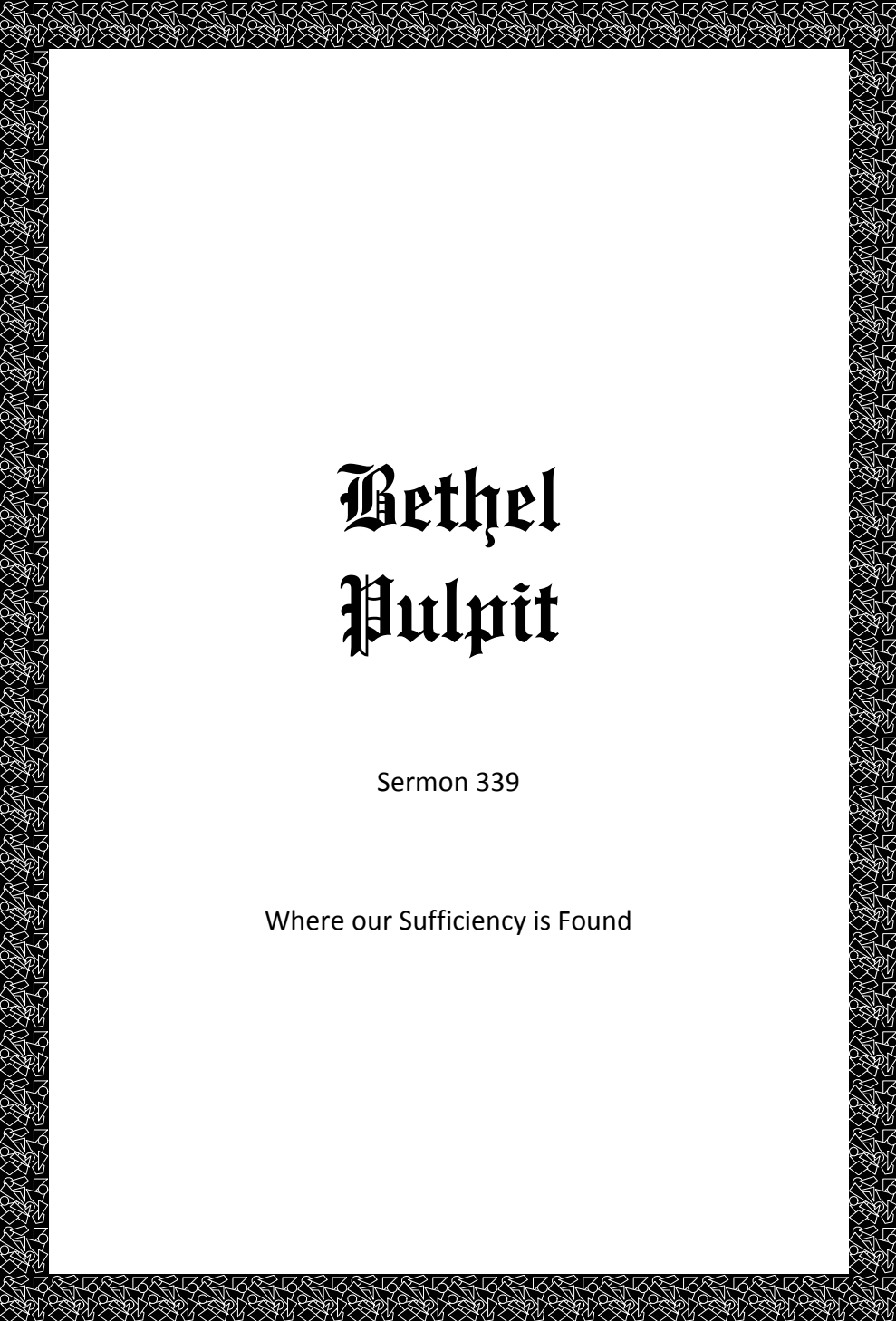




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 339

Where our Sufficiency is Found

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 6th October, 2013**

Text: “*And who is sufficient for these things?*” (2 Corinthians 2. 16).

