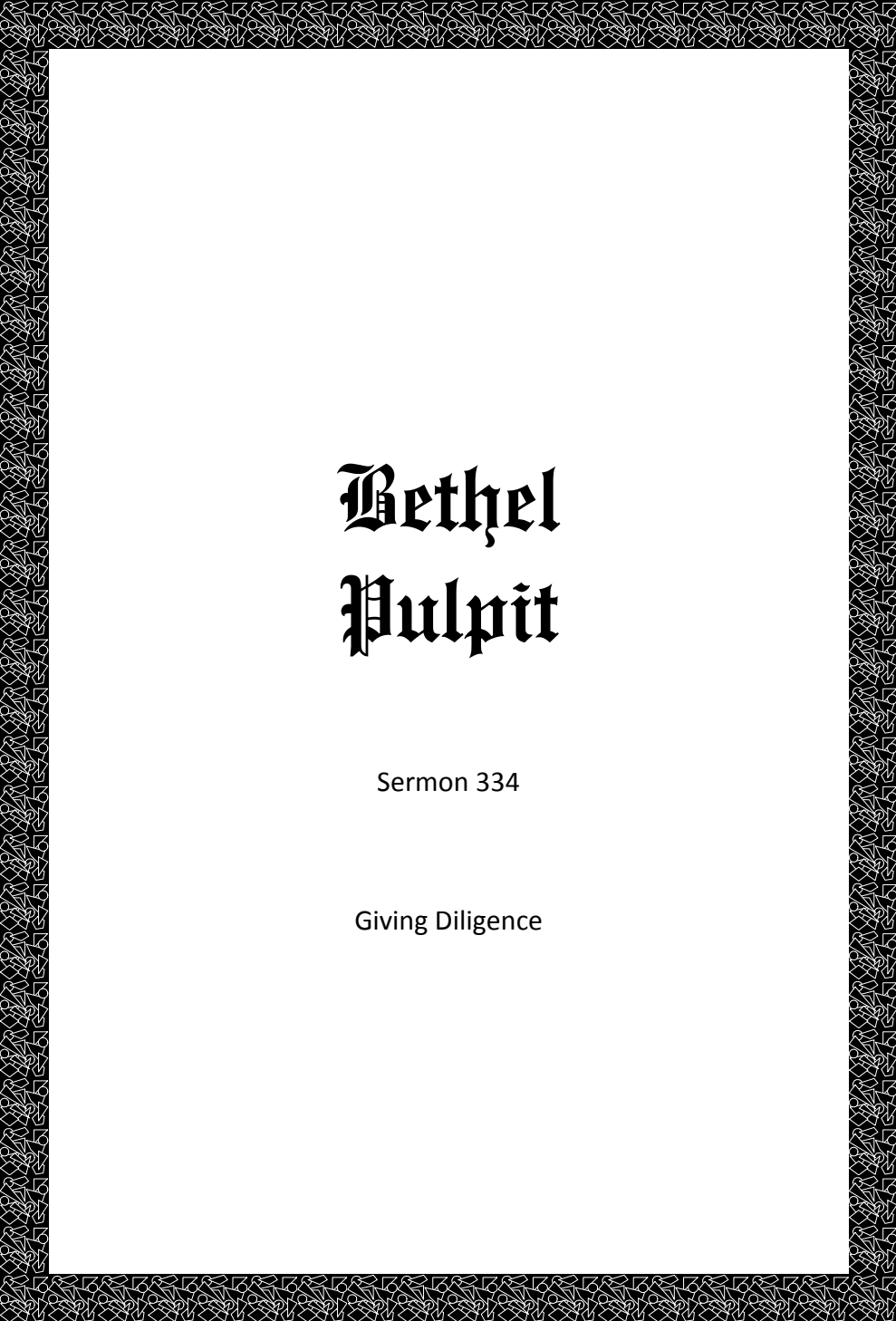




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 334

Giving Diligence

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 28th April, 2013**

Text: *"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1. 10).*

These are two great, vital truths of the gospel: election and calling, both clearly revealed, clearly taught in God's Word. Election – God from the ruins of the Fall eternally chose a people. He gave them into the hands of His beloved Son. Christ was set up as their Surety. They were blessed with every spiritual blessing in Him. They were ordained to eternal life. They were loved with an everlasting love. And they were as safe from everlasting as they will be when one day they are in heaven, standing in everlasting union with the Son of God, "saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." So what a blessed, favoured people they are! It is no wonder that Ruth in her desire said, "This people shall be my people, and their God my God." Living souls can echo what Ruth said, first of all in the way of desire, and then later in the way of a resolve. "This people shall be my people" – this favoured people, this eternally-chosen, eternally loved people. "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord." I wonder if you have ever by faith had just a little glimpse of the everlasting blessedness of the people of God as they stand eternally secure, eternally complete in Christ.

And then we have calling. The simple point is this: that every single one of these who were chosen in eternity, in time will be called. The old divines used to speak of a general call and an effectual call. In a sense, every hearer hears a general call, but what the old divines meant by an effectual call is put so beautifully by John Kent:

"There is a period known to God
When all His sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in."

There is a divine certainty. It is the Holy Spirit's work. The Lord does not suggest salvation to them; He calls them, effectually calls them, calls them by His grace. And that calling is out of the world. It is away from their past life. It is away from their own self-righteousness and trusting in

what they have done. This call is really how the Lord so beautifully speaks to His beloved bride. He says, “Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away.” But this call is to the Saviour. It is seeking mercy. It is in prayer. It is in complete dependence. It is being brought to Him. It is being called to a knowledge of Christ and Him crucified. It is being called to a good hope through grace in Him. It is being called to the fellowship of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now beloved friends, there are two things here which God has joined