

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 312

That Day!

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 20th March, 2011**

Text: *“Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring My words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 39. 16-18).*

We have met this Ebed-melech before. We read of him in the preceding chapter: his wonderful kindness to the prophet Jeremiah. Let me just remind you of it. Jeremiah was a most godly man, a most gracious prophet, but didn't he have to suffer for the truth's sake! The message he had to bring was one of condemnation to the people and the people did not like it; they opposed him. But he had to be faithful to what the Lord said. And so we find that his enemies not only put him in prison, but they threw him down into a deep pit, and in the bottom of that deep pit there was nothing but mud and mire and filth, and he sank in it. What some of the Lord's servants have had to suffer in their witness for the truth! The Lord raised up a friend for him, and in a strange way – a courtier in the court of that wicked, ungodly King Zedekiah – the last place you would think of, but there was a man there who really loved and feared and trusted the Lord. His name was Ebed-melech. You do not know where the line of grace may run. You have Daniel in the court of the Babylonian king. You have Obadiah in the court of that wicked Ahab. If the Lord needs a man to be there, that man will be there. We even read of those who loved the Lord in Caesar's household.

Here was this man, and he was not even a Jew; he was from Africa; he was a black man; he was an Ethiopian. There was all this ungodliness among the Jews, God's ancient people, and here was a man who had come from afar, an Ethiopian, and he knew and loved and trusted the Lord's name. We cannot help thinking of another Ethiopian: “What doth hinder me to be baptized?... And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went

down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”

It is clear from this verse I have read this morning that this Ebed-melech was a fearful man; he was a timid man. Yet he was so overwhelmed with love and sympathy for godly Jeremiah in this dreadful condition that he went in boldly to the king and pleaded for him, and strangely, remarkably, the king listened to him and granted his plea. I often say that the fear of the Lord will do two things. There will be some things your flesh would love. “So did not I, because of the fear of God.” There are other things from which your flesh shrinks, and yet, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” I am sure dear Ebed-melech, his flesh shrank from going into the king, and what about Jeremiah’s enemies? What about all the princes? And what about their enmity? And what about his own life? He went in boldly.

Again we cannot help thinking about New Testament times, two timid men, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. They “went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.” There were the sweet constrainings of love. I think there will be times in your life when there are things your flesh shrinks from and you would rather not do them, and yet there is something that impels you. It is for the honour and glory of God. It would be a wonderful thing if there were more of this religion today, if the Lord’s timid, fearing ones were so constrained by love to Christ that they *have* to bear a witness, that they *have* to come forward, that they *have* to witness for Jesus’ sake, whatever be the cost, and not only before the people of God who love them and sympathise with them, but before a wicked and opposing and gainsaying world.

See this man going into the king and see what the Lord Jesus meant when He spoke of those who were willing to go the second mile for His sake – that holy zeal, that perfect love which casteth out fear. May there be more of this. Read through the Epistle of James and see if it does not touch you and prick you and reprove you and rebuke you. “Faith without works is dead.” You see the kindness of this man. I suppose poor Jeremiah was in an emaciated condition down in that terrible pit with hardly anything to eat, and Ebed-melech took those ropes to pull him out, but he also got a lot of old rags together so he could put them under his arms so that when he was pulled out it would not hurt him and gall his flesh.

There is a great point, and the older I get, the more I hold fast to this: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” I watch for that and I am satisfied when I can see it. We had a poor old soul in the Bethesda Home in the past, so downcast. She did not seem to have much interest in anything and she did not speak much and she never smiled. When I visited her, I hardly got a glimmer, but if I said, “Have you heard that,” and I mentioned a name, “has come forward to be baptized?” O the difference in a moment, a smile over her face. Or if another time I said, “Have you heard that someone is very ill,” or in deep trouble, or had to go into hospital? And that immediate difference, that deep sympathy. That word came to me despite everything else: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” It is a great thing in real religion. I think quite a few hearts were touched the other Lord’s day when we closed the service with that beautiful hymn that ends,

“Love is the golden chain that binds
The happy souls above;
And he’s an heir of heaven that finds
His bosom glow with love.”

O that there were more of the love of Christ in our hearts and O that there were more of love to the brethren!

The love, the kindness, the tenderness – he did not even throw the old rags down into the empty pit. He made sure they were put down gently and carefully.

Well, before going on, we pause here for a moment or two, because many of God’s people know what it is spiritually, feelingly to be in the horrible pit and in the miry clay. It is a miserable condition. They cannot get themselves out of it. The more they struggle, the deeper they seem to sink. Perhaps it is at the beginning in all their burdens and exercises. Perhaps it is when they have been seeking the Lord for a long time, feeling they have not found Him. Perhaps it is deep trouble they come into. Perhaps it is darkness of spirit. But like Jeremiah (though this was literal), spiritually they feel they are in the horrible pit and the miry clay and they cannot get out of it.

