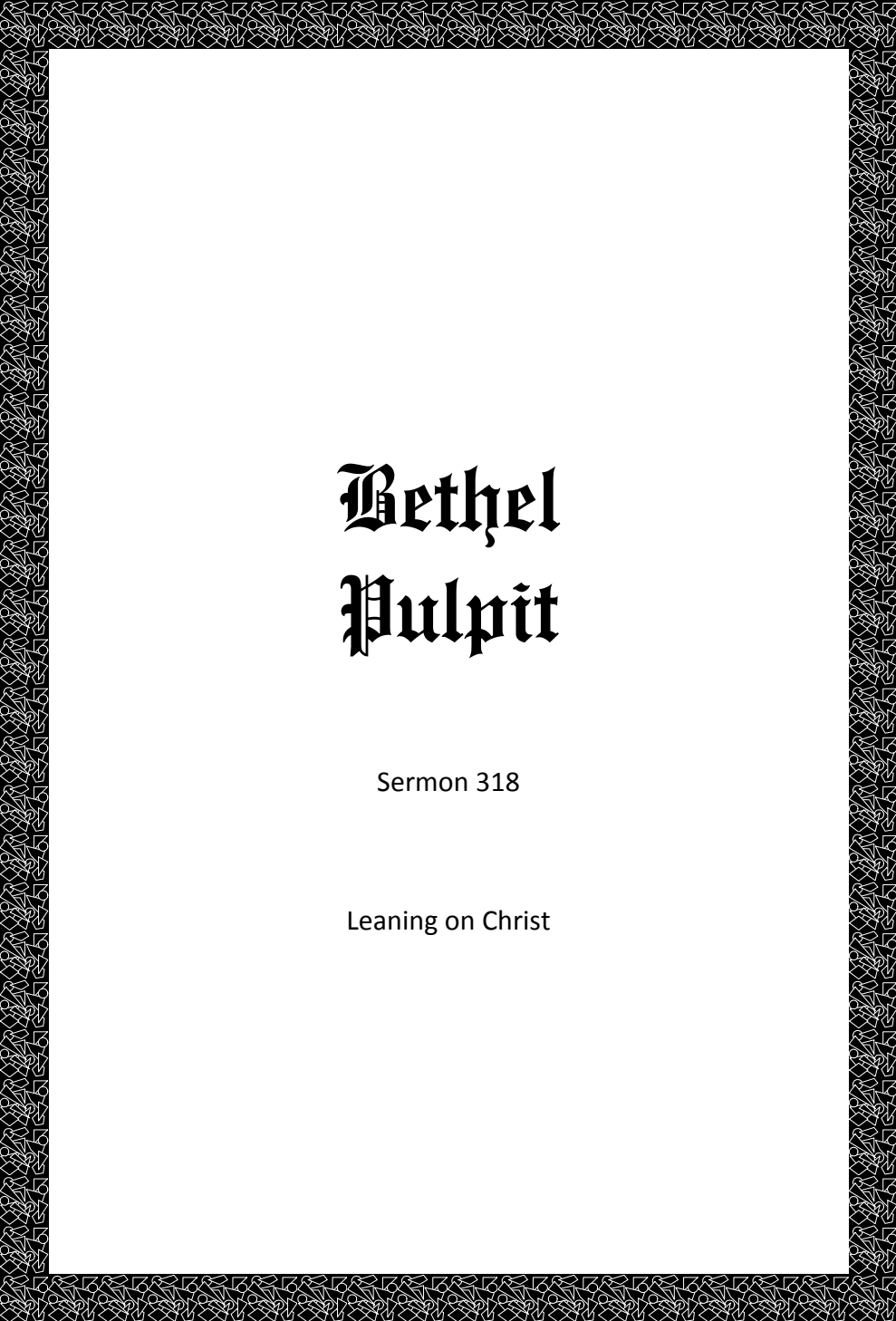




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 318

Leaning on Christ

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 4th December, 2011**

Text: *"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" (Song 8. 5).*

Never be afraid of the Song of Solomon. It is a very beautiful Book. Some of it, perhaps much of it, we do not understand. But the whole theme of it is clear: the wonderful love of Christ to His people, and the way, constrained by His love, they love Him in return. This union of love is set forth between the husband and the wife, the bridegroom and the bride. Now do not be too swallowed up with the details. I have often said, some people go to a magnificent old building, perhaps a cathedral, and take all their time taking notice of a little plaque here or perhaps something else there, but it is the grandeur of the building. Some of these descriptions of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ – never mind what all the details mean – it is the beauty and the grandeur and what He means to the whole church of God, His beloved bride, and to each lost, ruined sinner, to sinners saved by grace.

