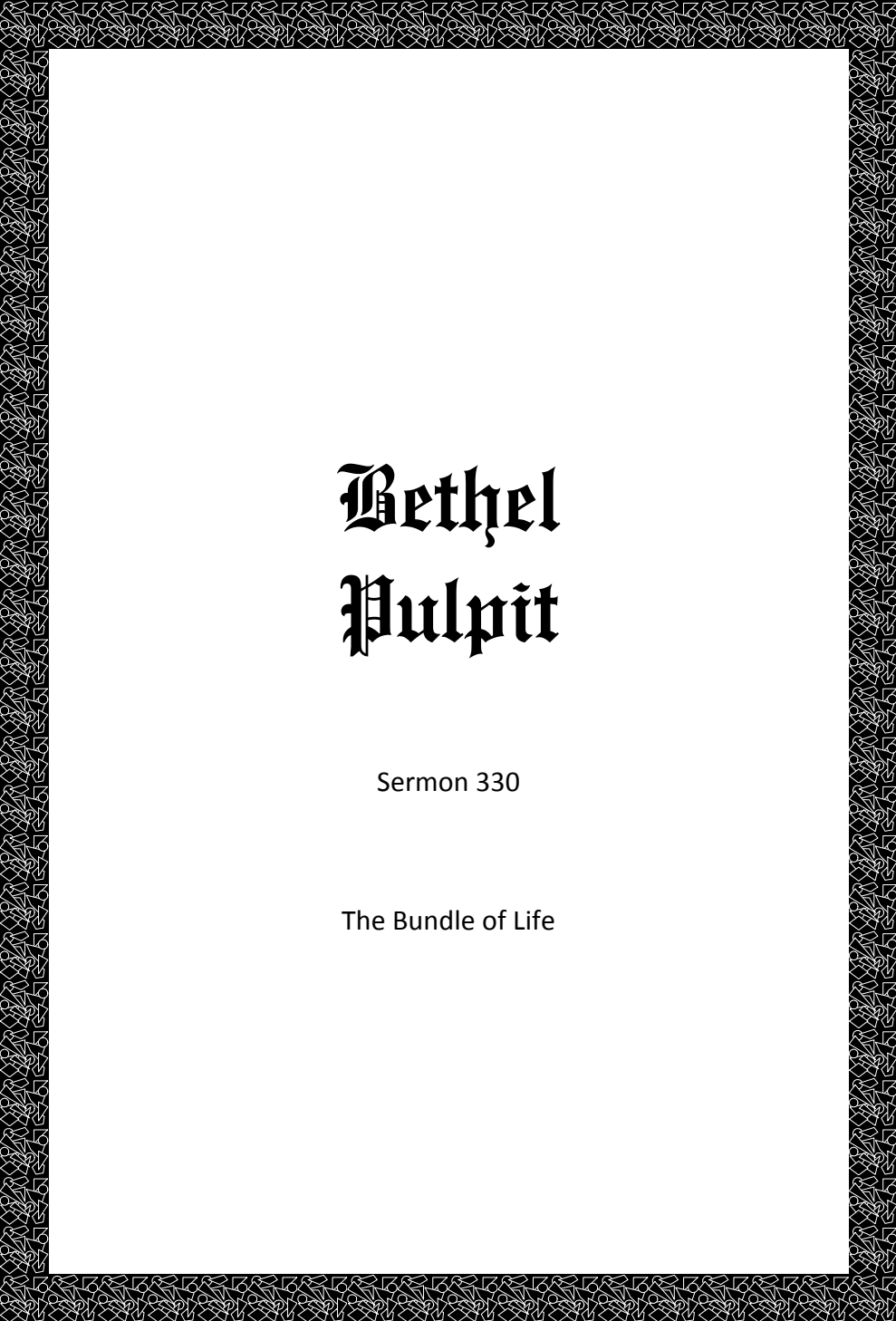




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 330

The Bundle of Life

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 13th January, 2013**

Text: *"Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God" (1 Samuel 25. 29).*

This very beautiful word is found in an unusual place, and beloved friends, I think you will find that some of the most precious scriptures are found in very unusual places as we read through the Word of God.

