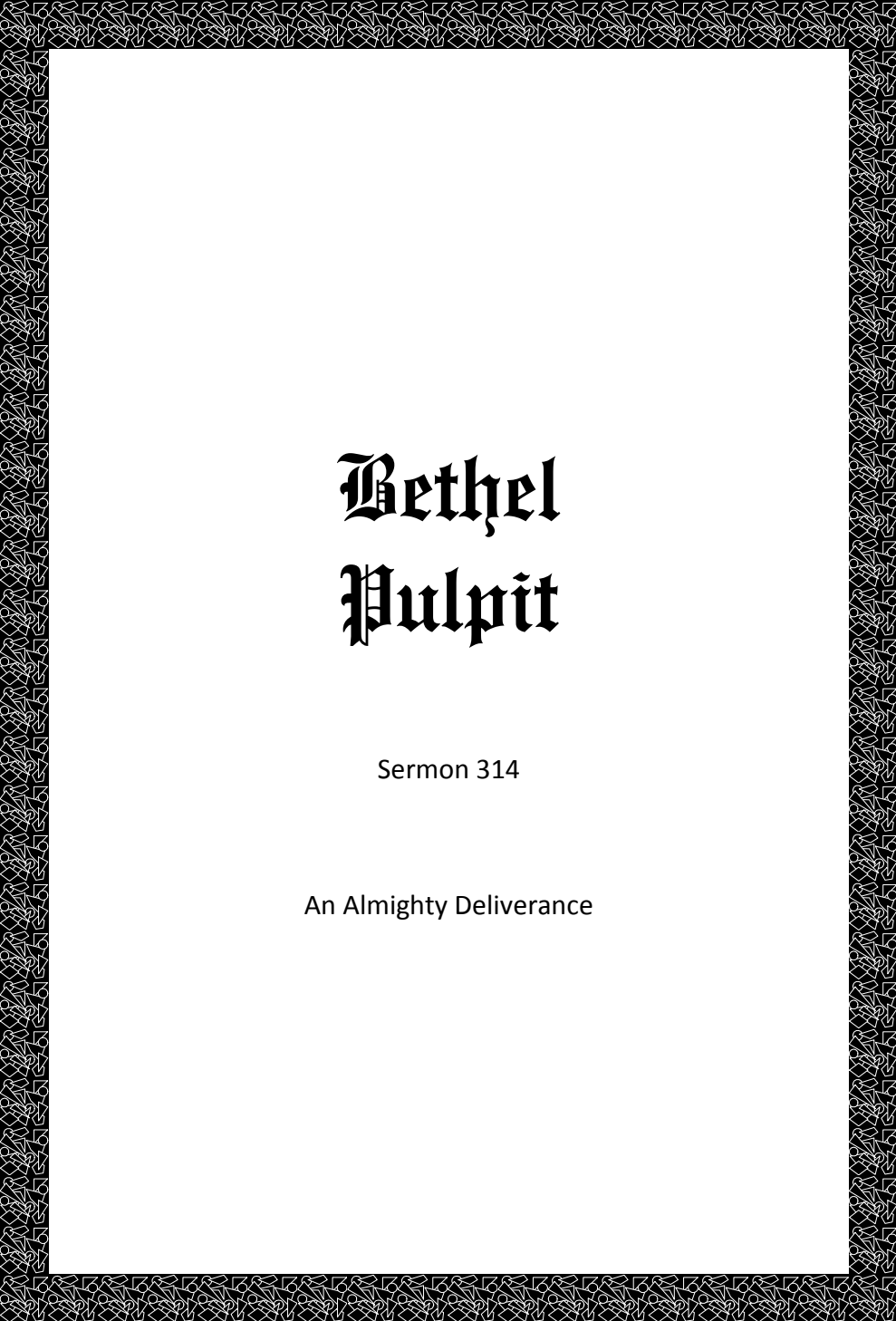




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 314

An Almighty Deliverance

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 18th September, 2011**

Text: *"When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple" (Jonah 2. 7)*

