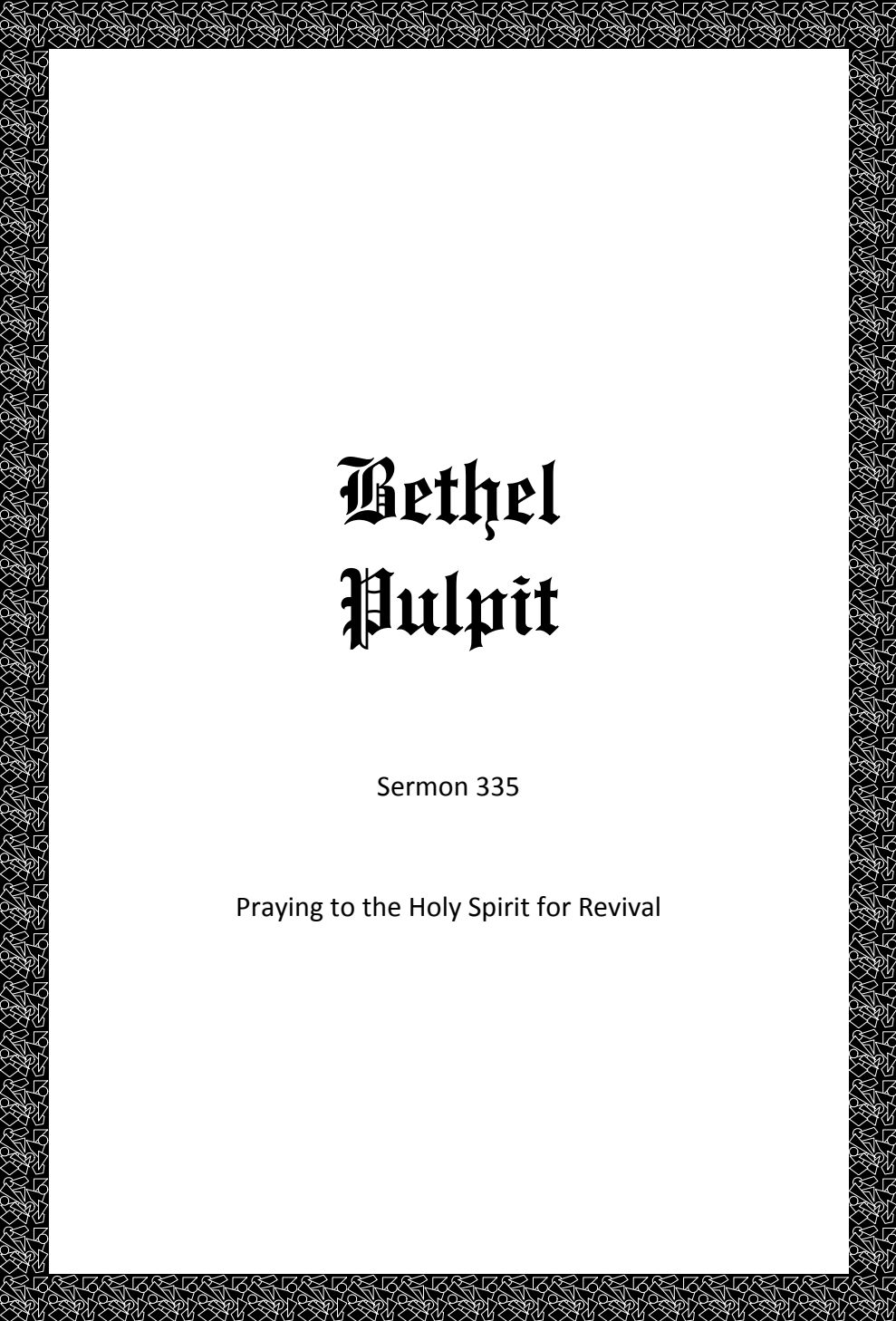




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 335

Praying to the Holy Spirit for Revival

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

Text: *"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits" (Song 4. 16).*

I wonder if you have ever been out on a sultry evening. Perhaps you have been in a garden; perhaps you have been in a park; and everything is heavy, and everything is still, and nothing is moving at all. *Sultry* seems the only word to explain it. And then suddenly the wind has begun to blow, perhaps only a gentle breeze, but O the difference, everything different and as if things are reviving.