Now where is this lovely word to be found? This is the life of David. He was being hunted by Saul. He came to a place where there was a very wealthy man, Nabal. He was having his sheep sheared, which was really a wonderful festival of rejoicing. David sent his men to ask if they could have a share. They had been kind, they had been helpful, they had not caused any trouble – could they have something in return that would be a comfort to them? That wealthy man Nabal was a wicked man and sent back an awful answer, and David was left to his own spirit. David was going to go hastily, and he made a vow that before the next day not only would Nabal be dead, but all the men in his household would be dead.

Mysteriously that wicked man Nabal had a wife who is described as being very gracious and very beautiful. Her name was Abigail. She seemed to realise that one day David would reign as God's anointed king. Not only did she dread the slaughter there was going to be in her household, but she thought it would be a blot on David's character for the whole of his life. So she went and took beautiful gifts and met David, and fell at his feet, and begged him not to act rashly. And in the middle of it, she gave this reasoning: "A man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul" – King Saul – "but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." In other words, David, you are safe from the hand of Saul. One day you are going to be king, but more than that, you are "saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." You can leave your enemies with your God. "The souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out." If anybody knew what the use of a sling was, David did. "The souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out, as out of the middle of a sling." You know what transpired. David fell before it. He honoured this

godly woman. He thanked her for her advice, and later, when the Lord suddenly judged her husband and he died, Abigail became David's wife.

Well then, leaving all that; that is the background to this very beautiful verse: "Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." It is a beautiful description of the blood-bought church of God, "saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." From all eternity God foreseeing them in their lost, ruined condition, He bound them up in the covenant of grace, the bundle of life. He ordained them, every one of them, to everlasting life. He secured it all in His dear Son. And there from all eternity we see the church of God, as John Kent says:

"They on His sacred bosom lay,
Loved with an everlasting love."

So here really in these few words you have a very beautiful picture of the eternal bliss and blessedness and everlasting security of the people of God. "Bound in the bundle of life." The Lord bound them in that bundle in His eternal choice, by His everlasting love, and they stand in union with Jesus. "Bound in the bundle of life."

Now then, if this is the subject, why did I read the account of Peter and Cornelius in the 11th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles? For this simple reason. I have always felt that the best explanation of the bundle of life and the best commentary on it is that vision that Peter had on the housetop at Joppa when he saw the great sheet knit at the four corners let down from heaven. I believe that explains what the bundle of life is. Of course, as it was revealed to Peter, it was a view of God's people eternally saved, and to him especially it was Jews and Gentiles bound up together in that great sheet.

But you think of it: it is a great sheet. The purposes of God are great. The salvation of God is great. The everlasting love of God is great. The riches of His grace are great. We need all these things because our need is great, because our sin is great. So this bundle of life is great. "A great sheet." And as Peter saw it, he said it was "let down from heaven." It was not something that sinners invented. Adam could not think it out when he fell. It has a divine origin and it comes down from heaven. O what a mercy if there is anyone here this morning who like Peter can say, "It came even to me"! As I look round on you, my beloved congregation,

this morning, I realise that is just what some of you – I believe many of you – are longing for: for the blessings of the gospel, for Christ Himself, to come right where you are. You would go home happy this morning if like Peter through grace you could say, “And it came even to me.”

Well, this bundle of life. When Peter looked inside it, he saw all manner of creatures. Now amongst the Lord’s people there are all manner of creatures. And every one of them was unclean, but every single one was cleansed. That is, the bundle of life contains none but sinners, none but those who are unclean by nature. But there is one word you can see written the whole way across the great sheet, and the whole way across the bundle of life, and the whole way across the everlasting gospel, and it is this: “And the blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth us from all sin.” All these in the bundle of life are unworthy; they are all guilty; they are all sinful. They cannot cleanse themselves. But at last it shall be said of the whole lot of them, “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.”

“The blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Those of you who are familiar with the life of Martin Luther the great Reformer, though he was wonderfully blessed by God, will remember he was most severely tempted, perhaps more than anyone I have ever read about, and sometime by horrifying dreams and visions. In one of these, Satan appeared with a long scroll and said, “Luther, these are all your sins.” And he said, “You cannot deny it.” Luther said, “That scroll was so great, it seemed to go all the way round the world and back again.” Satan asked him, and he agreed; he said, yes, he was guilty; they were his sins. In his vision, Luther said, “Make sure you have every single one on that great scroll. Be absolutely sure you have not missed a single sin out. And then, Satan,” he said, “take thy pen and right at the bottom, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ God’s Son cleanseth from all sin.’” And in his vision Satan fled.