The enemies of the truth have always used the Book of Jonah to pour contempt and scorn on what is written – a man being swallowed by a whale and then that man still living. Well, we believe it is the inspired and infallible Word of God – we need go no further than that. But if any do, on two occasions our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ referred to the Book of Jonah. I do not know if you have ever noticed this, beloved friends, but it is an interesting point. Almost all these things in the Old Testament like the Flood and Lot's wife and Jonah and the whale, and so you might go on, almost every one of them, the Lord Jesus Himself mentions in His ministry whilst He was here upon earth, as if He would have the answer ready beforehand for the critics. But on one occasion the Lord Jesus spoke of just as how Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights and then he came forth, in the same way He would die, and He would be buried, and like Jonah He would be in the grave, and the third day He would rise again. And then the second occasion, when He was warning the people about their unbelief He said, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." So there is a lot hangs on this. If you are tried and tempted, if you listen to the critics or anything like that, if Jonah and the whale is not true, then the resurrection of Jesus is not true; then the great judgment at the last day is not true.

So here we have this very remarkable Book. It is different from all the other books of the prophets. So much of it is narrative, things that are taking place, things that are happening. Almighty God gives a command to His prophet Jonah. We have read of Jonah previously in the Book of Kings (2 Kings 14. 25). He is not entirely a stranger. And God gives him a commandment that he has to go to Nineveh, that vast city, and there he has to stand and declare that Nineveh shall be destroyed because of its wickedness.

And “Jonah rose up to flee ... from the presence of the Lord.” Now you cannot flee from the presence of the Lord. But do not be too judgmental about Jonah. I do not know how some of us would be if we had a commandment like that given to Jonah, if we had to go to some great city and there stand and denounce it. How would we be if we had to go to Iran or Iraq or Libya, or Egypt? Jonah was facing almost certain death. So do not be too hard on Jonah. But you cannot flee from the presence of the Lord, and if it is the Lord’s will you should do something, you will have to do it, and if the Lord gives you a commandment, you will have to obey it. But the point is, He will be with you and guard you and support you and bring you safely through. Jonah should really have known that. It was an amazing thing for a sinner to receive a direct word from heaven. He should have known that in obeying the Lord, the Lord would be with him.

“But Jonah rose up to flee ... from the presence of the Lord.” He went completely in the opposite direction. Instead of going to Nineveh, he went to take a ship to Tarshish. Do you know what happened? Everything went right! That does not prove you are walking in the way of God if you decide on a course of action and everything goes right. Jonah determines he is going to disobey God. He is not going to Nineveh. He is going the opposite direction. He is going to Tarshish. He goes down to the port Joppa and there is a ship for Tarshish waiting – I do not suppose they were all that regular – and there is a place for him on board, and the poor prophet has enough money in his pocket to pay for it. You see everything going well. This is very, very solemn. If you and I decide on our own course, decide to disobey God, decide to walk contrary to Him, do not be a bit surprised if everything goes well. One of the most solemn words in Scripture is concerning Ephraim: “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” It is a sad thing when the Lord leaves us alone. What we need if we are trying to flee from the presence of the Lord, if we are walking in disobedience to His commandment, is for Him to hedge up our way. We need His chastening. “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” But Jonah never did get to Tarshish. Jonah did go to Nineveh. O the wonderful blessing that attended his preaching there! God’s purposes will be accomplished in judgment or in mercy.

There is one thing we need to watch concerning Jonah. He was a godly man, and yet he was acting wrongly. I do think there is a principle here. In our chapels sometimes there has been a godly minister left to

himself to act wrongly, and you find part of the denomination defends him. They say he is such a godly man, he must be right in what he is doing. And then you find another section and they say, This is a dreadful thing he is doing; he cannot be a godly man; do not have anything whatsoever to do with him. Never forget, Jonah was a godly man, yet it is very clear that he was acting wrongly. And Jonah's God knew how to deal with him, and our God knows how to deal with us.

So Jonah finds himself, not in Tarshish; he finds himself in the belly of a whale. I should think in all the Word of God, perhaps you can say in all the history of the world, has any person ever been in a more awful, dreadful, frightening situation? You just think of it. It was a miracle that he was still kept alive, but you just think of the horror if it. Well, Jonah uses some quite strong expressions. He felt it to be "the belly of hell" itself.