Sadly it has become the custom today to count this beautiful Book, the Song of Solomon, as just a love song and perhaps just given as an example. Even more sadly this has generally become the view even in many Evangelical circles today. I could speak a long time this evening on the clear proof that the true meaning of the Song of Solomon is that which has always been held down the ages, always been held by each branch of the Christian church, that this refers to Christ and His people. But I will just say two things very briefly. There are other parts of Scripture extremely similar, almost identical in language to the Song of Solomon, and in the New Testament we are told they are referring to Christ. Let me give you an example. The 45th Psalm – read it through. It is very, very similar to the language we have read tonight. Hebrews chapter 1 says this is speaking of Christ.

But perhaps above anything else, if the church of God has been mistaken down the centuries, if this is not speaking of Christ and His love to His people, if it is just a human love song between Solomon and a shepherd girl and a shepherd and some onlookers, well what is the point of

it? What is the purpose of it? What profit is it to a never-dying soul? What help is it to anyone who feels that the vital point is their sins and their soul and a never-ending eternity? But may you and I be led into it. You younger ones who know and love and fear the Lord, ask the Holy Spirit kindly, graciously to lead you into it. I think you will find this as a fact, that in days of real, blessed prosperity in the church of God, this Book has been very dearly loved. In days of spiritual decline like the present day, it has been very much neglected.

Reading through the chapter, not just this evening but earlier, and meditating on it, I was reminded of two of our former, loved deacons. Mr. Watts, when he gave his testimony before the church, I can never forget the way in which he began. I have never heard anyone else begin the same way. He began with this fourth verse: "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, until He please." And then Mr. Gurney before that. Just before I came to Bethel, Mr. Gurney was in hospital for an operation. He was very much favoured in his weakness and pain, feeling the very similar verse to this third verse: "His left hand is under my head, and His right hand doth embrace me" – the left hand of the Lord's providence; the right hand of the Lord's grace.

Well then, in the Song of Solomon we have some very high things. The church of God makes some very high claims. She says some very wonderful things. For instance, she says, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." She says, "He brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love." She says some wonderful things. God's little ones sometimes are a little bit troubled by that. They feel they cannot just get into it or aspire to it.

There are two other things in the Song of Solomon and the first is this: *the beautiful prayers* of the Song of Solomon. Perhaps you cannot speak of the magnificent testimonies of the Song of Solomon, but can you pray some of the prayers? There are two in this chapter: "Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm." Let me have an interest in Thy everlasting love. Let my name be engraven on Thy heart, my unworthy name. Let it be engraven on the palms of Thy hands. "Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm." And then, "Thou that dwellest in the gardens" – well He does. That is a subject for you to think about. He dwelt in the Garden of Eden. He dwelt in the Garden of

Gethsemane. He dwelt in the garden of the rock sepulchre, Joseph of Arimathaea's garden. And He dwells for ever in the garden of the paradise above. But this prayer: "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to Thy voice: cause me to hear it." You feel that God speaks. You know He speaks. You know He speaks to His people. But you want Him to speak to you personally. There are a few things you would like to hear Him say. "The companions hearken to Thy voice: cause me to hear it." I could go on all evening on the beautiful prayers of the Song of Solomon. We sang it just now, and it is a good explanation of it, good divinity:

"And her request and her complaint
Is but the voice of every saint."

But right at the beginning we have this: "Draw me, we will run after Thee." That prayer, seeing the beauties and glories, the suitability of the Lord Jesus, wanting Him, seeking Him, needing Him, but knowing the backwardness of our hearts. "Draw me, we will run after Thee." And then a little later: "Tell me" – she does not know all the answers. "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" She sees that Christ has a little flock. She sees their blessedness. She wants to be one of them. She does not want to be left out. Do not pass me by. Do not exclude me. These beautiful prayers of the Song of Solomon. I am sure many of you can pray them even if you cannot aspire to some of these high things.

And then the second thing. We have, for the want of better words, the *posture* of God's people. Well, without going right into other examples, to come to these words. Here we have the posture of God's people: "Leaning upon her Beloved." This is true of the whole blood-bought church of God considered as the bride of Christ, and of each individual believer. Just like some poor, weak, helpless girl, she has not got any strength; she is so dependent. But there is her Beloved. He loves her and she loves Him, and she cannot do without Him. He is her Saviour and He is her only hope, and of necessity she has to lean upon Him. That is what we mean by the *posture* of God's people. It is one of helplessness; it is one of complete dependence; it is one of entire reliance. There are two here, and one is weak and the other One is mighty. The safety of the