That is it. The great sheet, the bundle of life in which God’s people are safely bound up, bound up with an everlasting salvation, all unclean, and yet all cleansed in the blood of Christ. Some of them were flying fowl, and some of them were creeping things, and some of them

were wild beasts. Perhaps you find one of them fits your character: wild beasts, flying fowl, creeping things, all unclean, all cleansed.

They were all in the sheet, all in the bundle of life. How did they get in? Well of course, in the everlasting purposes of God in the covenant of grace they were always there. But then it is personally. Those to whom the Lord has a purpose of love and mercy, personally they are brought in. Well, I suppose those flying fowl flew in. They perhaps got in more easily. Perhaps the creeping things had a job getting in. And what about these wild beasts? How did they get in? How does a sinner get into the great sheet personally and experimentally? Beloved friends, you and I this morning are either in that sheet or we are not, and if you and I die and never get into that great sheet, it is solemn for us to all eternity. How did they get into the great sheet? Led by the Spirit of God, born again of the Spirit, quickened into life, seeing their need, seeing the preciousness of the Saviour, seeing a sweet attraction in Him, hearing His loving voice, listening to His sweet invitation, believing that there is a welcome for sinners on mercy's ground. And so one by one – and it is personally; it is one by one – so one by one they come into the sheet.

But I have always loved this word: “Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” We speak so much about the bundle of life, and this great sheet knit at the four corners, but the vital point here is this, and I wonder how much Abigail could see by faith, and how much David saw by faith: “With the Lord thy God.” That is Christ. Why they came into the great sheet, because Christ was there, because they saw an attraction in Him. They must have Him; they could not do without Him. And so whether they flew into the sheet or whether they crept into the sheet, it was this:

“I must have Christ as All in all,
Or sink in ruin, guilt, and thrall.”

Have you a sweet hope that you have ever been led by the Spirit? Have you seen an attraction in that great sheet, seen Christ there? It is the same blessed truth, but a completely different figure – the flood, the ark. “Come thou and all thy house into the ark.” But it is “bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” There is Christ there. There is union with Jesus there.

“Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” And Peter said that he saw that sheet was taken back up to heaven, and there was not a single one fell out. It is a wonderful truth, the everlasting security of the people of God, especially for a young believer, when you are starting out and you have – how many years before you in the wilderness? and you are weak and helpless and sinful, and Satan is strong, and unbelief is strong, and self is strong, and the world strong, and temptation strong. How can you endure to the end? And then to see that wonderful truth, the eternal safety, the everlasting security of the people of God. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.”

“Bound in the bundle of life.” And the sheet was taken back to heaven, and not one left behind. These wild beasts will not with all their wildness fall out from the sheet, and neither because of their wildness will their God and Saviour throw them out of the sheet. It is “bound in the bundle of life.” And Peter saw this: the sheet was “knit at the four corners.” It was securely tied up. It is tied up with the cords of God’s everlasting love. That is what makes the bundle of life secure, because it is secured with the cords of everlasting love, and those cords, as old John Warburton used to say, are fastened secure in eternity at both ends, from everlasting to everlasting. “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

“Bound in the bundle of life.” O but to see this: the Lord in love and mercy binding you and me in that bundle with Christ. There is one word in our hymn book which I think suits a lot of you, especially if you are feeling down and sad and dark and hard. It is this:

“I’ve bound thee up secure,
’Midst all the rage of hell;
The curse thou never shalt endure,
For I’m unchangeable.”

Now you deserve the curse, but you never, never can endure it. It is the Lord who in love and mercy takes that sinner and He binds him up there secure in the bundle of life.

“I’ve bound thee up secure,
’Midst all the rage of hell.”

May that be a suitable word to some of you this morning, those of you who are tried, and those of you who are tempted, and those with problems in your life, and those not feeling well, and those with things before you in the new year, those with mountains. “And who is sufficient for these things?” Those of you concerned about those you love. So we might go on and on about all these things, but if only you could hear the Lord say,

“I’ve bound thee up secure,
’Midst all the rage of hell” –

bound thee up in the great sheet knit at the four corners, bound thee up with the cords of everlasting love, bound thee up in the bundle of life.