You may say, What has all this to do with you and me this Lord's day morning? It is an interesting point. It is something that happened. Well, the point really is this: I do not suppose any of us will ever have any likelihood of coming into such a situation as Jonah was, but all God's people do come into such a situation in their feelings and in the spirit of it. What is it? You are in something and it is terrible. It may be providence; it may be grace; it may be natural things; it may be spiritual things; it may be your body; it may be your soul; it may be your circumstances. You are in something, but the point is, you cannot get out of it, and not only you cannot get out of it, but you cannot see any possible way of getting out of it. So you know something of this: "My soul fainted within me." Now there are not people here this morning just where Jonah was, but I wonder if there are some of you, perhaps many of you, and you feel at times your soul fainting within you.

You say, What exactly do you mean – soul fainting? Well, you feel you cannot go on. You feel you cannot continue. You feel this is such a trying situation; you cannot get out of it. Or you feel weak. "He weakened my strength in the way." With some of you, perhaps it is spiritual. Your soul is fainting within you. You feel your need as a lost, ruined, guilty sinner. There is eternity before you. The day is coming nearer. You have been seeking the Lord. You have not got what you want and your soul is fainting within you. Or perhaps there are those who have been wonderfully blessed in times past, but now the days of darkness have

come and you are tempted by Satan and your soul is fainting within you in this. You feel your faith is so weak. You feel your love is so weak. You think of that wonderful love for the Saviour, but now it is “your chief complaint that your love is cold and faint.” And what about that hope that once strengthened your heart? Well, that seems weak and faint. And if you think of things like holy zeal in the things of God, being “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might,” you feel the opposite. You feel this fainting. And then those not feeling well, those with problems and difficulties in your home and family and circumstances, and sometimes mothers with so much to do with little children, and then those who have the burden, the heavy burden of things in the church of God. You know something of this: “My soul fainted within me.” So you are not exactly where Jonah was, but you know what Jonah meant when he said, “My soul fainted within me.”

You have so much about this in the Word of God. David was a strong man and he was a king, but he talks about fainting. “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” But you do not need me to spend all morning outlining this fainting condition when there are things in your life and your family, your relationships with others, perhaps even the church of God, things before you, tomorrow and the coming days. You say,

“All my little strength is gone;
Sink I must without supply.”

You do not feel strong spiritually, bodily, mentally, physically, emotionally, any way. You know what this fainting is.

“My soul fainted within me.” I do feel this is a beautiful word: “When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord.” To Jonah in the whale’s belly it was like a gleam of light from heaven, and it will be to you and it will be to me, when we are in a downcast, sad, weak, helpless, fainting condition, when we remember the Lord. I think this is a beautiful word: “I remembered the Lord.” You know why he remembered the Lord. Well, if you do not, when you go home, read that wonderful sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to John – at the beginning of it, the Lord Jesus speaking to His disciples before He suffered. He tells them of days of darkness and sorrow and persecution; if you will, days when their soul will faint within them. And He tells them this. He said, Remember then that I have spoken unto you of these things. That is it. But we are like the

hymnwriter: “Alas! my dear friends, we’re apt to forget.” But before the sixteenth chapter of John ends, the Lord Jesus speaks so beautifully about the Holy Spirit the divine Comforter whom the Father will send, and He says, “He shall ... bring all things to your remembrance.” Now hold that word fast: “He shall ... bring all things to your remembrance.” And that is what happened here with Jonah. He was in this lost, dark, dismal, sinking condition. In the chapter, O the language he uses, the dreadful condition he was in, and his soul fainting within him, but then, “I remembered the Lord.” So it was not the end. So it was not hopeless. O beloved friends, this morning, those of you in that sinking condition, those of you whose souls are fainting within you, may you be sweetly enabled to remember the Lord.

