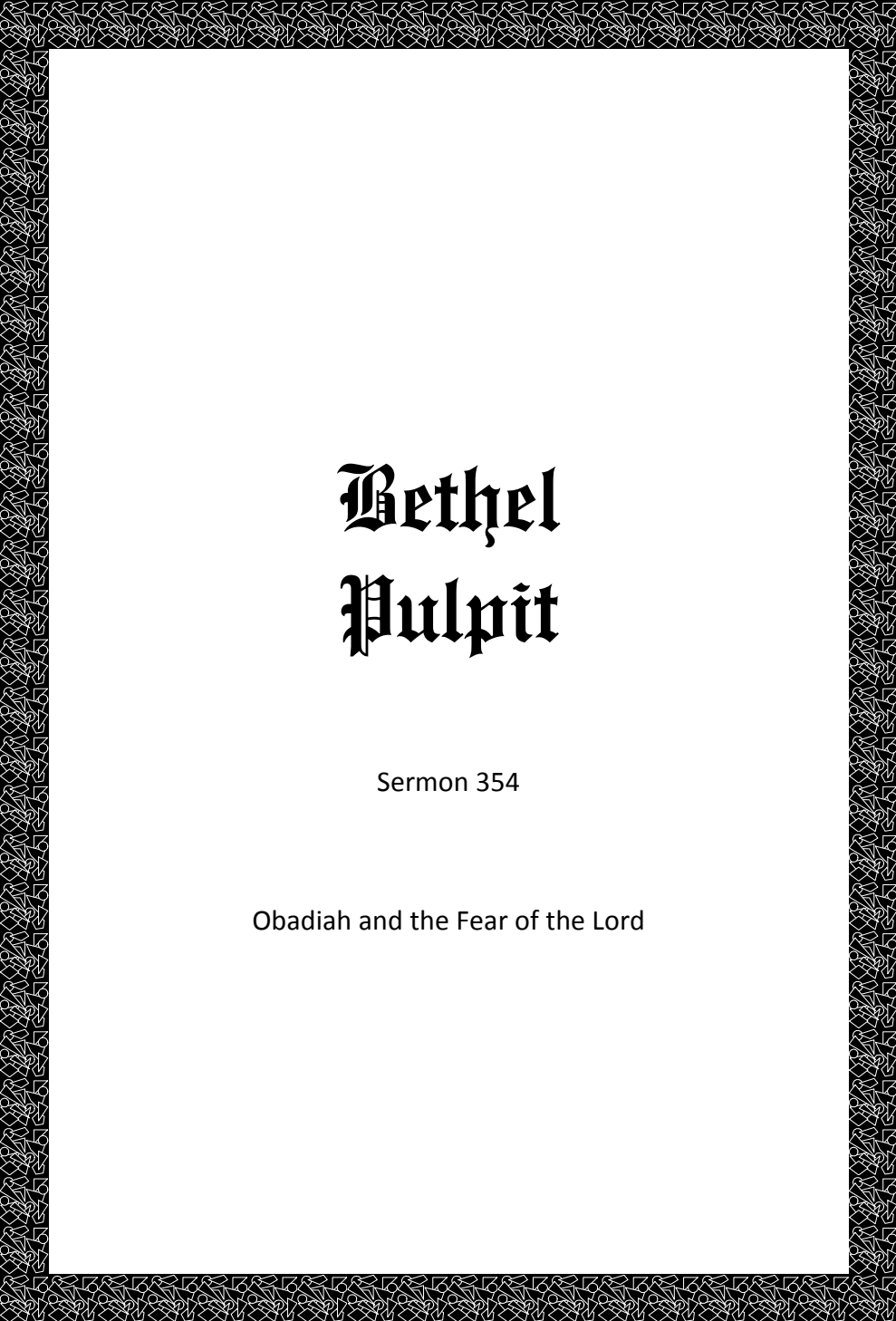




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 354

Obadiah and the Fear of the Lord

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 30th November, 2014**

Text: *"Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly" (1 Kings 18. 3).*

