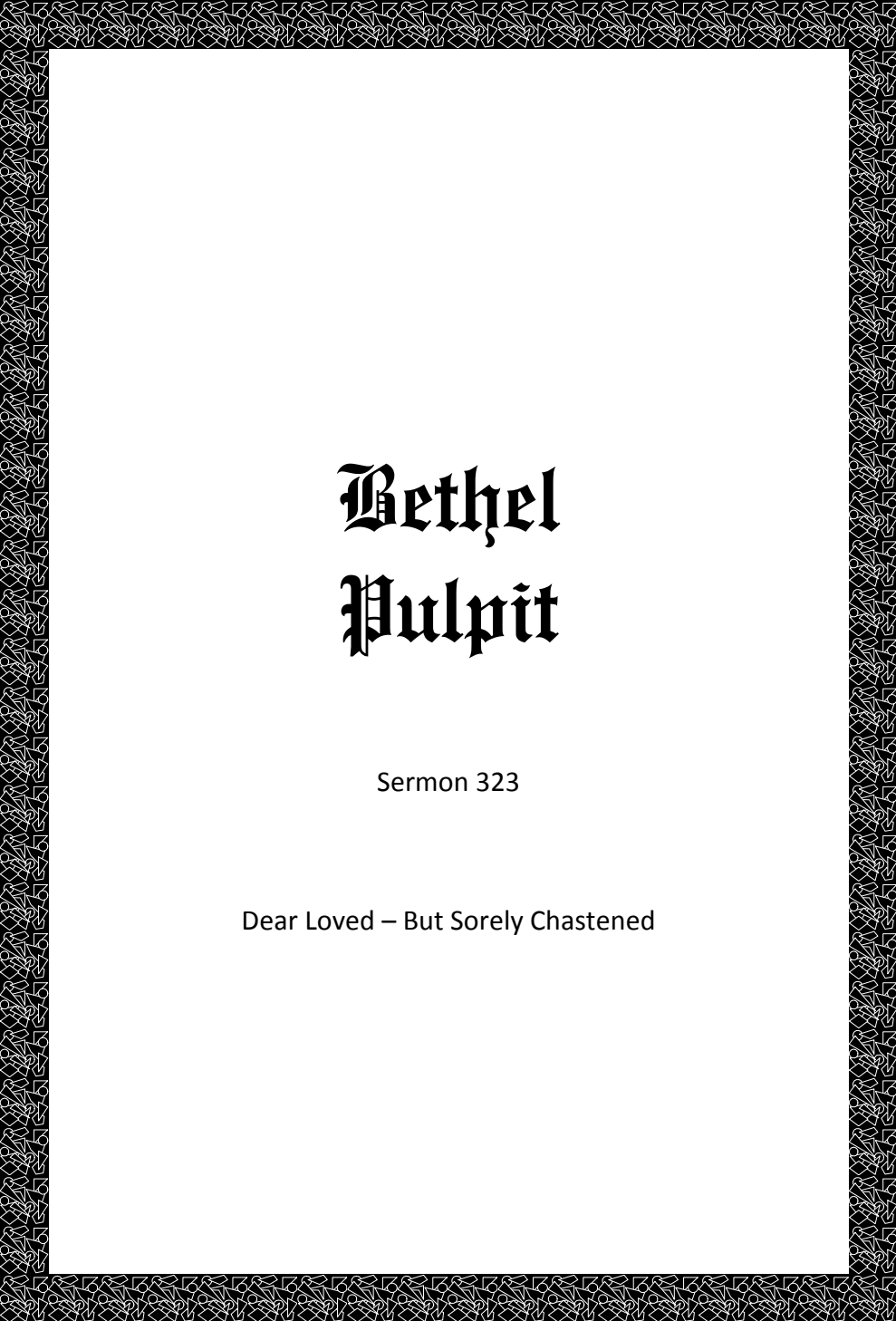




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 323

Dear Loved – But Sorely Chastened

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 27th May, 2012**

Text: *"And he [Joseph] turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes. Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them" (Genesis 42. 24, 25).*

The Word of God tells us that the end of a thing is better than the beginning. Most certainly it was with the Lord's dealings with Joseph. When Joseph saw his sinful brethren after all those years, and when they fell down on their faces on the floor and bowed before him, at that moment everything fell into place. We read this morning (verse 9), immediately as he saw them fall down, his thoughts went to those dreams he had when he was a boy in the land of Canaan, and he saw them as God's mysterious promise then – the sun and moon and stars bowing before him, the sheaves of corn bowing before him – that one day his brothers would bow before him. It was a mystery. He could not understand it then, and even less could he understand it when he was sold into the land of Egypt as a slave and thought he would never see his brethren again, but when he saw them falling down before him, he remembered one lesson: the faithfulness of God. God gave him that promise many years ago. At that time God often spoke by dreams. It was God's word, God's promise, and if ever a promise was tried, if ever a promise seemed impossible, it was this. But now Joseph saw it fulfilled to the very letter and he was overwhelmed. The faithfulness of God. "Hath he said, and shall He not do it?" So you see the fulfilling, the unfolding of God's purposes in the life of Joseph, brought safely through, delivered, exalted.