And beloved friends, that is exactly what the picture is here. There is a garden. You can take that garden two ways: one way as it represents the church of God – the Lord Jesus says, "My garden" – and the other as it represents the heart of a believer, the heart of a sinner saved by grace. It does not matter which way really you think of it, because the spiritual truth is the same, and in reality I believe the word refers to both: the church of God as a whole and the heart of a believer.

Surely, beloved friends, you know something of seasons like this, and you cannot be really happy with them. They do not seem really pleasant to you, when there does not seem to be anything much going on in your soul, when everything seems dead and dark and dry and heavy; there is no movement, and try as you may, you cannot make things any different. O these are sad seasons, but if our religion is real, we are not satisfied with them. We want the Lord to appear. We want the Holy Spirit Himself graciously to work. We want Him to come, either like the north wind, more powerfully, or to come like the south wind, more gently. And then there will be a difference. Then we shall know something of what the Word of God means when it says, "Times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Now that is a good word and really there are two things in it. One is, it is a promise. They "shall come" – the times of refreshing. But the second thing, where are they going to come from? Only one place: from the presence of the Lord.

So we can look at this word as a prayer. “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” It is a prayer to the Holy Spirit of God. And let us be clear, it is right, it is scriptural, it is God-honouring to pray to the Holy Spirit. But not only thinking of this word concerning our own hearts, but concerning the church of God, the church of God in general today, our churches. This prayer was specially answered and abundantly answered on the Day of Pentecost. Then the north wind *did* awake and the south wind *did* blow, and the spices *did* flow forth from three thousand hearts. Now that was a most glorious fulfilment of this verse. But in measure, now and again down the ages, this has been fulfilled in the history of the church of God, and may there be that real prayer that it might be fulfilled again in our churches, remembering this, that the Holy Spirit, just like the Lord Jesus, is “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” He is the same today as He was on the Day of Pentecost. Do not forget, not just an influence – a Person. Do not forget, not just a Person – a divine Person, though here compared to the wind.

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” Now what a difference, what a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, what a reviving, but this is God’s work, not man’s, and it comes from heaven. It is not something that is worked up, any more than you and I have any control over the wind, no more have we any control over the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and yet sinners are permitted to pray, encouraged to pray. The churches are permitted to pray, encouraged to pray. “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south,” because if there is to be any real blessing in the church of God, if there is to be any real, true reviving, if there is to be any real blessing in our hearts, then it must come from the Holy Spirit and from Him alone. As He works, it will always be to exalt our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to exalt Him in the church and to exalt Him in the preaching of the everlasting gospel, and to exalt Him in our hearts.

So we think of this word. You know the stillness, the deadness, the longing for something to move, and we think of it personally in our souls, and I will just hold you on this one point: it is a wonderful mercy if you know the difference. Even if you are feeling this dead, sultry condition, it is a mercy if you know it. John Newton – I am turning off the subject just a moment – but John Newton wrote a hymn which begins,

“Breathe from the gentle south, O Lord,
And cheer me from the north.”

You know what John Newton’s religion was. Well, you know what it was when he sang “Amazing grace.” But he brings religion down to – would you say? – the lowest point there is, and in the analogy of this text, that dead, dry, sultry condition, and in that hymn he says,

“Cold as I feel this heart of mine,
Yet since I feel it so,
It yields some hope of life divine
Within, however low.”

Now that is not a resting place. That gracious man “Rabbi” Duncan said, “A perhaps of salvation, never despise it; never rest in it.”

But in the church of God, in our hearts – I do not know whether you ever feel it at Bethel – our services are not always the same. Do you ever find the Lord’s day morning comes, and perhaps you sit in your pew, and things seem dark and dry and dead. It almost seems as if someone has forgotten to put the lights on, or the hearing system is not working, or something. But O the difference when in power and His sacred influence the Holy Spirit is present and when there is some moving! You older ones remember that quaint expression the old people used to use: “a sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees.” It is a scriptural expression. When you get home, you look it up (2 Sam. 5. 24) and what it means there in the lives of the kings – something happening, some movement, however small. “A sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees.”

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south.” Well, I am sure it is clear to all of you here that the Holy Spirit and His working is often compared to the wind. They say that in the Hebrew language the word for the spirit and the word for the wind are one and the same words.