So what does it mean? That whatever lies before you, the Lord in love and mercy will be with you. “For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” If there are troubles, the Lord will make them all work together for His glory and your real good, and if you have hard things, then the Lord will uphold you in them, and He will bear you along, and He will bear you up, and He will bear you through.

“I’ve bound thee up secure,
’Midst all the rage of hell,”

“Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” I think some of you would like to know it personally and feelingly, the Lord taking you and bringing you and drawing you and attracting you and binding you up in that bundle of life. Well, if you read David’s Psalms, he could speak a lot about this being bound up, but he felt it specially when his feet were allowed to fall, and when he dishonoured his Lord and Master, and when he sinned so grievously. If you read the 51st Psalm, the bitter repentance, the sorrow, the humble confession, the grief, but at the end he knew this: that he was still bound in the bundle of life. Then grace is free indeed. Then mercy is free to the chief of sinners.

They say if you had a bundle of sticks, if one stick could be pulled out of that bundle, the whole bundle would disintegrate and fall to pieces. Well, it is so spiritually. Joseph Hart says,

“If one believer may be lost,
It follows, so may all.”

But every single one secure.

“Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” There is a lot of good divinity with Abigail. It says, “She was a woman of good understanding.” She seemed to have a good understanding of the things of God. She saw this: that there was life in it, everlasting life in it, and I believe she saw it was death everywhere else. It is not just the sheet knit at the four corners; it is not just a bundle; it is “the bundle of life,” because all those who were bound up in it are blessed with eternal life. And that life is in Jesus: “With the Lord thy God” – not apart from Him. It is life, eternal life through His death. You remember Bunyan’s Pilgrim with his burden coming to the cross, and the burden rolled away. “He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.” It is only through the death of Christ that a sinner can ever know eternal life. Remember Bunyan’s Pilgrim when he set out. He said, “Life! life! eternal life!” They tried to bring him back to the world, but, “Life! life! eternal life!” That embraces heaven, but it embraces every blessing here below that God can give, that a sinner can know, and all this in Christ.

“Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” It will endear the Saviour. It will make Him precious, because apart from Christ, apart from His sin-atonement sufferings at Calvary, apart from His death on the cross, there could be no bundle of life. O but to see it all in Christ! To see nothing but death in yourself, to see nothing but life in Christ; to see nothing but uncleanness in yourself, to see nothing but forgiveness and cleansing and salvation in the blood of Christ.

“Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” There is a grave in Rochdale cemetery, and it has this on it: “Bound in the bundle of life.” That is the grave of Mr. William Hill, who was the brother of Mr. James Hill (formerly pastor at Ebenezer, Luton, and before that at Watford). He was in soul trouble, so much so that he felt there was hardly any use in him still going to the house of God, and in the end his family had to leave the chapel they had always attended, but he did not go with them at first. There was this distress. In the end, he went back to chapel again, and that was the text: “Bound in the bundle of life.” He was delivered the first time of hearing, and he always felt he should have been

baptized immediately, but he said, what would people say if the first time he entered the chapel, he was brought into gospel liberty? But God is sovereign. I did baptize him some time later and also I buried him, and it quite touched my heart when I went up to take his widow's funeral at Rochdale, the grave stone was lying there at the side. It had his name and the date of his death, and "Bound in the bundle of life."

I believe the ancient Jews used to count this as an epitaph for those they loved. When we come to the end, a lot of people will probably say a lot of things about us, but it will be a wonderful mercy if this can honestly be said of us: "Bound in the bundle of life." It would be a wonderful thing if this could be recorded of you and me. But of course, the great point is not what other people think; it is what the Lord says. "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence." But all His beloved people from Adam's day to the end of time *are* bound up in the bundle of life with Christ, with the Lord their God.

"In union with the Lamb,
From condemnation free."

But our desire personally is this: that we too might be bound up there, that the Lord Himself might bind us up there, that we might be in the bundle, we might be safe in the bundle, that it might be with Christ, that it might be in Christ, and that we might know: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

"Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God."