Beloved friends, you remember that two weeks ago I spoke to you then about Joseph and the text was about Joseph in the prison: "And he was there." We tried to speak about Joseph literally in his troubles and sorrows and trials and difficulties. I want to look at Joseph in a different way as the Lord shall help me this morning, and that is Joseph as a type of Christ. The old godly divines, the old gracious ministers so often used to

Speak about Joseph as a type of Christ. What did they mean by a type? Something that represents or symbolises something else. You have so much of it in the Old Testament. For instance, to give a very simple example, perhaps the chief example, the lamb that was slain, the Passover lamb, the blood shed, the sheltering beneath it, the safety. All this was a type of Christ. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” – a type of His precious blood; a type of the safety and security that is found with sinners sheltering beneath the blood. Also, as you go through the Old Testament, in places you have people who are spoken of as illustrations of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus on one occasion said that Jonah was a type of Him in His death, burial and resurrection – Jonah three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, a type of Christ’s death and burial and resurrection.

We need to speak carefully when we deal with types. We must never build a doctrine on a type, but they are set forth to help us, in our weakness and ignorance, more blessedly, more clearly to understand the glorious truths of the gospel of the grace of God. You cannot help but see in the life of Joseph a beautiful illustration of the life of our Lord and Saviour. I mean, Joseph, beloved of his father, hated of his brethren, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” so wrongly accused, so sorely tried, brought so low, and then his deliverance, his exaltation. You cannot help but think of Him who “made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.”

But perhaps especially a type in this: when Pharaoh said, Go to Joseph. He is the only one who could help. He was the only one who had the supplies. He was the only one to whom the hungry could go. Go to Joseph. All these things pointing forward to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And then when Jacob blessed his sons, and it seems that as he came to Joseph he had just a glimpse of a greater than Joseph. “Joseph is a fruitful bough” – the true Vine – “even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: the archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength.” And at the end, The blessing of the Lord “shall be upon the head of Joseph, and on the

crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.” Well, so much for that, Joseph a type of Christ.

Well, the subject really this morning is this: Joseph dearly loved his brethren despite all their sin and all their evil treatment of him, but he spoke roughly with them and he dealt hardly with them. They just could not understand what was happening, but Joseph knew what was happening. It was not mysterious to Joseph. Some people may say, Why did Joseph treat them in the way that he did? Well, he treated them in love. He treated them in kindness. He could not do enough for them. When he saw them, he could have refused them food altogether, or he could just have sold it to them and sent them back again, but he could not do enough for them. Yet though his heart was overflowing with love, he spoke roughly to them and he dealt hardly with them. Why? Because he wanted to see them humbled in the sight of God and brought to real repentance.

That is just how our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ deals with His people. Who can really estimate how much the Saviour loves His people despite all their sin, and not just their sin before their new birth, but their sin afterwards, their rebellion, their hardness, their unconcern, their dishonouring of Him? Yet, “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” And He loved them so much that He died for them. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Who can really speak of the love of Christ to His people, or who can really estimate the love of Christ to His people?

Yet this question arises, and Satan will raise the question if your own unbelieving heart does not raise it. If the Lord really loves me, why has all this come upon me – this bereavement, this sore trial in business, this affliction in the family? Especially if you get in the 73rd Psalm like Asaph and you have sought to walk tenderly and prayerfully and carefully in the fear of God, and you see your ungodly neighbours and everything prospering and everything going right for them, and you have this constant burden and you have this constant care. Unbelief will sometimes say that, and Satan will surely say that.

Really, Joseph’s brethren were completely bewildered and mystified by it all. Yet everything he was doing was for their good. There was not a trace of unkindness in it, not a single trace of unkindness.

Everything he was doing was for their real good, yet they completely misunderstood his blessings. What did we read here? “Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man’s money into his sack.” Now he did that absolutely in love. He was not having his old father paying. He was not having his own brethren paying, however disgracefully they treated him. He did it completely in love. But when they saw the money in their sack, they began to wonder. They “made even grace a snare.” How often in our lives we are like that! We do not really see these things as blessings from the Lord. “Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man’s money into his sack.” But you notice this: “And to give them provision for the way.” I do not think Joseph did that for anyone else who was coming into the land of Egypt. His brethren, he gave them full provision for the way. We cannot help but think of things like this:

“With joy we meditate the grace
Of our High Priest above;
His heart is made of tenderness;
His bowels melt with love.”