I am sure that as you come to chapel this evening, many of you have things in your life, things before you, and you look at them, and you look at yourself, and you ask this question: “Who is sufficient for these things?” The concerns of your immortal soul, the conflict with Satan, your pilgrimage, with some of you your illness or the illness of those you love, the hard things, the problems, long-drawn-out trials, the unknown way, things before you, disappointments, problems, perplexities, and as you look at these things and as you consider them you say, “Who is sufficient for these things?” And the one point that is clear is this: you feel they are too hard for you. I go back to a time in my life when again and again I said to the Lord, “Lord, it is too hard for me,” and that word came again and again with power: “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me” – it is not too hard for Me – “and I will hear it.”

“Who is sufficient for these things?” We look within and we look around and we look forward, we look at these things – but you notice the verse that concluded our reading this evening (2 Cor. 4. 18). Paul was speaking of afflictions and he said this: that we are not looking *at* them. He saw them; he could not help seeing them; but he said he was not looking at them. May we know something of that work in our hearts and lives. The things we have, we cannot help seeing them, but the Word of God exhorts us not to look at them, to look elsewhere, to look upwards, to look Christwards. “We look *not* at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” Now that is faith. “For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” So what is it? “Who is sufficient for these things?” “Commit thy *works* unto the Lord, and thy *thoughts* shall be established.” The better-known word is, “Commit thy *way* unto the Lord; trust also in Him.” But do not forget He also says, “Commit thy *works* unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.”

Now in coming to this important question that so many ask and I believe all God's people ask at times, because they are well taught their

insufficiency, “Who is sufficient for these things?” I would like just first of all for a few moments to set it in its context. Now Paul is speaking of his preaching. He is speaking of the gospel ministry, the importance of it, the weight of it, the solemnity of it, because eternal issues are bound up with it. That is the point Paul is speaking about. He says, “We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” He felt that solemnly; I feel it solemnly, more and more, that there are some to whom we preach who one day will perish. Like good old Francis Covell, I often say and think, “I wish I could carry the whole congregation with me.” But Paul knew that some to whom he preached would perish and perish eternally, but he warned them, and we warn you.

But this is a remarkable statement. Paul was shown whatever effect his preaching had – whether it had good effect, whether it had no effect, whether people heard and received him, whether people heard him and rejected him, whether the people were saved, whether the people perished – as he sought to preach Christ and Him crucified, it was a sweet savour of Christ unto God. Never forget that aspect of gospel preaching, that if Christ is exalted in this chapel from this pulpit, whatever the people think about it, it is a sweet savour of Christ unto God.

But then he comes very solemnly to the separation. “To the one we are the savour of death unto death.” The figure is this. If there were a dead man lying in a room and it was filled with fragrant flowers, the sweet fragrance would mean nothing to that dead man. And it is like that with preaching. If Christ is exalted and His beauty and preciousness and suitability, where there are those who are dead in sin, there is no attraction in it; there is no sweet savour in it. That is solemn. “Take heed therefore how ye hear.” “To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.” Where there is a living soul, there is always a sweet attraction in Christ. Where there is a living soul, there is always an attraction in the gospel. It is like the heavenly perfume of the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valleys.

So there is a separation here. It does not need a minister to be cutting everybody off to separate the people. I have found myself from personal experience, I have preached in a place and just tried simply to speak of the beauties and glories of Christ, and it separates; they do not want it. If you tell them a few anecdotes, that would do, but the simple

preaching of Christ and Him crucified will always separate. And Paul felt the weight of it and the awfulness and the solemnity of it, and it was in this context that he said, “Who is sufficient for these things?” And the point was that the great apostle painfully felt his own insufficiency, and so do we.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” What a question! And did you notice as we read this evening in the next chapter, very soon he answers his own question. He says, “Our sufficiency is of God.” *We* are not sufficient; we painfully prove our insufficiency; but “our sufficiency is of God.” “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” One of the first things the Lord teaches a person who is preparing to preach the gospel is his complete unfitness and insufficiency for it, that he might have to depend on the Lord alone and find all his sufficiency there.