together and no man can ever put them asunder: election, calling. I was once asked to speak at a Sovereign Grace Union meeting in Kent and the subject given was this: “Election Known by Calling.” That is just the very point here. The only way that a sinner can know his election is by calling. God’s election is in the past; it is in heaven; it is in the heart of God; it is in His eternal purposes. Calling is made known in time; it is made known personally; it is in the hearts, in the lives of the people of God.

So if you can speak of an order here, election is first in eternity past and then calling in time. I am not going to distinguish between all these things, though there is a distinction: there is calling; there is the new birth; there is the quickening; there is conversion. All these things are most intimately bound up together. So election first in eternity past, calling now in time. But the way a sinner comes into the experience of it is completely the other way round. He does not ascend to heaven and read his name in the book of life, but he is enabled to trace his calling. He believes that under the influence of the Spirit of God and the sacred calling of the Spirit of God, he has fled for refuge to Jesus. Feeling his need as sinner, he has fled for refuge to Jesus. Jesus is his only hope. Jesus is his only plea. All his dependence is there. He is a true believer on the Son of God. So as he is brought to Christ and looks to Christ, there he can discern his calling, and as he can discern his calling, so he can discern his election.

So Peter says this is the vital thing. It is the vital thing to be concerned about. It is the vital thing to know. Peter was an old man.

“What shall the dying sinner do,
That seeks relief for all his woe?”

By nature we are lost, ruined, guilty sinners. Are we right for eternity? “Give diligence” – he does not say to make your election and calling sure. He says, “to make your calling and election sure.”

So let me linger on this point, how the Lord has joined these things together. That beautiful, well-known verse, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me” – that is election and calling. “All that the Father giveth Me” – election – “shall come to Me” – that is calling. “And him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” “Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee.” “Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest” – that is election – “and causest to approach unto Thee” – that is calling. “We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple.” So you might go on through Scripture. Those the Lord has ordained to eternal life: “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” “Ordained to eternal life” – that is election – “believed” – that is calling.”