That is a lovely word that begins the Psalm: “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay.” To be brought up; to be

brought out. And that is what grace does. And I have spoken to you recently about reigning grace and abounding grace and all-sufficient grace. Well, this is all three. This grace, like Ebed-melech's cords, goes right down into the pit and it brings the sinner up. But that is not the end. There are two sides to the gospel. "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God." Well, may the Holy Spirit graciously, powerfully perform this in our midst today.

In passing, I just mention this memory. I once heard a remarkable sermon (and it was not a fanciful sermon), and the text was, "Old cast clouts and old rotten rags" (chapter 38. 11), and the theme was this: in the eyes of the world, the Word of God, the things of God, the gospel of God are nothing; they are useless; they are despised. "Old cast clouts and old rotten rags." But O the wonders that the Word of God and the gospel of God perform, like Ebed-melech's rotten rags and old cast clouts; what the gospel, what the Word of God, what the things of God can do under the divine, almighty power and sacred influence of the Holy Ghost.

So from Ebed-melech in chapter 38, we come to Ebed-melech in chapter 39, and we are told that the poor, dear man was frightened; he was terrified; and well he might be. He believed what Jeremiah said – a lot of the others did not – that the cruel, evil Chaldeans were going to come to Jerusalem. They were going to pull down all the buildings. They were going to destroy the place with fire. They were going to kill people. They were going to take people captives. It was going to be a most appalling scene. It was going to be a most dreadful scene. And Ebed-melech was afraid; he was terrified.

Now here you see the love and mercy of his God. "The word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah ... Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring My words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in this day before thee." In Ebed-melech's mind, it was *that day*. "But I will deliver thee in that day." The Lord had His loving, kind, gracious eye upon him. "I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid." He says it a second time, and He puts a *surely* on it: "For I

will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee.”

We have this expression a lot in the Word of God: life being given for a prey. It seems it was a saying among them – sudden deliverance, unexpected deliverance, remarkable deliverance, great joy, great thanksgiving. We had it in the chapter we read this morning (chapter 38. 2). It comes in many places. “Thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord.” This man Ebed-melech in that evil day, in that evil city, in that evil court, he had the grace of God in his heart and he was blessed with living faith to believe in the Lord, to trust in Him, and it was faith which worked by love, it was faith which purified his heart, it was faith which overcame the world, and it was faith which gained the victory.

Many people have spoken of this being Ebed-melech’s reward for the way he so kindly treated Jeremiah and how he had risked his life. Now perhaps it was, but I do feel we need to be very, very careful lest we get on legal ground: if we do something, well the Lord will bless us because of that. The reason the Lord gave why this was going to take place was: “Because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord.” It was the answer to his faith. But beloved friends, having said this, there is a principle, and it is a principle of grace, not of the law: “Them that honour Me I will honour.” And you do find this – you will see it in your own lives; you will read it in church history; you will find it in the church of God – “Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” So in that sense Ebed-melech did receive his reward here, and the Lord does reward those who are faithful and those who serve His people, especially those who risk their own lives. The Lord does give them a reward, but it is a reward of grace, not a reward of debt.

“I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord.” Well, thinking of a few things as it concerns us, and those amongst us who for various reasons are fearful, those who are timid, those who are afraid, perhaps of things before them, or things which are likely to happen. Well, may the Lord give us that true faith in His beloved Son, like Ebed-melech, to look to Him, to look to Him alone, rest on Him, rely on Him, look to Him for strength, for wisdom, for grace, for the supply of every need.

“I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord.” It is that word: *that day*. Just a few things. We cannot help but think of all the things that are

happening in the world at present: the terrible things in Libya, and the earthquake in Japan, and the various uprisings in the other countries in the Middle East, and the whole world seems to be in a turmoil, and men's hearts failing them for fear, and people wondering what is going to happen, and some people afraid of the future, and how can we stand the trying day? And what is there going to be, and what if these things come to us? Well, there is a special word here for the Lord's people: *that day*, that terrible day: "I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord.... I will surely deliver thee ... because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord."

Now some of you are going to say to me, the obvious difficulty we have here is that when calamities take place in the earth, the righteous suffer with the wicked. Often these terrible things happening in the Middle East, those who profess the Lord's name suffer along with those who do not. Of course in Puritan days, in the days of John Bunyan, there were those two dreadful calamities, the Great Plague in London and the Great Fire in London, and a lot of the godly perished in each, and the old Puritan preachers preached sermons on that: why did the godly perish as well as the ungodly in these calamities? I want to speak very carefully, very advisedly here. The righteous do suffer with the wicked. But there is such a thing as a person realising a calamity may come and being blessed with special faith to ask the Lord's help, special faith to seek the Lord's protection, special faith to seek the Lord's deliverance, and the Lord honours that special faith that He gives. So fearing, timorous ones, there is an encouragement there that if the Lord enables you to pray to Him in this matter, enables you to trust in Him, enables you to rest all upon Him, then as He gives that special faith, so He has promised that special deliverance.