But also in the life and experience of every true believer, every sinner saved by grace, each one without exception will be taught how insufficient he is – insufficient to save themselves, insufficient to keep themselves, insufficient to walk out the way to heaven. Now when you find a professed Christian who is self-satisfied and self-sufficient, well, that person’s religion cannot be right. There is that expression the old preachers used to use. It comes in Jeremiah chapter 48. The Lord empties a sinner from vessel to vessel. He empties him from vessel to vessel so that he has nothing and looks for everything to Christ. So he feels his weakness and helplessness and he has to look for everything in Christ. I am sure that many of you here this evening know this lesson in your souls’ concerns and in church concerns and in family concerns, and as you seek to walk your pathway out, you feel at times your weakness; you feel at times your helplessness; you feel at times your lack of wisdom. You have things you do not know how to manage. “Who is sufficient for these things?” And then the wonderful answer, that complete sufficiency in God, in Christ. “But our sufficiency is of God.”

It rests powerfully on my spirit this evening to make four statements here, and the first is this: *the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse away sin*. The fountain opened, the value of the atonement, however great the sin, the blood which Jesus shed on the cross, that He shed at Calvary is sufficient to take away sin.

The second statement: *the grace of God is sufficient to uphold us in our pilgrimage.* In our pilgrimage there are many problems, many difficulties and opposition, and often it is weakness, and how can I continue? and how can I go on? The grace of God is sufficient to bear you up under the heaviest load and in the most difficult circumstances.

The third statement: *the wisdom of God is sufficient to guide you and to direct you in all your paths.* We come into things; we have not the wisdom; we know not what to do. “We have no might ... neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee.” The wisdom of God is sufficient to direct your paths. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

The fourth statement: *the power of God is sufficient to deliver you,* however great the trial, to answer your prayers, however impossible your case. If you remember nothing else this evening, O do remember those four things as an answer to this solemn, weighty question of the apostle, and as you find this solemn, weighty question in your own heart and life: “Who is sufficient for these things?” The blood of Christ, the grace of God, the wisdom of God, the power of God.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” So this evening we consider an all-sufficient God and Saviour in all His blessed ability to deal with this question. Now let us look at it, first of all in providence. You have things in your life. Perhaps things you need. You lack them, things you badly feel your need of. You have things and you cannot manage them. “Who is sufficient for these things?” Well, of course one of the most beautiful illustrations of an answer to this is the feeding of the five thousand. Here, if you will, is a problem. There are five thousand men besides women and children, and it is now the end of the day, and the Lord Jesus says, “Give ye them to eat.” The Lord says, “They need not depart.” And it was Philip who raised this point. They had five loaves; they had two fishes. And Philip’s conclusion was this: that these are not sufficient. These are the very words he uses. In John chapter 6 verse 7 he says that these are not sufficient. That was Philip’s answer, but it was not the answer of the Lord Jesus. Philip thought their own paltry provision would not do. Well, it would not, but he was looking at the things that were seen; he was not looking at the things which were not seen.

We have that sublime word of the Lord Jesus: “He Himself knew what He would do.” He always did; He always does. In one sense Philip was right – there was not any sufficiency in the little boy and in the loaves and in the fishes – but he was looking in the wrong direction, and you and I often look in the wrong direction. His sufficiency should have been in God. It is no wonder on another occasion, a later occasion, the Lord Jesus said, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?” We need that rebuke. Some of us have been with the Lord Jesus a long time in a profession, but how often we fail to trust Him and how often we are like Philip. Then you see the Lord wonderfully answering the solemn question, “Who is sufficient for these things?” performing a miracle, and do not forget,

“Sooner all nature must change,
Than one of God’s promises fail.”