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” The older ones here have often heard me give an illustration of this, and perhaps you children have not, but in Scotland at their communion seasons they have a question session and different people are asked to “speak to the question.” I think one or two of our people from Bethel when they have been up there have been asked to “speak to the question.” One year the question was this: how may I know that I am among the elect? And various ones spoke, and one who spoke was a poor old man, an old soldier. He said, “You all know I am an old soldier. I get a pension. Now,” he said, “all the pensioners, their names are inscribed in a big book in London. But,” he said, “I have never been to London and I have never seen that big book, but because the pension comes to me from London every month, I know my name must be written in that book I have never seen.” And so he went on to speak of this very point of election known by calling. How beautifully and simply it is put in that lovely hymn of ours:

“The streams of love I trace
Up to the fountain, God;
And in His wondrous mercy see,
Eternal thoughts of love to me.”

Well, these things I have been saying so far, they are the gospel, they are divine truth as revealed in the gospel. But this is the point. Peter was an old man. He emphasises it in his second Epistle. He said, “Shortly I must put off this my tabernacle.” He was not here for long. But Peter was pressing the solemnity of the point, the urgency of the point, the need to be right, the need to be prepared for eternity, the need for it to be our chief concern. And so he says, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, *give diligence* to make your calling and election sure.”

Now it is one of Peter’s expressions: “Give diligence.” A chapter or two later, he says, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things” – what things? He has been speaking of the end of the world, that the Lord “will come as a thief in the night”; “all these things shall be dissolved,” the end of all things. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things.” Now do you? Do you look for these things?

Last Lord’s day morning I spoke at some length on what living, saving faith is. But one thing we are told in Scripture is that living faith sees things which are not seen as yet. One of our hymnwriters says it “brings eternal glories near.” Some people have spoken of living faith as a telescope. You young ones know what a telescope is. If you are out at sea, there might be something in the distance. It is not visible to you. You look through the telescope. You do not know what you might see. You might see a ship approaching. You might see a distant island.

So we are told that, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” These things Peter is speaking of here, he says, “Be diligent.” They are like these things with Noah. They are things “not seen as yet.” God told Noah there was going to be a flood. It was over one hundred years before it came, but Noah, as if he looked through that telescope of faith, he could see the whole world being destroyed in that deluge, and he was a faithful preacher. He warned the people. It seemed they mocked at him and laughed at him. He was building this boat on dry land. But he could see things by God-given faith not seen as yet. Faith sees them, and it has a gracious effect. It was “by faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”

So Peter here by faith could see things not seen as yet. He could see the whole world dissolving. He talks of it here, the elements melting in fervent heat. He could see it by faith. He was looking at it. So it is concerning the day of our death and eternity and the great judgment day. It is so; it is true, and God has warned us of it. Beloved friends, if the Lord has blessed you and me with living faith, we shall be like Noah. We shall see those things which are not seen as yet, and we shall be moved with fear. The wonderful mercy is we have not to do what Noah did, to prepare an ark for the saving of our house. It is revealed in the gospel: the Ark is prepared. The Saviour has died and risen again.

O but, “being warned of God of things not seen as yet.” We shall know this holy diligence that Peter insisted on so much, to flee for refuge to the hope set before us. There is an urgency in real faith, in living faith. Eternal things will be near. You will see yourself. How shall I stand in the great day? How shall I do in the swellings of Jordan? And then to enter by faith and find our safety in Christ the Ark of grace.

Peter keeps pressing this word *diligence*. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things” – that is the whole world being destroyed, the whole world coming to an end, time for ever ended, eternity brought in, the everlasting sentence, heaven or hell. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, *be diligent* that ye may be found of Him in peace.” Well, one day Almighty God will find *you* and Almighty God will find *me*, and it will be our mercy if He finds us *in peace*. The only way in which Almighty God will ever find you and me as sinners in peace, if He finds us in Christ. So, “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” And this is it: that I as a guilty sinner might be found in Him. That I might “be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.”

“O may my soul be found in Him,
And of His righteousness partake!”

