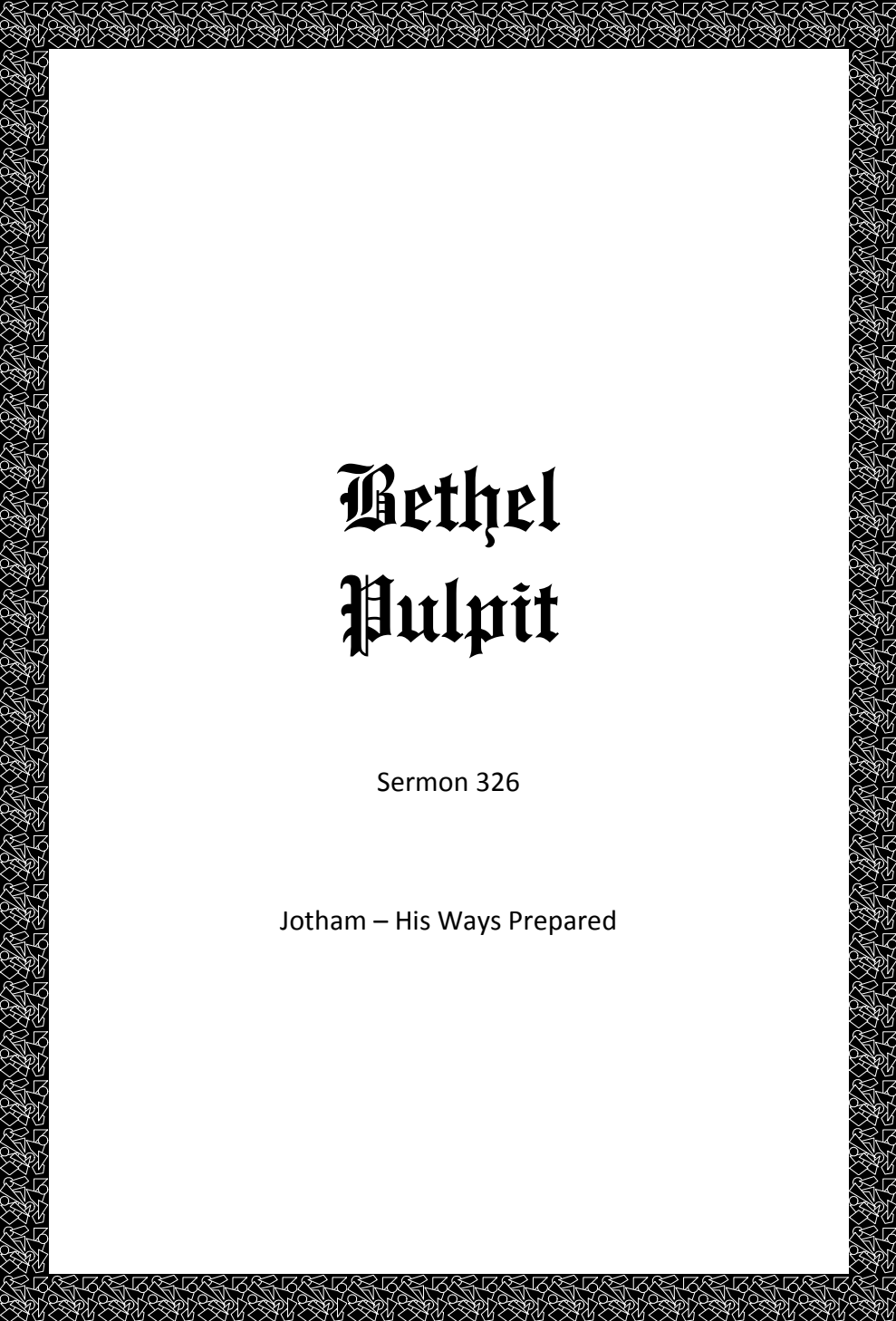




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 326

Jotham – His Ways Prepared

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 2nd September, 2012**

Text: *"So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God" (2 Chronicles 27. 8).*

When we come to these ancient accounts in the Kings and in the Chronicles, never forget this: *"All scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable." Never forget that. But also that God was the same then as He is now, that their God is our God, this God of holiness and judgment, this God of grace, this God of love.

