whether that means seven months, seven years or just a long period of time). But you have the greatness of God. “The most High ruleth.” And you have it in the life of this mighty king, how he is brought down and then how he is lifted up again.

“Keep silence all created things,
And wait your Maker’s nod.”

“The most High ruleth.” The way it has rested with me is like this. In this dark, sad, solemn day in which we live, and also with all the various concerns that so many of you have in your homes and lives and families and circumstances, what a wonderful thing to have a believing view of this by faith, that over and above it all, “the most High ruleth”!

“Our lives through various scenes are drawn,
And vexed with trifling cares,
While Thy eternal thought moves on
Thy undisturbed affairs.”

“The most High ruleth.” Well, first of all this evening, “the most High ruleth” in the nations of the earth. At present there is a terrible lot of

consternation, things happening. When you think of the terrible earthquake in New Zealand;¹ you think of all those happenings in the Middle East, especially Libya. But to see this and believe it: “The most High ruleth” – not Colonel Gaddafi, not President Obama. “The most High ruleth” – certainly not our own Prime Minister. “The most High ruleth.” To see that the Lord is in complete control over and above all these things, working out His own purposes. He will have the last word. He will be worshipped in heaven to all eternity when all the nations of the earth have perished. O to see this foundation truth: “The most High ruleth” – sovereign, almighty, omnipotent, in control.

The same when you come to our own country. There are so many things, surely, that in recent weeks have distressed us – these dreadful judgments in the law courts that have gone against those who were seeking to act rightly and stand for their own beliefs; the dreadful enmity against Christianity in any form; the blasphemy and the atheism; the dreadful idolatry in one way and another in the world; the immorality, things now accepted which were once a criminal offence; and so we might go on – the terrible state of our country, very much like the Roman empire before it perished. And as we look around, our hearts are filled with dismay. But may we still know that word we sometimes think of: “If the outlook is bleak, the uplook is bright”; the Lord is in control, and may He still hear the cries of His little remnant, those who sigh and cry because of the abominations done in the land. What did He do in the days of Abraham? What did He do in the days of Elijah? “The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

“The most High ruleth.” And then you come to the church of God. It is very, very sad. You think of the state of religion in the country and in our chapels. Recently I have been going back to my early days of preaching and I have a list of my engagements the first year, and nearly all the chapels where I preached are closed. Of those that are not closed, apart from one or two, they are no longer our chapels; they are no longer Strict Baptist chapels. You think of the godly ministers who have perished from the earth. “Help, Lord for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.” But then to see this, that “the most High

* Not long after this sermon was preached, there was the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

ruleth,” and if He does in the earth and among the nations of the earth and in our own land, how much more so in the church of God! And if you and I love Zion, always remember this: that the Lord loves Zion more. “The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” May there still be that burden: Put forth Thy holy arm in salvation; glorify Thine own name. “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us.”

“The most High ruleth.” But as we think of Almighty God as the most High, how we need to be kept in humility before Him, in meekness, in godly fear! How we need to be kept from disobeying Him! How we need to be kept from dishonouring Him! There is a most wonderful side to this truth; there is a very solemn side. We think of this great, almighty, sovereign Lord with whom we have to do. These are not things to be played with or tampered with, to have light views about, to be careless. O to be found in humble submission at the feet of Almighty God at His footstool.

“The most High ruleth.” To come to it personally – there are a lot of things here for our encouragement if only we can behold them by faith. This is the One who “with heaven and earth at His command waits to answer prayer.” The most High who ruleth is our prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God. If He is a sovereign, if He for ever reigns, if He for ever rules, if He for ever sits upon the throne, He sits upon a throne of grace and He bids the sinner draw near. If He is almighty and sovereign and holy and righteous and omnipotent, yet He is a God who loves sinners in Christ and who loves them with an everlasting love. This most High who ever ruleth is the One who sent His beloved Son to suffer, bleed and die, and His beloved Son stands between this great and holy God and guilty sinners so that they are permitted – no, invited – no, welcomed – to come before Him with all their sins and all their wants and all their sorrows. For if He is great in majesty, what does our hymnwriter say? –

“Though His majesty be great,
Yet His mercy is no less;
Though He thy transgressions hate,
Jesus feels for thy distress.”

If He hates sin, yet He pardons repenting sinners. It is this One who ever lives and ever reigns, who sits on the throne in awful majesty, who says,

“Come, then, repenting sinner, come;
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death.”

“The most High ruleth.” One day we must meet Him and give an account. But O to be prepared, and what a mercy the glorious gospel of His grace

“Points out the place where grace abounds;
Directs us to the bleeding wounds
Of our incarnate God.”

And so this is the way of salvation, the way of forgiveness, the way to heaven, the way to be prepared.

“The most High ruleth.” O but the wonderful point that this is the One who hears and answers prayer, and if the place where He sits is called the *throne of grace*, it is also called the *mercy seat*, sprinkled with blood, where sinners are welcome with their woes and their wants and their sins. That is a good verse, a really good verse:

“Approach, my soul, the mercy-seat,
Where Jesus answers prayer;
There humbly fall before His feet,
For none can perish there.”

No sinner ever yet perished at the Saviour’s feet.

“The most High ruleth.” So here you are this evening, some of you with your sins and your souls and a never-ending eternity – and “the most High ruleth,” and He delights to answer prayer. And if He is a sovereign, and if He has a sceptre, it is a *sceptre of mercy*. We read of the great King Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther. Esther had a heavy case. It was not just herself approaching death and destruction; it was all the people of God. O but dare she go into the king? He was great; she had not been called. She said, “So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” And he held out the golden sceptre, and that is what you will find as a sinner when you go in unto the King.