Now you have this right through Scripture. That is why I read two chapters this evening. Ezekiel chapter 37, the valley full of dry bones, and “they were very dry,” and, can these dry bones live? Lord, Thou knowest. And what had Ezekiel to do? He had to prophesy to the bones and he had to prophesy to the wind – in other words, pray to the wind. And really that is what gospel preachers have to do now: preach to the people and pray to the Holy Spirit to use the Word and apply it. And the wind blew upon

those dry bones, entered into them, the breath of life. They rose up, they lived, an exceeding great army. Perhaps you come to chapel sometimes feeling like dry bones and perhaps you pray,

“Breathe on these bones, so dry and dead;
Thy sweetest, softest influence shed
In all our hearts abroad.”

You know how the verse carries on, and if the Holy Spirit leads you there, that will be life in your heart, and that will soften your heart.

“Breathe on these bones, so dry and dead;
Thy sweetest, softest influence shed
In all our hearts abroad;
Point out the place where grace abounds;
Direct us to the bleeding wounds
Of our incarnate God.”

There will be a time of refreshing then from the presence of the Lord in your heart and in the church.

But, “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south.” Especially this point of making the dead live, the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit. “You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” The north wind, the south. That is Ezekiel 37.

And then we read that beautiful, well-known chapter, John chapter 3 – Nicodemus meeting the Saviour, and the Lord Jesus speaks of the new birth. Beloved friends, it is vital. “Ye must be born again.” I have often told you that when England was turned upside down by Whitefield’s preaching under the power of the Holy Spirit – and you think of him, six o’clock in the morning having a congregation out in the fields of thousands of people – and invariably his text was the same: “Ye must be born again.” As far as we can tell, there were thousands in England who were born again of the Spirit under his preaching. But people asked him on one occasion. They said, “Why do you keep preaching from the same text, ‘Ye must be born again’?” He thought a moment, and he said, “Well, because *ye must*.” That is as true tonight here at Bethel as it was in the 1700s. It would be a wonderful thing if the Lord raised up a Whitefield again. Where did He find him? Well, he was nobody. He was born in an inn, a

public house. There he was serving behind the counter when the Lord found him.

It is the Spirit's work. As the Lord Jesus discoursed on the new birth, He spoke of it as being entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Now you can see how striking the comparison, the Holy Spirit and the wind. You cannot see the wind blowing – no-one has ever seen the wind – but you see its effect. If it is a windy day and you look through the window, you can see its effect. What a power there is in the wind! How often recently we have read in the papers of some of these hurricanes that have swept a country here and there. Nobody could stand before them. When they were forecast, the only thing was for the people to flee. Nobody can stand before the wind. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

We could also have added a third reading tonight, the Acts of the Apostles chapter 2 – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. There was a sound there "as of a rushing mighty wind." O but the effect of it! There were three thousand people sovereignly worked upon, graciously changed, and we read this: "And they continued stedfastly" – every one of them. Now that is the Holy Spirit's work. It does not miss its mark; it does not fail.

"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." Now the point here, this especially is a garden of spices. I think the word we use today is an aromatic garden. You often find these today if there is a home for the blind. They have a garden. It is not the beauty of the plants; it is the fragrance. And this is the garden we have here. There were fruits in it. "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse" – the blood-bought church of God. And it is enclosed by God's everlasting love. That is its blessedness. That is its security. And there are many plants of the Father's right-hand planting. We read of "an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits." The Word of God has so much to say about pomegranates.

But this garden here is a garden of spices and fragrant herbs, and it is difficult to ascertain exactly what all these were. I gather that these

were very valuable spices. These were spices exceeding precious. “Camphire, with spikenard. Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.” The point here in the verse: we have this beautiful garden; we have all these precious spices; they have a lovely fragrance; but when everything is still, and everything is dead, and the evening is sultry, you cannot smell any of the fragrance. But let the wind begin to blow, whether it is the powerful north wind or the quiet south wind. Let it begin to blow, and then the spices flow out. The whole of the garden is full of the fragrance from all these spices. That is the figure, that is the analogy here.

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” Well, what does it mean spiritually? What is the application spiritually? If your religion is real, if you are born again of the Holy Spirit and led and taught by Him, then He plants these precious spices in your heart, in your very soul. What are these spices? Well, there are many of them, but do not forget they are all precious in the sight of God. Things like this: humility, repentance, faith, meekness, prayer, love, thanksgiving, patience, the fear of God, longsuffering, hope, joy. Now these are the graces of the Spirit. These are exceedingly precious and they are not there in our hearts by nature. They do not “grow in nature’s barren soil.”