What are the kind of things that we remember when our soul is fainting within us, when we wonder how to go on, when we wonder how to face tomorrow, when we feel weak spiritually? What are the things we remember? “I remembered the Lord.” Well, we remember there is a God, and He is in heaven, and He is almighty, and He is merciful, and that He does answer prayer. O these are the kind of things that Jonah remembered. O may you and I remember them. And we can remember things that Jonah never knew. We can remember the Saviour going to Calvary. We can remember He shed His precious blood that sinners might live. We can remember that in heaven He ever lives and intercedes, almighty to save. We can remember that there is a throne of grace and a blood-sprinkled mercy seat, and grace to help in time of need. O may the Lord sweetly enable us to remember all these things.

But there is something even more than this, better than this. Not just may the Lord sweetly enable us to remember these things, but may He remember us. It is a wonderful thing when the Lord remembers a sinner. A few Scriptures: He “remembered us in our low estate: for His mercy endureth for ever.” He remembers His people when they are in a low estate. Who could be in a lower estate than Jonah? but the Lord remembered him. “He remembered us in our low estate.” “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people.” But if you want to find a person in a dreadful state, I was almost going to say worse than Jonah – you say, That is not possible – what about the dying thief, in agony nailed to the cross and dying, a guilty, wretched sinner about to be thrown into a never-ending eternity. The Lord remembered him. “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” The Lord

remembered him. “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” It is a wonderful thing when the Lord remembers a sinner.

“But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” It was Zion who said it, not the world and not a dead professor. “Can a woman forget her sucking child?” Can she? “That she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me.” So the Lord remembered Jonah; Jonah’s case was “continually before” Him. Despite all Jonah’s sin and guilt, the Lord remembered him.

“When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord.” What effect did it have? What did Jonah do? He prayed. “Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God.” God was still his God. “Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish’s belly.” There is no place on earth where you cannot pray. What is the strangest place where you have ever prayed? I should think many of you have prayed and it has not just been in secret in your home or in your bedroom. You have had to pray in some strange places.

We read this of this prayer: “Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight.” Well, he was not really, but he felt it. “Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight.” He knew he deserved it. The point with Jonah was this. It was not just that he was in terrible, dreadful trouble, but he knew he had brought it upon himself. He knew he deserved it. Jonah knew that. But how Mr. Oliver Pack of Irthlingborough used to emphasise that point: “Call upon Me in the day of trouble,” even trouble you have brought upon yourself; even self-procured trouble; even trouble that you deserve. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” And Jonah proved it. The Lord did deliver him.

“Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; *yet*.” O these wonderful *yets* of the Word of God! It is an amazing thing that some godly writer has never written a book on the *yets* of the Word of God. “Although my house be not so with God; *yet* He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” “Though He slay me, *yet* will I trust in Him.” There are so many of them. You cannot get beyond these *yets*. You can never sink down beneath them.

“Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again” – that second look. There is so much about *looking* in Scripture. Looking is believing; believing is looking. Not just looking *at*; looking *to*. O the difference! If there is a wealthy man you hope is going to help you, be kind to you, there is all the difference between looking *at* him and looking *to* him. That tiny child looks *to* her mother, not just looks *at* her. So we have that wonderful word, “Looking unto Jesus,” and that is really what Jonah did. It is looking away from everybody and everything else. Apparently that is what the word really means in Hebrews chapter 12 – looking away from all things, from everything. “Looking unto Jesus.” Jonah had to look away from everybody and everything else. There was nothing else he could look to.

“Yet I will look *again*.” O that second look! May you be blessed with it this morning. You say, I have looked and I seem as though I have looked in vain. But may you be blessed with that second look, that look which will avail, because no sinner ever looked to Jesus by precious faith and looked to Him in vain. That word still stands: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” And if ever a sinner was at the ends of the earth, Jonah was. But he looked as a dying sinner and he lived. “Look unto Me.” That second look. “Yet I will *look again* toward Thy holy temple.”