That was Joseph’s attitude to his brethren. What else do we sing?

“He wraps in frowns as well as smiles,
Some tokens of His love.”

In the Word of God, there are many verses of Scripture that have a contrast. You find it especially in the Book of Proverbs, the Book of Ecclesiastes. One half of a verse seems to be a contrast to the other. But when I read this verse through, if ever there is a verse in which there seems to be a contradiction – not just a contrast, but a contradiction – Joseph turned himself about from his brethren and wept. He was absolutely overwhelmed with love towards them, so much so that he could not contain himself; so much so that he had to go aside from them. His heart was overflowing with love to his poor, sinful brethren. So what did he do? Immediately he took Simeon from them “and bound him before their eyes.” You know what I mean when I say it seems a contradiction.

Now Joseph knew what he was doing. There was no less love with Joseph. He had a purpose in it, and his purpose was for their good, and his purpose was for the honour and glory of God, and he could not do enough

for them. He was going to bring all of them down into the land of Egypt and care for them until he died. But the Lord's mysterious dealings with His people!

And then you come to the New Testament. You read so much of it. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

"Not in anger,
But from His dear covenant love."

If your religion is real, the Lord will deal with you as Joseph dealt with his brethren. That is in the greatness of His love, in forming you as a people for Himself that you might show forth His praise, correcting you, and humbling you, and abasing you, and teaching you to pray, and bringing you in helplessness to the Saviour's feet. And if He takes something away, He gives something better. "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second." You say, Why have I lost this? "God having provided some better thing for you." O but the mysterious dealings of the Lord! And,

"Could we see how all is right,
Where were room for credence?
But by faith, and not by sight,
Christians yield obedience."

"And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again ... and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes." But even in this chapter Joseph could see the Lord's blessing resting on what he was doing. They did not know he understood them, but he could understand them. He spoke through an interpreter, but when he spoke hardly to them, when he spoke roughly to them, he heard them begin to talk one to another. "We are verily guilty concerning our brother." They are being brought to repentance. Joseph is not acting foolishly. It is all to the honour and glory of God. It is all for the good of his brethren. And when you think how they treated Joseph, how gentle he was with them in return. But they began to speak: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us."

God's people need to learn the lesson of repentance. The Lord Jesus preached repentance. The disciples preached repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. What does the word say? "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." But it is not easy to bring sinners to repentance. One of the godly Puritans, Thomas Watson, once said that the hardest thing for the minister in his preaching is to show those who are not the Lord's people that they are wrong, and to show those who are the Lord's people that they are right. There is a lot of deep divinity in that. O that being brought to repentance, being humbled, the sanctifying effect of the Spirit of God, but amidst it all, the tender, loving, sympathising heart of the Saviour! Our carnal hearts can never see it, and our unbelief rejects it and dishonours God and staggers at it, but the Lord reveals it, that at the same time as He chastises His people for their sin, as He humbles them, at the same time His heart overflows with love towards them.

"And he turned himself about from them, and wept." There is one verse in one of those very long Joseph Hart hymns which over many years I have loved:

"Without cessation pray;
Your prayers will not prove vain;
Our Joseph turns aside to weep,
But cannot long refrain."

"He turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again." What is it going to be? Is it going to be a kiss? It will be one day, but not just yet. Is it going to be some display of affection? Soon; not yet. He "returned ... and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes," and then he threw him into prison. All these things were in love and mercy. They could not understand; Joseph understood. And how it was all going to work out for their good and for the honour and glory of God and for the preservation from death of the Lord's people as they were brought down from Canaan into Egypt.

"Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack." We have to learn that lesson: we cannot pay for gospel blessings. Old Jacob in the next chapter was still on that old, legal ground. He said, When you go back to that man, you must take him a present – what did he say? – nuts and balm and honey and spices. If you read through the chapter, Joseph did not take a scrap of

notice of all those nuts and balm and honey and spices, but he saw his brother Benjamin. This is it:

“Bring no money, price, or aught,
No good deeds, nor pleasing frames,
Mercy never can be bought;
Grace is free; and all’s the Lamb’s.”

“Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man’s money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way.” There was something extra. We read about grace *abounding*. “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life.” It was not just they were forgiven, but Joseph could not do enough for them. He had greater blessings for them in his heart. He was going to have them all down into Egypt and the land of Goshen was going to be prepared for them. It is not just that the Lord forgives, but the abundant blessings of His grace. Joseph could not do enough for them. What could the Lord Jesus do more for His people than He has done?