But if our religion is real, these things are planted in our hearts. But the point of the verse is this: they are not always active; they are not always flowing. You do not always have that joy in the Lord Jesus. You do not always have that thanksgiving, that sweet gratitude flowing. You cannot always say that in your heart in your trials you feel very much patience and are blessed with a great deal of longsuffering. And though the Spirit’s work will humble you, we have a lot of pride. We are not always feeling humble. Then you think of love. Well, sometimes you do not feel there is much. You say, My love is cold and faint; my heart is hard. You are like this garden of all these precious spices. It is a sultry evening, nothing moving, nothing flowing. Some of you know what we are speaking about: everything seeming to be dead and dry and withered and barren and unprofitable.

What is it that will do the deed? Only if the Lord in love and mercy comes and the Holy Spirit graciously breathes upon your heart, and

then you find the difference. There is something moving. There is something different. There is something alive where everything seemed dead before. There is something flowing where everything was still. There is something rising upwards, heavenwards. You can pray now. You can return thanks now. O the difference when the Holy Spirit touches our hearts, looks in mercy upon us, breathes into our hearts, and the transformation! But here is prayer for it, here is the cry for it, and may the Lord in love and mercy answer it, personally in our hearts tonight, here in our midst at Bethel, throughout our churches, and amongst His people throughout the world.

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” There is something very fragrant in these precious gifts of the Holy Spirit. They give a fragrance to the church. They are attractive to the people of God. They are precious to the Lord in heaven, because it is His own work. The spices flow out. Joseph Hart in that well-known, long hymn of his when he is mourning over his barrenness has one verse like this:

“Lord, my heart, a desert vast,
Thy reviving hand requires;
Sin has laid my vineyard waste,
Overgrown with weeds and briars.
Thou canst make this desert bloom” – now this is it:
“Breathe, O breathe, celestial Dove,
Till it blow with rich perfume
Of humility and love.”

Another hymnwriter says, “Let every grace be active here.” You can never lose the graces of the Spirit from your heart – they are there; they are planted; you can never lose them – but they are certainly not always active. “Let every grace be active here.”

“Breathe, O breathe, celestial Dove,
Till it blow with rich perfume
Of humility and love.”

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.” Now if this prayer was answered, there would be true reviving in our souls and in the church of

God and in the churches throughout the earth. So it is a blessed prayer. There are some things in the Song of Solomon and the language is very high, but there are the beautiful prayers of the Song of Solomon. This is one of them. "Draw me, we will run after Thee." That is one of the prayers of the Song of Solomon. "Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon." That is another. And this one: "Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to Thy voice: cause me to hear it." Another one: "Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm." There are so many. They are beautiful prayers. And this in the text is one: "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south." The sacred, powerful, gracious influence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives. "Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

Now there is another way, a different way in which this word can be considered, and that is as the language of Christ Himself, the heavenly Bridegroom, sending forth by His divine authority as the risen Saviour the gift of the Holy Ghost, speaking of the church so lovingly: "My garden" – Mine, His wonderful love, His tender care, the purchase of His blood, the sinner for whom He died. "My garden." So if you consider it the language of Christ, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon *My garden*, that the spices thereof may flow out." I think a few of you have found this, and I think all of us have found it: in the Song of Solomon it is not always easy to tell whether it is Christ speaking or whether it is the church speaking. I remember they said that Thomas Godwin of Godmanchester spoke on one of these verses one way in the morning. One of his congregation said, "I thought it meant the other way; I thought it meant not the church, but Christ." "Well," he said, "this afternoon I am going to take it the other way round." I think in the Song of Solomon if there is one emphasis above everything else it is this: Christ and His church are one. So it is very, very beautiful which ever way we take it, either as the sinner's prayer or as the Saviour's commandment.

"Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." But the final sentence is definitely the prayer of the church. She cannot be satisfied with anything unless Christ the heavenly Bridegroom Himself comes, comes down and walks in the garden where she can see Him and know Him and feel His presence and love Him. "Let my Beloved come into His garden." May

this be the way we approach our Sabbaths and our ventures to Bethel to the services: let our Beloved come. We do not deserve it, but what is our gathering if He does not? “Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits,” which in doctrinal language, in gospel language is this: may He see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. May He find that joy that was set before Him for which He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God. O let Him come into His garden.

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits.”