Over the years I have often spoken on this point, how much the temple meant in the old dispensation to a godly Israelite. Jonah was not a ritualist like someone turning to the east in saying the Creed, or someone looking to Mecca; neither was Daniel when he opened his windows three times a day and looked towards Jerusalem. It is hard for us to imagine what a dark dispensation it was. Christ had not yet come. The veil of the temple had not yet been rent in twain. Christ had not yet cried, “It is finished.” But the temple in Jerusalem foreshadowed these things. It spoke of them. There was the high priest there who stood between the sinner and God. There was mercy there. There was blood shed there. There was intercession there. In a sense the temple at Jerusalem was almost like the gospel to the Old Testament church, and it pointed them forward, however dimly, to that glorious Saviour who was to come and who spoke of Himself as the temple. That is what Jonah meant: “I will look again toward Thy holy temple.” I need the mercy; I need the forgiveness; I need the help; I need the deliverance. So though I feel cast

out of Thy sight, “yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple,” and if I perish, I perish.

Now here we see the wonderful effect of that prayer. “When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple.” They talk about some prayers and say they do not get any higher than the roof, and there are other prayers which enter right into heaven, or as the Word puts it, “entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.” Well, this prayer of Jonah’s, a feeble, trembling prayer, on mercy’s ground, a sinner who has been walking in disobedience, a sinner under the chastening hand of God – it penetrated right through that whale’s belly and right through that deep, dark sea and it penetrated all the way to heaven, and it entered into the holy temple, which in all its fulness meant this: it entered into the loving, tender, sympathising heart of God Himself in heaven. “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” “My prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple.” What does our hymnwriter say?

“Is he a Temple? I adore
The indwelling majesty and power;
And still to His most holy place,
Whene’er I pray, I’ll turn my face.”

O to be able to pray in a spiritual sense, looking to the temple, looking to Jerusalem, looking to a once-crucified, now risen, exalted Saviour. And this was real prayer, and you will notice there are quite a few expressions in Jonah’s prayer in Jonah chapter 2 from the Book of Psalms. He knew his Bible well and the pleas of the Book of Psalms came in, and it is a good thing when in our prayers we can bring in the pleas of the Book of Psalms and the pleas of the New Testament. Prayer, real prayer, prayer in extremity, prayer heard, prayer answered and deliverance granted. Now it was an impossibility, but the Lord performed it, and never forget what I am always saying: you and I know the end of the story; Jonah did not. But it was deliverance sought, deliverance granted.

“When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple.” “And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” Do not forget, we read that the Lord had prepared the fish. Even if people say, Well, whales do not do such things, the Lord had prepared the fish and “all

creatures obey His command.” He spoke to the whale. “The Lord spake unto the fish,” not Jonah. “The Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.”

Do you know what the last word was that Jonah spoke in this chapter? It is a wonderful word. “Salvation is of the Lord.” The whole of that wonderful salvation. “Salvation is of the Lord.” Over the years I have sometimes thought if I was ever asked to speak to a congregation of people who did not know anything at all about the truth, about the gospel, the way of salvation, Christ, themselves, anything – I have often thought that perhaps this would be the text I would take: “Salvation is of the Lord.” And for this reason: what a graphic picture I could give to them of what salvation, the salvation of our souls is through what happened to Jonah. Because, beloved friends, you and I by nature are in a worse condition than Jonah. You say, Is that possible? In the belly of the whale; in the belly of hell. That was just temporal. But with us, unless mercy intervenes, it is in hell for ever and ever.

“Thine’s alas! a lost condition;
Works cannot work thee remission,
Nor thy goodness do thee good.”

Our case by nature is as dreadful, as awful, as impossible as Jonah in the whale’s belly, and we need just the same merciful act, the same almighty act, the same gracious act that the Lord performed for Jonah to be done for you and me, and that is what salvation is.

“His love was great, His mercy free,
Which from the pit delivered me.”

And it is just like Jonah: “I will look again.” “My prayer came in unto Thee.” “Looking unto Jesus.” O may you and I sweetly be enabled to walk this out this morning if we feel our ruined, lost condition, and may the Lord awaken us to it if we do not.

“Thine’s alas! a lost condition;
Works cannot work thee remission,
Nor thy goodness do thee good.
Death’s within thee, all about thee;
But the remedy’s without thee;
See it in the Saviour’s blood.”

“When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord: and my prayer came in unto Thee, into Thine holy temple.”