Now here we have this man Jotham. If anyone had approached you before you came to chapel and said, Who was Jotham? I wonder how many of you would have known the answer! Who was Jotham? We do not read much about him in holy Scripture: nine verses in the Chronicles, only six verses in the Kings. He was a humble king of Judah, but he was one of the very few Old Testament kings who were really gracious in the sight of God. We do not know much about him, but right at the beginning we were told this, beloved friends: he was *right* – and that is the one thing that matters. When you and I come to the end, it will be the only thing that matters: am I right, or am I wrong? And by nature we are not right – lost, ruined, guilty, unbelieving, sinful, dead in trespasses and sins. The only way we can ever be right is for Almighty God by His Holy Spirit to make us right, to make us right in Christ, to make us right through His great salvation, to make us right personally and savingly. If your religion is real, you will have that concern sooner or later: am I really right, or am I not right? And you will pray to be right, and you will want a sweet hope you are right, and you will long for the assurance that you are right.

Well, this man Jotham, we do not know much about him. He was a good king. He did some very good things. But he was right. Of course, with all these Old Testament characters, and especially the kings, the Holy Spirit usually shows us there were certain things with them that were not really right; they would be better if they had not existed. That is a warning to us, but also it is a gracious reminder that no sinner is perfect, that salvation is by grace alone.

I want just to say one or two things about this man Jotham, this king. It is specially mentioned who his mother was: Jerushah. You notice in the previous chapter with King Uzziah, it is specially mentioned who his mother was. There seems to be this emphasis right through the Kings and the Chronicles, and if words mean anything at all, it is speaking of the influence of a mother for good or for evil. That is a word to many of you here, and that is a word to you girls as you are growing up. They say some mothers have had more influence than anyone on their children, children who have become eminent, become great, and it has been their mothers' influence. But also it can be so for ill. We read of one of the kings, he was terrible, and his mother was Jezebel. We read of another who was terrible and his mother was wicked Athaliah. So we read of the influence of these mothers for good or for evil. It seems clear in the Kings and the Chronicles that some of them were grandmothers. You have it in the New Testament, how the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. Now I do not feel led to dwell on that point or open it up or develop it this morning; only to leave it with you as a subject of very, very great importance: your example, your teaching, your prayers. So it is specially noted, his mother's name was Jerushah, the daughter of Zadok.

And then we mention his father, Uzziah. Well, I read a whole chapter about his father (chapter 26). It was one of the saddest accounts in the Old Testament. He was a most godly man and we have that expression: "He was marvellously helped." What an expression that! But we know what it means. God's help is marvellous; divine help is marvellous. You have proved it. Some of you here this morning, perhaps you cannot say much, dare not say much, but you can say, "I was holpen with a little help." You can say, "I was brought low, and He helped me." You can say, "Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." It is an almighty Helper, help laid on One that is mighty, help when no-one else can help. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

We have this expression of Jotham's father: "He was marvellously helped, *till he was strong*." O isn't that a word of warning to you and me! When he was weak, he was marvellously helped. When he was dependent, he was marvellously helped. When he was looking to the Lord, he was marvellously helped. But when he was strong, he was lifted up. He could

manage things himself. He could go his own way. He could neglect what the Lord had commanded, and so he presumed upon the priesthood. He went into the temple. He seized the censer from the priests. They remonstrated with him. No-one under the ceremonial law was allowed to be both a king and a priest. That was reserved for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ alone. "He ... shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon his throne," that "Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." A royal Priest, a priestly King. None but Jesus in Israel must ever be king and priest, and Uzziah disobeyed and was smitten with that dreadful disease of leprosy. He had to live separate from the people. He could no longer reign. He died a leper's death.

"Jotham was twenty and five years old when he began to reign." But he had been reigning for some time as the prince regent. We have had it in our country. You think of that dear old King George III who was so kind to the Lord's people, the Dissenters, and he was out of his mind for years and his son reigned as prince regent briefly. So Jotham became king when he was twenty-five years old, but he had reigned before for a time.