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, *be diligent* that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” If you are found in Christ, it will be the wonder of wonders,

“without spot and blameless.” You know the secret: “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church” – this is it – “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” I can never forget dear Mr. Leslie Rowell speaking on that. He spoke on the spots that the Lord’s people do not have in the sight of Christ, their sins. Wrinkles? He said, You know what it is. Some of the Lord’s people are very strange and very peculiar, but he said the Lord Jesus Christ does not think they are strange and peculiar! “Not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, *be diligent* that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” Now this point of diligence. “Be diligent.” It is not an easy word to give a very simple explanation of the meaning of it. It means being very earnest, being very painstaking, not being satisfied easily, not being careless. “Be diligent.” I think you will find there is a lot in Scripture about being diligent, and if I were to ask you which book of the Bible especially warns us, commands us to be diligent, what would you say? If you go to the Book of Proverbs, you will find it in chapter after chapter [eleven references]. There is a verse where the wise man warns against not being diligent and the word he uses is being slothful. He presses the point on them.

“Be diligent.” But here with Peter especially concerning your sins and your soul and eternity, your standing among the people of God, being ready, being prepared for the great day, and having the marks and evidences of being amongst His people, and especially this great, this vital point: have I as a sinner fled for refuge to the hope set before me in Jesus? That is the clear mark of calling, the clear mark of election.

“Give diligence.” Well, beloved friends, how does a word like this affect you, when Almighty God looks down on you and says, “Be diligent”? Doesn’t it affect you two ways? First of all, you feel self-condemned in God’s sight, that really if we think of the vital importance of these things and we are made honest in the fear of God, we are not diligent. Then the second thing: we see the importance of it, we see it is God’s commandment, and we see we are unable, and so turn it into a

prayer. Lord Jesus, in Thy kindness give me this holy diligence that I so painfully lack.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence.” Have you ever seen a football crowd or been caught up in a football crowd going along to an important match? That is what diligence is. They cannot get there quickly enough, and some of them wake up not feeling very well, but they could not think of missing it, and they are willing to pay so much for their ticket, and as they go along, they are not talking about the weather; they are talking about what they are looking forward to, the excitement of it. But if you see a person going shopping – wherefore be diligent – they have something on their mind. They have something they are looking for. They want to find a bargain. They are comparing the prices. They are going in different shops. They are disappointed if they cannot get what they have gone for. They do not want to go away empty-handed. We are so diligent in our day-by-day things, whether they are important or whether they are small things, but O our lack of diligence in the things of God!

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence.” If you were to ask me to give just a little, simple illustration of someone being diligent, I think perhaps the one I would choose would be Ruth when she came gleaning in Boaz’ field. She was diligent. It was hard work, that gleaning. She was poor. It meant so much if she could gather a few handfuls of corn. It was the difference between life and death. She was toiling in the midday sun. It was back-breaking work. She did not go home, she could not be satisfied until she had a good portion to go home with. What diligence there was in Ruth!

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence.” May the Lord bless us with this holy diligence in the things of God. You have the very opposite in those foolish virgins *and* the wise, because we are told, “They all slumbered and slept,” and the point was, they were not supposed to be slumbering and sleeping. It was important. When we have a wedding, I do not expect those of you who come to be slumbering and sleeping and forgetting it is the day of the wedding. I should be very, very surprised if during the service I looked round and somebody was snoring. Of course you are not. You are looking forward to it. You are interested. It is important. This was the parable the Lord told. They are waiting for the bridegroom’s coming, and because he was late, they all fell asleep. Do not

forget, the wise as well as the foolish – they all fell asleep. The wonderful mercy was, when they were suddenly awakened, the wise had oil in their lamps; they were prepared. But the church of God today, the wise as well as the unwise, are in a sleepy, slumbering condition. But there is an order in it. The Lord Jesus said they slumbered and they slept. First of all they slumbered – they became a little bit drowsy, but they were not concerned; they did not seek to rouse themselves. They slumbered, and then they fell asleep. If you are slumbering this morning, be very, very careful that you do not fall asleep.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence.” When you come to the house of God, give diligence. I do think our attendance on the Lord’s day is excellent, the families coming morning and evening, but can you be satisfied to go home just as you came, and do you ever speak of anything concerning the service outside the chapel? Are you really diligent as you come? Is it a matter of life and death? Are you concerned to make your calling and your election sure? Is it this: how shall I stand in the great day? Is it, Am I among Thy people? Is it your great desire: “This people shall be my people”? But as the gospel is set forth, is there that sweet attraction, that running after Christ, that fleeing to Him, Christ crucified your only hope, as the clear mark of your calling and the evidence of your election? Do you come diligently to the house of God?