There is so much good divinity with John Newton:

“How safe and how happy are they
Who on the good Shepherd rely;
He gives them out strength for their day,
Their wants He will surely supply.
He ravens and lions can tame!
All creatures obey His commands!
Then let us rejoice in His name,
And leave all our cares in His hands.”

Well then, that is an answer. “Who is sufficient for these things?” “And leave all our cares in His hands.” “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” And then you see written across it all, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

“Who is sufficient for these things?” There are times when you specially feel it, when “trouble, like a gloomy cloud” comes, and it “gathers thick and thunders loud.” Who is sufficient for that trying day? How can you stand that trying day? Or this pilgrimage you have to walk out – now “who is sufficient for these things?” There is a very remarkable verse and it comes in this same Epistle. “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things.” It is a remarkable word. It seems almost like an exaggeration, but

there is no exaggeration in Scripture. It is one of those wonderful texts: “He is able.” “God is able to make all grace abound toward you.” Now here you are walking out your pilgrimage, and you are not able, and you feel your insufficiency; you feel your helplessness. “God is able to make” – it is strong language – “*all* grace abound toward you; that ye, *always* having *all* sufficiency in *all* things.” You have four *alls* there: *always* – at every time; *all* sufficiency; in *all* things – in everything; *all* grace. “That ye, always having all sufficiency in all things.” The blessed ability of the Lord! In a word we are being led to that wonderful fulness which dwells in Christ, that fulness of love and mercy and grace.

“Here the vast seas of grace,
Love, peace, and mercy flow,
That all the blood-bought race
Of men, or angels know.”

You see that fulness in Christ. Really what it means is this all-sufficiency. This is that river that Ezekiel saw, and he went into it and he tried to measure it. It was up to his ankles, up to his knees, up to his thighs. He said it was “a river that could not be passed over.” It is inexhaustible. “God is able to make *all* grace abound toward you; that ye, *always* having *all* sufficiency in *all* things.”

“Who is sufficient for these things?” Now then you come to the life of Elijah – a famine, a drought, and nothing to eat, nothing to drink. “Who is sufficient for these things?” Not Ahab, not Elijah, but Elijah’s God. There is the Brook Cherith; there are the ravens; there is the continued supply. What when it dried up? The old preachers said, “The Lord is not limited to one Brook Cherith!” “Remember that Omnipotence hath servants everywhere.” A widow woman and the all-sufficiency. There was a complete sufficiency for all those months of famine – the barrel of meal, the cruse of oil. “Who is sufficient?” Not the poor widow woman, not her son, not Elijah, but Elijah’s God. That all-sufficiency! They did not go to the barrel and the barrel was full, or the cruse of oil and it was running over. There was just a little in the bottom, a little oil in the cruse. It was like the manna: there was plenty of provision for forty years in the wilderness, but they got it day by day, morning by morning. That is a lesson we have to learn. Wouldn’t you like a stock in hand for tomorrow and next week and the week after, and so you might go on?

“No stock on nature’s barren ground;
My all is in the storehouse found.”

But it is when you need it you shall have it, not the day before. That is what it was with Elijah. There was the all-sufficiency there, but the all-sufficiency was in the hands of Elijah’s God. It was not in the hands of Elijah and it was not in the barrel and it was not in the cruse. “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” – that is another question. Where is He now, this evening, today, “the Lord God of Elijah,” the One who performs all these miracles, who loves His people, who supplies their needs? Where is He? Well, He is in heaven, almighty, and He is with His people here on earth, watching over them caring for them, supplying their needs, helping them, bringing them through.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” But it is day by day. You have not got this all-sufficiency in your hands. O what a word that is: “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” There is a complete all-sufficiency of strength in the Lord. “In the Lord Jehovah,” we read, “is everlasting strength.” But it is with Him, not with you, not with me. But when you need it, you shall have it.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” These things you have in your life, and perhaps especially as you think of the unknown way, what lies before you; some things you do not know, some things you do know, and you shrink from them, you fear them. And especially when you think of the unknown way, and especially when you think of all these mountains and these problems and as you see your own insufficiency, weakness and helplessness and fearfulness. And then this question, “Who is sufficient for these things?” And then to see, “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” The Lord’s people will not have one more trial than they have a deliverance from it, and they will not have one day that ever comes in their life when there is not strength sufficient for them.