Yet there is this: he turned aside to weep, and he returned, and took Simeon, and bound him, and put him in prison. Have you noticed one thing in Joseph’s dealings with his brethren? He always gave them something, or he always did something to bring them running back into Egypt from Canaan before long. He was not going to have them stop away from him for long. Once it was money in their sack, and then he kept Simeon, and then there was a cup in Benjamin’s sack. There was always something to bring them back to Egypt. Once he had seen them he would not let them stay away from him long.

That is how the Lord is dealing with you at present. Our carnal hearts would stay away. Things are going nicely, things are going well, so there is not much prayer, not many visits to our heavenly Joseph, not much spiritual hunger, not much sense of need. The money in the sack’s mouth, Simeon kept in prison, the cup in Benjamin’s sack – you will have something in your life and it will bring you running as fast as you can on an errand of mercy to the throne of grace, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. That is in love. The Lord will not let you stay away long from the throne of grace. He describes His people as a people near unto Him (Psa. 148. 14), yet by nature they are not, and even after grace, they are still trying to

manage themselves, still finding things going well – till that thorn in the nest, that thorn in your flesh, that cross providence, that difficulty, that trial, that affliction, and then you are going back to the Saviour and seeking His mercy and seeking His help. The Lord does all this in love, and Joseph was doing all this in love, to bring them near to him.

But Joseph's brethren could not understand what he was doing, and neither could old Jacob when they told him. He seemed to be worse than his sons. He was not only mystified by what Joseph was doing, but it seems he was angry, and he used some strong language. Old Jacob did not realise this was his beloved son Joseph still alive. He did not realise all this was in love. He did not realise the wonderful provision in store in the land of Goshen. He did not realise his last days were going to be his best. Do you know what he said when he heard about Joseph's dealings? "All these things are against me." Jacob, if you really knew, every single one of these things is *for* you, not against you!

But don't God's people get there sometimes! You see that cross, that loss, that trial. "All these things are against me." We need this to be revealed and applied to our hearts: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Paul did not always feel it, but he believed it and he knew it. "All things." What, you say, Simeon thrown into prison? What, you say, the lord of Egypt seeming to speak unkindly and harshly to them? Surely Jacob was right! This is according to the flesh. All these things are right and all working together, the wonderful wheel of providence in the hand of Almighty God. They are all working together for good to old Jacob and for all his family. May we prove it.

Then Jacob said another terrible thing. Do you remember what he said? He had heard all about this man in Egypt and what he had done and what he had said. Do not forget, it was all in love, wonderful love, matchless love. But the chapter ends: "Then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." That is what Jacob said. The future was bleak. He could not see much hope spiritually or providentially. All he could see was this: he was old; he had had a sorrowful life; and the worst was still to come. He said, "Then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." Yet Jacob had the most blessed end that is ever recorded in the whole of the Old Testament. Others may have had an

equally blessed end, but only Jacob's is recorded. He had not a single cloud in his sky. Everything was right; not a thing wrong; not a thing out of place. He said, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord," and he gathered up his feet into his bed and he died. The wonderful love, the mercy, the compassion, the goodness of Joseph to his father and his brethren, and yet how it was completely misunderstood.

But there came a day when Joseph revealed himself to his brethren. He said, "Come near to me, I pray you.... I am Joseph your brother." They were afraid, but the beautiful, blessed things he spoke. He said, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." He said, "God did send me before you to preserve life." Have you noticed that when Joseph revealed himself to his brethren, he did not speak one word of condemnation or unkindness or reproof for the way they had treated him when they threw him into the pit? It was nothing but love, nothing but mercy. They began to understand now why he *seemed* to deal harshly with them. Doesn't Rutherford say,

"With mercy and with judgment,
My web of time He wove,
And aye the dews of sorrow
Were lusted with His love:
I'll bless the hand that guided,
I'll bless the heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land"?

It was a wonderful day when Joseph made himself known to his brethren and received them.

Years ago down in the Fens I knew an old man who used to ask people the hardest of questions, the most severe questions. He asked me a lot of hard questions on one occasion. But he told me this himself. He heard Mr. F.L. Rowell preach. I do not think he should have done this, but he went up to him afterwards and said, "It is alright, Mr. Rowell, you preaching these wonderful things, but what do you think it is going to be when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ?" Mr. Rowell seemed staggered for a moment, and then he said, "Friend, I think He will say something like this to me: 'Fear not, I am Joseph your brother; come near to Me, I pray you.'" The old man said, "I never had a more beautiful,

never had a more blessed answer than that.” Well, beloved friends, may that be the end of the Lord’s mysterious dealings with you and me.