“I’ll to the gracious King repair
Whose sceptre mercy gives;

Perchance He will accept my prayer,
And then the suppliant lives.

“I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For, if I stay away, I know
I must for ever die.

“But if I die, with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die (delightful thought!)
As sinner never died.”

“The most High ruleth.” There are those of you this evening and you have got your burdens, and perhaps some of them seem hard, some of them seem impossible – your own things, the things of those you love, your health, the health of those you love, the troubles that you are in, your perplexities. O to hear that voice: “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” But the point tonight is this: that this One to whom you are coming is almighty.

“Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring.”

He is all-gracious; He sympathises; He understands. But the point here: this One is almighty. “The most High ruleth” – the One to whom you pray, the One to whom you bring your hard causes. O those many, many encouragements you have in Scripture! Just a few seem to come across our spirit. “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee” – this Lord who is almighty, on the throne. “Commit thy way unto the Lord” – this same almighty God – “trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” “Casting all your care upon Him” – and then to prove it – “for He careth for you.”

“The most High ruleth” – the One who hears and answers prayer. “The most High ruleth” – the One who helps in the time of need. Poor Peter was sinking. He was going under. He said, “Lord, save me,” and there was an almighty arm reached out which held him and lifted him up and brought him back and brought him through. Now the One who helps His people is the One who is almighty. We have the beautiful word: “I have laid help upon One that is mighty.” And when you are in your pilgrimage and the way is hard, *you* do not feel mighty. You think that

word in Isaiah 41 suits you well: “worm Jacob.” You feel weak; you feel unworthy; you feel worthless; you feel you might be trampled on. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob ... I will help thee, saith the Lord.” O this is almighty help. What does the Lord say? “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.”

“The most High ruleth.” Everlasting strength belongs to Him. “In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” The wonderful thing is He gives it. There are some things the Lord cannot give. I mean, He cannot give His Godhead. He cannot give His royal authority. But there are some things He possesses and He can give and He does, and if in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength, then the most High who ruleth gives it and He gives it wherever it is needed. He gives it especially to those who feel their weakness. When the way is rough He says, “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.”

“Let not thy heart despond, and say,
‘How shall I stand the trying day?’
He has engaged, by firm decree,
That as thy days, thy strength shall be.”

“The Lord sitteth upon the flood,” says the psalmist, and what comes next? “The Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace.” “The most High ruleth.” He gives strength to His people, especially when they feel their weakness, for, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

“The most High ruleth.” He supplies all His people’s needs. He supplies their needs, whatever those needs are. “Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide.” Think of Elijah under the juniper tree: “Who remembered us in our low estate: for His mercy endureth for ever.” And, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

“The most High ruleth.” And then in your troubles, this is the One who upholds you, who supports you, who will not let you sink. “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath” – and you cannot sink lower than that – “and underneath are the everlasting arms.” The old preachers when they quoted, “Underneath are the everlasting arms,” almost always

said, “The everlasting arms of God’s love and mercy,” which was a beautiful expression. “The everlasting arms of God’s love and mercy.” But they could also have added, “Underneath are the everlasting arms of God’s love and mercy and divine, almighty power.” “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

“The most High ruleth.” But let us not just think of it as providence. Think of it in grace, how His grace reigns in calling a sinner and saving a sinner and forgiving a sinner and bringing him safely to heaven. I think of one case in the Old Testament and one in the New. Manasseh. If you read of King Manasseh, he ruled in Israel and he was a mighty king, but he was more mighty in wickedness and sin than anyone else in the Old Testament. But, “the most High ruleth” – not Satan and not sin. “The most High ruleth.” And He brought that evil man Manasseh – he was the kind of man like Hitler, a dreadful man – and the Lord brought him into trouble and he prayed and he found mercy and he is in heaven.

“That sacred stream, from Jesus’ veins,
Was free to take away
A Mary’s or Manasseh’s stains,
Or sins more vile than they.”

The Lord ruleth in the riches of His grace.

And the New Testament: the dying thief. Now he was a great sinner, and if ever it seemed that God’s purposes were overthrown, that the covenant of grace had failed, that here was an object of mercy ready to be lost, it was now. He was a great sinner and justly he was suffering for his guilt, and it seems clear comparing the gospels that even when he was hanging on the cross, he was reviling the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But it was not going to be Satan who ruled. “The most High ruleth,” and that almighty arm stretched out and snatched him as a brand from the burning. “Lord, remember me.” “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”

Do you believe it? Do you believe that this is your God? The Lord ruleth, and how He rules in all our concerns and all our affairs. It is not just chance; it is not accident. “The most High ruleth.” Nothing can take place by accident in your life. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Not a sparrow can fall to the ground. “Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.” The Lord, “the most High

ruleth.” He rules in heaven and He is your Saviour and your Friend, and He rules for you; which means that “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” You say, I cannot see it. Well, Paul could not, and Paul certainly did not feel it. But he said, We know it. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.”

The Lord, the most High God rules in the movement of every planet, the rise and fall of nations, the overthrow of great men, and in your life’s minutest circumstance. O to feel this, and may you feel it even tonight, looking up to heaven, seeing this great, almighty God in complete control, seeing His wisdom and His sympathy, His kindness, His power, and feeling your own weakness and your need and your sorrow and the things you are troubled about, to find that resting place: “My times are in Thy hand,” all of them. And one hymnwriter said, “My God, I wish them there.” We would not have them anywhere else.

“All must come, and last, and end,
As shall please my heavenly Friend.”

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” And may you find that resting place here: the greatness of God, and this God is your Saviour and Friend in Christ, and all your concerns, every one of them, are in His hand, and you yourself as a sinner are in His hand, and,

“If you are found in Jesus’ hands,
Your soul can ne’er be lost.”

“The most High ruleth.”