But coming to this word, it came to me very forcibly. There is not a word like it in all Scripture. What a word it is! The godliness, the grace, the looking to the Lord, the walking before Him in His tender fear, seeking His honour and glory, seeking His will. We do not read much about this man, but there are not many in the Word of God who have a better description given of them. And do not forget, this is God's judgment of him, this is the Holy Ghost's judgment of him: "He prepared his ways before the Lord his God." Or in other words, he sought that his ways would be ordered by the Lord. He sought that his ways might be directed by the Lord. He looked to Him. He was dependent. And in doing this, the Lord honoured him.

"Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God." Well, I suppose if people in Luton knew that we had a chapel full this morning and we were talking about an Old Testament king who lived two or three thousand years ago, they would wonder what on earth it was all about. Even religious people would say, What is the point? What is the profit? Well, these things that were written aforetime were written for our comfort, for our instruction. We have the blessed example here. We have the Holy Ghost's record here. We have what true religion

is here, and we are told this is the religion the Lord will honour and the Lord will bless. And do not forget, this was in that dark, shadowy, Old Testament day before Christ had come, but we look on a religion like this and if we are right, we say, “Be this religion mine.” May I know Jotham’s religion. May I prepare *my* ways before the Lord *my* God.

Now he was only a young man. He was only forty-one when he died. He was called to take over the kingdom in very, very sad circumstances. It was a time of crisis in Israel. There was this king, a good king, a well-loved king, and suddenly there is disaster, and he is struck with leprosy and he cannot reign any more. He is shut away in a house by himself, and this boy finds it is all thrust upon him. It was a time of crisis in Israel. It must have been a time of terrible, terrible sadness to this boy. He must have felt the awful weight of responsibility. And “he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” God was not a stranger to him. It did not come upon him unexpectedly.

Bring it home a little bit. If some of you boys or girls here, if tomorrow your father was suddenly killed, or your mother went completely out of her mind, or either of them, or both of them were afflicted with a dreadful disease, would you be able to turn to the Lord that you already know, seeking His help, His blessing, His guidance, His presence, or would He be a strange God to you? Would these things take you unawares? It may be something completely different – a dreadful disappointment – it may be at work, a dreadful disappointment in a job. It may be a friendship, a dreadful disappointment in this friendship. But here is this young boy – and we read these things in one or two lines – the poor boy must have been heartbroken, and not just the sadness and the sorrow and the problems and the disappointment, but he is ruling as king. He has not been prepared for it. He was a stranger to the way he had to walk. “Ye have not passed this way heretofore.” But he was not a stranger to his God. He knew where to turn, where to look and where to go. Now then, you girls and boys, if ever something comes, and we hope it may not, but sooner or later as you grow older, perhaps it is later in life but you find these sudden, unexpected things come and they throw you and they shatter you. But what a mercy if you know that

“There’s a God in Israel still,
Lives and reigns, and works His will,

For His people ever cares,
All He is or has is theirs.”

If you know “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

Well, he was only a young man, only a boy, but he knew what it was to seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and if you read through this chapter, literally all these things were added unto him. But it is that word *first*. The Lord will not be second in your life. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

“So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” Well then, beloved friends, this is a theme not just for our children, girls and boys, young people at the beginning. It is a subject for each of us. Do we know what it is to prepare our ways before the Lord, all our ways? And most important of all, and first of all, and before anything else, the way of salvation, the way to heaven. O we need to be prepared for that! “He prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” Now that is the vital thing, and hearing the preaching of the everlasting gospel here, that is the vital thing.

“Pause, my soul! and ask the question,
Art thou ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer’s blood?”

We need to be prepared for heaven. We need to be prepared for our end, prepared to meet our Maker, prepared to die, prepared to give an account. I lovingly and affectionately ask that question, are you prepared for your end? We have that beautiful word, He “hath made us meet” – that is to be prepared – “hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” That is heaven. It is “the inheritance of the saints in light.” You cannot buy an inheritance or earn it. It is bequeathed to you. It is because you are an heir. To be made meet for it, made fit, to be partakers. I have often mentioned that point to you over the years, but it is to be a *partaker* – not just to be an onlooker or a bystander – to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. And we need to be made

meet for it, and that meetness is in Christ, nothing in self, everything in Him, taught our need, fleeing for refuge to the Saviour.