You probably saw on the noticeboard that I have been asked this year to give an address on the Lord’s day, the Sabbath day, at the Annual Meeting of the Gospel Standard Trust. Well, the godly Puritans were very, very diligent in this. They felt because it was so important, they kept their Saturday evenings for the Sabbath, getting ready, looking forward, anticipating. They used to call the Sabbath “the queen of days,” “the market day of souls.” They came empty; they did not want to go home empty – just like a person going to the market. It was the market day of souls. It was the best day of the week for them.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence.” I was concerned today what we should have for our readings, and those two short passages I read were on *diligence in prayer* (Luke 11. 1-13; 18. 1-14). We pray, but do we look for answers? Do we expect answers? Are we disappointed if we do not have answers? One was the man who knocked up his friend in the middle of the night and said, “Lend me three loaves,” and his friend

did not want to get up. But he would not go away. That is giving diligence. He would not go away. The other went to the unjust judge. He was a wicked man from whom not much could be expected, but he would not give up. The one kept on knocking; the other kept on asking. That is diligence. But they were not satisfied until they got what they wanted. O may the Lord make us more diligent in prayer.

I should think if you want the great example of diligence in prayer in Scripture, I should say Elijah on Mount Carmel. “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence.” He sent his servant boy to have a look if his prayers were being answered, and seven times he came back and said they were not. “Go again.” Keep on going.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence.” At Willenhall they used to speak about the days of Daniel Matthews, their old pastor. There was a poor, ignorant, godly man, and he just could not make any sense of this word *importunity*, that you have to be *importunate* in prayer. He did not like asking people, so he begged the Lord to show him. He went to chapel, and Daniel Matthews stopped when he came to the word *importunate*. He said, You know what it means [knocking on the pulpit], *importunate*, *importunity* – keep on knocking, keep on knocking.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” There is just one other aspect of this. There is that giving diligence to make your calling and election sure in prayer, and seeking the assurance from the Lord, venturing as a sinner on Christ, believing the Lord has called you, tracing it back to eternal decrees. But there is this: in the sense of *enduring to the end*, walking it out, because practically that is the great mark that a sinner’s calling and his election are sure, as his religion “stands every storm and stands at last.” And Peter says, “Give diligence,” because he never forgot the time when he was not very diligent. He was self-sufficient; he was self-reliant; he was not seeking the Lord’s help, and he denied his Lord and Master with oaths and curses. Peter never forgot that. The mercy was his faith was not destroyed and the Lord restored him and recommissioned him. But he says, “Be diligent,” in the sense of being watchful and being careful, and being diligent in this.

“His grace shall to the end,
Stronger and brighter shine.”

To pray for enduring grace, for “he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” I know doctrinally all God’s people will endure to the end, but the proof that you are one of God’s children is that you do endure to the end. You say,

“Let cares like a wild deluge come,
And storms of sorrow fall;
May I but safely reach my home,
My God, my heaven, my All.”

It will be a wonderful mercy to be brought safely through, to be “kept by the power of God.” That is another of Peter’s wonderful words. “The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” That is another of Peter’s words. It is a wonderful thing to be “kept by the power of God,” to endure to the end, to be brought safely through, and at last through God’s mercy, through the riches of His grace, to prove our calling and election sure. It is only as the Lord gives His grace and gives His enabling and gives His help and supplies every need and gives strength equal to the day. But this was very solemn with Peter, and may it be very solemn with you and me. So often it is the opposite: it is the slothfulness.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.”