one and the salvation of the one and the blessedness of the one rests entirely in the other. O you have a meeting place here. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” Can you agree with the Saviour that you are helpless and He is almighty? Can you agree that you are a sinner and you need Him to save you? “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” There are two walking together here.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” I do not want to stop long on this. You might say, Well, who asked the question? I should say that again and again in the Song of Solomon you have various people appearing who are called “the daughters of Jerusalem.” It seems to me that they are enquiring, seeking souls. So they say it. But you can take it as spoken by the Holy Spirit Himself – not that there is any doubt here, not that there is any uncertainty, but to draw your attention. Well, it is a scene of matchless grace that the eternal Son of God, the Lord, the Creator of all things, should welcome a poor, helpless sinner to come and to lean upon His tried, almighty arm.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” Really, beloved friends, that is what living faith is. It leans on Christ. I understand that some years ago before the war they were translating, or seeking to translate, from the original Word of God into some native language, and it had a very, very small vocabulary. They could not find any equivalent for *believing* or *trusting*, and whatever they tried, the people just could not understand or get the idea, the feeling of what it was. Do you know what they did? It was not a perfect translation because there were not the words in the language, but they used this word *leaning*, and those poor natives understood what it meant, that believing is leaning on Christ, that trusting is leaning on Christ. That is where every sinner saved by grace is brought. You cannot lean too hard; you cannot lean too often; you cannot lean in vain.

“Leaning on her Beloved.” So as a sinner you are weak, you are unworthy, you are helpless, you cannot save yourself, you cannot prepare yourself for heaven, and you are brought here:

“Thy whole dependence on Me fix;
Nor entertain a thought
Thy worthless schemes with Mine to mix,
But venture to be nought.”

And this helpless sinner, conscious of unworthiness and sin and deeply concerned about it, is led by the Spirit to lean on Christ, and is safe there, and safe to all eternity. That is what a true believer is. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” – a sinner leaning on the Saviour. You lean on Him as the Son of God. You lean on Him as the Man Christ Jesus. You lean on Him as almighty to save. You lean on His precious, sin-atoning blood. You lean on His righteousness. O this leaning on Christ!

You have heard me speak sometimes of the first chapter in the Book of Leviticus, that when an Israelite was conscious of guilt, he was permitted, he was welcomed, he was commanded to go to the priest and to bring a sacrifice with him. The lamb was slain, and he laid his hand on the head of that sacrifice. He was commanded to lay his hand on the head of that sacrifice, that dying lamb. And the promise was, “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” So really that guilty Israelite was confessing, “I am guilty; this lamb is innocent. I deserve to die, but the lamb is dying.” And putting his hand on the head of that sacrifice, he leaned all the weight of his sin and his immortal soul there. “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” And,

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

This is the religion that takes a guilty sinner to heaven.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” Perhaps you are thinking, What has Proverbs chapter 3 [that was the Scripture reading] to do with it? I think I told you before I read the two chapters, they are very different chapters. The first is in plain, direct, simple language. This [Song of Solomon chapter 8] is in beautiful, symbolic, allegorical language. But you have the same truth there: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” You have two opposites here, but the plain meaning is that trusting in the Lord is leaning on the Lord. The two are put together. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart.” That is where you should be relying. “Lean not unto thine own understanding.” There are so many warnings about leaning on false foundations and broken reeds and bruised

reeds. I think even some of you children have had that experience. Sometimes you have leaned on something and it has not been very safe or stable, and has perhaps let you go. It has not been very pleasant. You have hurt yourself. It is leaning on Christ. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" Well, that is what faith is. But this travelling fair one is here spoken of as on a journey. She is a pilgrim. She is travelling through a wilderness, and she is weak and helpless, and she is needy, and she is surrounded by dangers and enemies and foes. But she is being brought safely along and she is being brought safely through, and all her needs are being supplied, every one of them.

"A weakling, more than strong;
Vents in His bosom all her woes,
And leaning moves along."

"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" Now tell me, are you coming up out of the wilderness? Because if your religion is real, you will have to prove this world to be a barren, waste-howling wilderness. Now it is not a wilderness to you and me by nature. We love it. This world is not a wilderness; it is our element; it is our delight. We have often said – and a number of you have visited that terrible Judaeon desert – the barrenness, the rocks. It is a waste-howling wilderness. But those Bedouins who live there do not think it is a wilderness. They love it. It is their home. They would not be happy anywhere else. That is you and I by nature. The world is not a wilderness to us; it is our home. But when the Lord opens our eyes and opens our hearts and when the solemn, separating work begins in the new birth, "O what a dreary land the wilderness appears!" We want to be coming up out of it. And you notice the expression the Holy Spirit uses: "Coming up." God's people are *coming up*. They are coming up through the wilderness, but they are coming up out of the wilderness.