“Stripped of all our fancied meetness
To approach the dread I AM,
We are led to see all fitness
Centring in the worthy Lamb;
And adoring,
Sing His Godhead, blood, and name.”

Now that is the preparation, and these things are made known in your heart by the Holy Spirit.

“He prepared his ways before the Lord his God,” and over and above everything else, the way of salvation, the way to heaven. So in the spirit of it you will be brought to pray, Prepare me personally.

“Prepare me, gracious God,
To stand before Thy face.”

Now how many of you pray it? But I do not want to speak unkindly. Beware you are not just praying it as a kind of automatic thing. A parrot could be taught to pray, “Prepare me, gracious God.” I do not want to speak unkindly, but I wonder if there are some people who have always said it as a prayer, “Prepare me gracious God.” O to feel it, the need to be prepared! I cannot prepare myself. It must be only in Christ.

“Prepare me, gracious God,
To stand before Thy face.”

I have always thought it so beautiful the way he explains so simply and so clearly what the preparation is:

“In Christ’s obedience clothe,
And wash me in His blood.”

That is the preparation.

“So” – and only so – “shall I lift my head with joy
Among the sons of God.”

A number of years ago we closed with that hymn, and when the service finished, there was a godly old woman from the Bethesda Home and she was very deaf, and you could hear her all over the chapel when she

spoke. She said, “I believe I shall lift my head with joy among the sons of God.” She knew it and she meant it.

“He prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” Well, that is the vital thing, the preparation for heaven. But then it is this: to have our ways ordered and directed and prepared before the Lord. If you are interested in this subject, and I hope you are because it is important, there is a lot in Scripture, especially in the Book of Psalms, the Book of Proverbs, about our way being prepared and directed. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word.”¹ “In all thy ways acknowledge *Him*, and *He* shall direct thy paths.” So it is this: to have an ordered life, a directed life. Our hymnwriter says,

“May our ordered lives express
The beauty of Thy peace.”

Not a disordered life.

“He prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” At the beginning of the day, as you have to go out, to prepare your ways before the Lord. You have a decision to make; to prepare your way before the Lord. You have a terrible problem; to prepare your way before the Lord. You are walking through the midst of trouble; to prepare your way before the Lord. “He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.” A boy or girl being married; to prepare your way before the Lord. Older ones having a move in providence; to prepare your way before the Lord, seeking to know His will.

“He prepared his ways before the Lord his God.” How did he do it and how do you and I do it? How do you and I prepare our ways before the Lord, knowing His will, walking worthy, seeking His help? Well, first of all, *by prayer*. That is the only way in which you and I can prepare our ways before the Lord so that they might be right ways and God-honouring ways and Christ-exalting ways – by prayer. I mean, the whole of your life. There may be nothing special before you this week, and those are the times when we need to be careful, beloved friends, when there is nothing special. Those are the times we get careless.

¹ Number 335, Young People’s Hymnal: “How shall the young direct their way?”

“Leave God to order all thy ways,
And trust in Him whate’er betide;
Who builds on His unchanging love
Builds on a rock that cannot move.”

But it is by prayer, if it is just the ordinary course of your life.

Then there are special things. You have a mountain, or there is a problem, or there is a difficulty. How are you going to direct your ways? How are you going to prepare your ways before the Lord? It is by prayer and it is in complete dependence on Him, and it is looking to Him alone. In a word it is this: “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.”

This week a lot of you children and young people have new things – starting school, and going back, and new classes, and all these things, and perhaps you will come across one or two difficulties. Perhaps you will not be with your old friends. Perhaps you will be with people you do not get on so well with. Perhaps the teacher will not be the best. Perhaps some of them do not understand you. Perhaps some of them smile at you because you go to chapel. How are you going to prepare your way before the Lord? When September comes, there is a lot of preparation for going to school. There are all these advertisements in the shops and parents running round preparing this and that. What about preparing your way before the Lord? “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” Families, parents, mothers at home with all these things; to prepare your way before the Lord, seeking His help, seeking His guidance.