“Who is sufficient for these things?” O this wonderful all-sufficiency and all-sufficient God! And of course, we must think of the Apostle Paul who asked this question, that time when he was in real trouble and he had a thorn in the flesh. Now we are not told what it was. People have tried to think and to guess, but it is wisely left open. If we read it was just *this*, well it perhaps would not be a help to you. But you

know what it is if you get a little thorn in your flesh and you cannot get it out; and what about this, when he talks about a messenger of Satan buffeting him where the thorn was in the flesh? You see him praying and praying and praying again, and if ever a man could pray, it was Paul, and if ever a man had answers, it was Paul, yet it seems the heavens were as brass and the Lord silent. But, “Who is sufficient?” And then that blessed answer which has been such a help to the Lord’s people down the ages: “And He said” – that is the authority for it. “And He said, My grace is sufficient for thee.” What does our hymnwriter say?

“Let me but hear my Saviour say,
‘Strength shall be equal to thy day;’
Then I rejoice in deep distress,
Leaning on all-sufficient grace.”

“And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee.” Whatever your case, your concern this evening, whatever it is tomorrow, this week, whatever mountains and problems there are in your path, whatever there is in the unknown way, an all-sufficient God and Saviour. “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

“Who is sufficient for these things.” Well, the most important thing is at the end. We have to die. We have to meet our Maker. “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” “Who is sufficient for these things?” What about the awful temptations of Satan? What about the Christian warfare? “Who is sufficient for these things?” What about your hard heart and your unbelief? Who can take them away? Who can deliver you? “Who is sufficient for these things?” And then to see that all-sufficiency in the Person and finished work of Christ.

But then you come to that vital point: your sin, your soul, eternity. O who is sufficient to meet a holy God? Who is sufficient to satisfy divine justice? Who is sufficient to make himself right, to make himself ready? O where can you find forgiveness? Our repentance is not sufficient. The best we can do, that is stained and died with sin; that is not sufficient. But then to be led by the Spirit of God to look to Calvary.

“View Him prostrate in the garden;
On the ground your Maker lies.

On the cruel cross behold Him;
Hear Him cry before He dies,
‘It is finished!’
Sinner, will not this suffice?”

Now that is the answer. That is God’s answer to all your concerns about your sin and your soul and eternity.

On the cruel tree behold Him;
Hear Him cry before He dies,
‘It is finished!’
Sinner, will not this suffice?”

Is this not sufficient? Can anything be added to it? Can any more be needed? Can anything be taken away? “Our sufficiency is of God.” For a poor, weak, helpless sinner, feeling his utter, complete, entire insufficiency, to venture on Christ and to rest on His finished work. “Sinner, will not this suffice?” It is no wonder John Kent says,

“All-sufficient is our Jesus,
Though our sins be black as hell.”

“Who is sufficient for these things?” And then to see the glorious answer in Christ: “Our sufficiency is of God.”

* * *

O Lord, I would delight in Thee,
And on Thy care depend;
To Thee in every trouble flee,
My best, my only Friend.

When all created streams are dried,
Thy fulness is the same;
May I with this be satisfied,
And glory in Thy name.

Why should the soul a drop bemoan,
Who has a fountain near –
A fountain which will ever run
With waters sweet and clear?

No good in creatures can be found,
But may be found in Thee;
I must have all things, and abound,
While God is God to me.

O that I had a stronger faith,
To look within the veil;
To credit what my Saviour saith,
Whose words can never fail.

He that has made my heaven secure
Will here all good provide;
While Christ is rich, I can't be poor;
What can I want beside?

O Lord, I cast my care on Thee;
I triumph and adore;
Henceforth my great concern shall be
To love and praise Thee more.

John Ryland