You will be taught that it is a wilderness, but you have to journey through it. There is a way to heaven. It has to be walked out. There is not any short cut. It is like God's ancient people Israel. They had to travel through the wilderness, but God was with them and all their needs were supplied. God's Israel travelling to Canaan were hindered every step of

the way, but they were relying on their God and Saviour. That is how it must be with us: coming up from the wilderness leaning on our Beloved. As we go along all kinds of things arise, and left to ourselves, we do lean to our understanding, and that is when we begin to falter and fail. We need to lean on our Beloved for daily strength, for daily needs.

That word which has been special to me for many, many years, just those few words: “Leaning on all-sufficient grace.” Well, I will tell you. It was the night before I went out to preach – before I went out formally; I had been preaching occasionally before. But I woke up in the middle of the night. I was filled with horror. I thought, There is tomorrow and next week and the week after, and then the coming year, and it might go on twenty years, thirty years. How are you going to manage? That word came very beautifully, and I fell asleep: “Leaning on all-sufficient grace.” Well, it has been over fifty years now. It is still the same ground and it has never yet failed, and it cannot fail, and it never will. “Leaning on all-sufficient grace” – leaning on Him for every supply; leaning on Him in every need.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” You need help. “Leaning upon her Beloved.” You need wisdom and counsel and divine guidance. “Leaning upon her Beloved.” You wonder which way to go. “Leaning upon her Beloved.” O but beware when you begin to feel you can manage and you stop leaning on Him! That is when we falter and fail. We need to be divinely kept, divinely upheld, leaning upon our Beloved. There is leaning upon the covenant of grace. There is leaning on God’s everlasting love. There is leaning on the promises.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” Then there are times when she specially feels her weakness. You know those times. You have had them, and some of you are in them now. You know what I mean. When trouble comes and when there is sorrow, and disappointment, and ill health, and bereavement, and losses, and crosses, and afflictions, and things in your family, and things among those you love, and how can you stand the trying day? and how can you carry on? and how is it that you are not going to sink? Then it is in a special sense you prove what it is to lean on your Beloved.

You think of the privilege of it. The Queen of England would not think much if a poor beggar asked her to help him along and could he lean on her arm. Well, people in a lot lesser position than the Queen would not be too happy. I do not know that we would if a beggar came to us outside chapel tonight to hang on our arm. But to think that the great God of heaven is not ashamed to have a poor, unworthy sinner hanging on His almighty arm, leaning on His almighty arm.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” And the point is, if she is weak, He is not weak; He is strong, and His arm “is not shortened, that it cannot save.” It is an almighty arm and it will not let her go. It will never give way. This is her safety. Here is the safety, the everlasting safety of the whole church of God in all ages, and here is the safety personally of every sinner saved by grace, however weak and however unworthy. What does the Lord say? “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.” So you know what that means.

“Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His loving breast.”

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” And then there is a leaning in sweet communion. O beloved friends, we know so little of this. We think of the loved disciple John and he leaned on Jesus’ breast. We think of that prayer in the hymn:

“Until, with happy John,
I on His breast a place have found
Sweetly to lean upon.”

If we only knew more of this, the nearness, the communion, and a sinner cannot really be closer than this. But you know what it is. “Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” That is the ground on which you can draw near. That is the ground on which you can lean.

“Saints, raise your expectations high;
Hope all that heaven has good;
The blood of Christ has brought you nigh –
Invaluable blood!”

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” Well, what a question! But then to put the question like this: Is this one here this evening, and is this one you, and is this one me?

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” Now in the Book of the Revelation chapter 7 we have a very similar question, almost an identical question. Not, “Who is this?” but, “Who are these?” And the question in the Book of Revelation is this: “What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? ... These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Beloved friends, the identical people, the very same people! Here in the verse I have read to you this evening we see them on earth in their weakness, in their helplessness, in the wilderness, as pilgrims. There in the Book of the Revelation we see them safely landed. We see them in heaven. We see them before the throne. We see them singing the everlasting song and crowning Him Lord of all.

But the point is this: they are the identical people, the very same people, which means this: if you and I are never led by the Spirit of God to prove this world a wilderness, and in our helplessness and sin to flee for refuge to Christ and rest our everlasting all in complete dependence on Him, we can never reach heaven; we can never be amongst that favoured multitude of Revelation chapter 7. But the blessed opposite: if through grace you and I can put in our claim and say, “Yes, I believe I am that one. I do feel this world to be a wilderness. I do feel my need and helplessness. I cannot manage things myself. I do need a Saviour. I know He is almighty. I cannot do without Him. I must make Him my everlasting all. I must trust in Him entirely. I must rely on Him completely. I can do no other but lean upon Him.” Then if this is your blessed posture through grace, then one day all the blessings of Revelation chapter 7 will be yours, singing, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own

blood”; singing, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain”; singing the song of redemption eternally.

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?”