"*But* I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord... For I will surely deliver thee ... because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord." Now another thing is this: this is a very evil world, and thinking of our children who are born into this evil world, a world that has never been more evil, a country that has never been more evil. Well, we can pray for them, for the babies in our midst and the little children. We can pray for them that as the Lord protected Ebed-melech, so He will protect them, that He will watch over them, that He will keep them as the apple of His eye, that He will hide them under the shadow of His wings; in this evil world with all its temptations and with all its calamities, that they might be found sheltering beneath the shadow of the Almighty. So we can pray for our little ones as they are growing up that they might be Ebed-melechs, blessed

with faith to trust in the Lord, to look to Him, and be under His shadow, and when *that day* comes – the expression keeps coming, *that day, that day, that day*; of course, here in the verse it was when the Chaldeans were cruelly going to overwhelm Jerusalem with fire, destroy it with fire, burn the people – but when *that day* comes, whenever it is, that it might be, “I will deliver thee in that day.”

I have thought of it in another way. Some of you perhaps have *that day* before you. With some of you younger ones, it might be a very important examination – *that day*. With others it may be the day when you have to enter hospital, and perhaps have an operation, perhaps something no-one knows anything about. *That day*. With some of you it might be something seemingly not so bad. You have to go for an interview and you are timorous, you are afraid. *That day*. You know what *that day* is for you – something in your life, something before you. You have perhaps even got it written down in your diary, and your heart desponds and says, “How can I stand that trying day?” But may you be blessed with Ebed-melech’s faith to trust in the Lord, look to Him, rest on Him alone, leave it in His hand. And then, “I will deliver thee in that day... For I will surely deliver thee ... because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord.”

Beloved friends, deliverance is one of the great themes of Scripture. So much of the Word of God consists of the trials of God’s people and their deliverances. You can go back to the Book of Genesis. You can think of the lives of old Jacob and Joseph. You can follow it all the way through the Word of God – trials and deliverances. And then in the experiences of God’s dear people, well for the most part what is it? Trials and deliverances. You will not have one more trial than you have a deliverance, and you can never, never get beyond this: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” God is an almighty Deliverer. That question that was asked Daniel, and he knew the answer, is still asked to the Lord’s people and they still have to prove the answer: “Is thy God ... able to deliver thee?” Is He? “Is thy God ... able to deliver thee?” O how many times very feelingly have we sung that hymn:

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

“But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord.... For I will surely deliver thee ... because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord.”

But in coming towards a conclusion this morning, I want to speak of the most important thing of all: that last, great, solemn, terrible day, *that day*, the day when you and I have to die. *That day*. “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” That day when we have to meet our Maker and give an account. *That day*. That day when we have to hear the sentence, “Come in,” or, “Depart,” and it is for ever and ever. O do you ever think of that terrible day? Do you ever tremble before it? “How shall I stand that trying day?” All my religion, all my profession, all my preaching, none of that of any avail then. Sinners before a holy, heart-searching God with all our faults and blemishes and failures. If Ebed-melech was afraid of *that day* for him, O are you ever afraid of *that day* when time shall be no more, when all things shall be dissolved, and the elements melt with fervent heat, when the earth shall be shaken, the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll? The vital point is this: if blessed with living faith in Jesus our only hope, then this will be true of you and me: “I will deliver thee in that day.... For I will surely deliver thee ... because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord.”

So that is the great question: that terrible day, are you, am I ready? But where is our trust? Is it in ourselves? Is it in what we have done? Is it in our chapel attendance? Is it because people think well of us? Is it because there is plenty of time? Is it because we have become careless, indifferent? Is it because we are taking it for granted? Only one thing will do. “Ye must be born again,” and wrought upon by the Spirit of God, you will feel your need as a lost sinner, no hope in yourself, and you will flee for refuge to Jesus, and you will be brought by precious faith to rest your everlasting all upon Christ, to hang on Him, His Person, His merit, His glorious righteousness, His precious blood, His finished work. And you find a sure, a solid foundation there, and none who trusts in Him shall ever be destroyed. O it is the great, the vital point. If Ebed-melech was delivered in that day, may you and I through grace, in Jesus, be delivered at last in that day, when time shall be no more.

“Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel ... I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given unto the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the

sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord.”