We are not going to leave the old people out, the aged ones out, because there are so many things in old age as the grasshopper becomes a burden; you cannot manage them and you need the Lord to deal with them for you, to prepare the hearts of these people you have to deal with, to supply your need, to direct your way – all these things.

“He prepared his ways before the Lord.” Well, perhaps some of you are saying, You are talking about children and old people. Well there are those in business, those mingling with the world. You specially need it, to prepare your way before the Lord, to be kept from the world and the spirit of the world. But also this: to set an example to the world, to walk

worthy before the world, to be kept before the world, to have a higher standard than the world. But in this, especially those in business and dealing with other people, O how you need to have your ways prepared before the Lord!

But then, maybe these are providential things. Well, there is the pilgrimage to walk out. There is a fight to be fought. There is a race to be won. You have an unbelieving heart. There are sins to be forgiven. There is an opposing devil. There is a gainsaying world. You have an unbelieving heart. O isn't that hymn we sung this morning a good one (341)! We have had to look at it hundreds of times as we seek to go on. You remember when it was my fortieth anniversary, I think I surprised everyone, but I felt the closing hymn must be that:

“Lord, hast Thou made me know Thy ways?
Conduct me in Thy fear.”

It is now and in the unknown way and all the way through and right to the end.

“And grant me such supplies of grace,
That I may persevere.”

“He prepared his ways before the Lord.” So that is the first way in which we prepare our ways before the Lord, great or small, in providence or grace, by prayer. Now the second way is this: “By taking heed thereto according to His Word.”

“Order my footsteps by thy Word,
And make my heart sincere.”

It is to read the Word and pray about the Word and to seek that your life might be ordered by the Word, and to be blessed with faith to obey the Word, and if things are forbidden in the Word, to deny them, and if they are commanded, to do them.

“He prepared his ways before the Lord.” That is what it means when we read of them who trembled at God's Word. It does not mean they are frightened; it means they have a loving respect and awe and reverence for the Word of God and they want the whole of their life to be guided and ordered by it.

“He prepared his ways before the Lord.” So it is first by prayer, and second according to His Word, and along with this, seeking to walk in obedience to Him. It is a way of dependence. It is seeking His will. It is walking in His fear. It is desiring the honour and glory of His name. It is wanting to do what is right in His sight. It is wanting to be upheld, supported and kept, every need supplied. O this preparing our ways before the Lord! This Old Testament king, almost unknown, a humble follower of the Lord, he is here as an example to you and me this morning. I repeat it. I do not read an expression or a word just like this anywhere else in the Bible, in the Old or the New Testament. Really this is the sum and substance of vital godliness being walked out by a child of God, and God honoured him in it. Again and again I say we are not getting on legal ground; we are not going to say because he did this, God did something else. But it will ever be true: “Them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” “*So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.*”

Now there is just one other thing that needs to be said briefly and it is of vital importance. Those three words: “*before the Lord.*” Now, that is what real religion is: it is before the Lord. And if the Lord deals with you and me and teaches us, we shall want a religion before the Lord, and that is what the fear of God is. It will give you a religion before the Lord. We might be something before our friends and before our enemies, if we have any. But what is it before the Lord? This is what really matters: to be right in the sight of the Lord. And it is in the walking of it out. I have thought many, many times of how the great Elijah first appeared and he said, “The Lord God of Israel ... before whom I stand.” That was the secret of it. He was not standing before Ahab or Jezebel; he was before God, and God was his Master, and God was with him, and he was immortal till his work was done. They wanted to kill him and tried to kill him, but he never died; he went to heaven in a chariot of fire.

“The Lord God of Israel ... before whom I stand.” May it be the standard in the church of God and may it be the standard in our life, in everything. Jotham’s godly ancestor David put it clearly. He said, “I have set the Lord always before me.” Looking unto Jesus for help, for mercy, forgiveness, cleansing in the blood, salvation, seeking to walk before Him. And almost the first time we ever have this in Scripture, when the Lord appeared to Abraham, He said, “I am the Almighty God,” or as it means,

the all-sufficient God; God who is all sufficient. “I am the all-sufficient God, Almighty God; walk before Me.” There is the standard and there is the commandment and here is the example. This is the important point: “Before the Lord his God.” Then “be this religion mine.”

“So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God.”