With the world in such a dreadful condition and our country, many people would think it exceeding strange that we should meet this morning to think about a few happenings in ancient Israel three thousand years ago. But beloved friends, what a similarity there is between the times then and the times now! The reading in the 16th chapter this morning – these were the worst days that were ever known in Israel. Israel had forsaken God and God was not in all their thoughts. King Ahab did wickedly more than any other king before him. But didn't you see an awful similarity between things then and things now, how things are in our country and the evil that abounds and the forsaking of true godliness and the despising even of the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? But beloved friends, "God is the same to endless years," and what He did then, He can still do now. "The same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

Well, in these most evil days, there was a baby born, and we are not told anything at all about that baby's father and mother, who they were or anything about them, but they were not ashamed to call their little baby boy Obadiah, which means, "the servant of the Lord Jehovah," or, "worshipper of the Lord Jehovah." Now they were not ashamed of that. The name of Jehovah in Israel was forgotten; it was hated; it was despised. It was the name of Baal and all the dreadful emissaries of Baal. But here was this unknown, godly man, this unknown, godly woman, and they were not ashamed to bear this witness. This was their desire for their little boy. Was it possible even in that evil day, when even Elijah felt he was the only one left and there were the thousands of followers of Baal and iniquity and evil abounded on every hand, that there was any hope for that little boy that he would become a servant of the Lord, that he would become a worshipper of the Lord? Well, their prayers were answered, and he did!

But the way this has rested so much with me, beloved friends, is this. There are the babies born amongst us. There are the little children amongst us. They are born into an increasingly-wicked, ungodly world. They are going to face temptations that you and I never knew anything

about. I know there are some of you, I think perhaps many of you here this morning, fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers, and you are concerned as you think about these little ones and our children growing up, and then our young people in this evil world. But the Lord is still able to do now what He did then.

The prayers of this unknown man and woman were answered. We do not know anything about them, whether they lived to see it or whether they did not live to see it, but in that evil generation this little boy grew up and he has one of the best testimonies borne of him of anyone in the Word of God: he “feared the Lord greatly.” It is one of the best testimonies we have concerning anyone in Scripture, and never forget, it was the Lord Himself who gave it. It was not the opinion of anybody else. We have Abraham described as the friend of God. We have David spoken of as a man after God’s own heart. We have Daniel, a man greatly beloved. But what a wonderful character this is that the Holy Spirit gave of this man Obadiah! Not just that he feared God in that dark, evil day; he “feared the Lord *greatly*.”

So though this is just a little, historical account from so many years ago, what a wonderful encouragement it is for us to pray for our children and our little ones and the babies and the young people growing up in this evil world. The Lord is able to keep them under the shadow of the Almighty. He is able to keep them by His divine, almighty power. He is greater than sin; He is greater than Satan; He is greater than the world, even as here He was greater than Ahab, and He was greater than Baal, and He was greater than all the powers of hell. So there is encouragement here for praying parents and praying grandparents. May our children and our young people in answer to our prayers grow up to be Obadiah.

“Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” But then there is another thing in which there is this intimate connection between that very evil day and the day in which live: employment; our young people finding jobs; older people, those who are in work. What am I thinking of? An ungodly environment, an evil environment, an antagonistic environment. Perhaps I am speaking to some of you this morning – young ones leaving home to go to college and university, and some of the evils among which you are found; some of you going out to work and the sin and temptation. You find in your employment you are just surrounded by all manner of ungodly

people and they do not understand you, and when you try to stand for the truth, they do not know what you mean. Some of you may have real opposition, or you may have antagonism, or you might find it difficult, and sometimes you may be tempted how you are able to continue.

What am I thinking of? Obadiah. “Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house.” His work was at Ahab’s palace. We have heard of a lot of the licentious kings and queens and evil courts even in our own country in former days. There never was such an evil place as this, openly evil. People use the word *devilish* lightly, but it can be used properly here. The devil was there. This man Obadiah, his work was not only in that king’s house, but in the king’s palace. He was the governor of it, and the Lord helped him to stand.

Now those of you who are interested in Christian reading will know that there are three well-known books on the life of Elijah, one by Krummacher, one by A. W. Pink, and one by F. B. Meyer. Two of them say what a wonderful thing it was that this man Obadiah was able to stand firm and resolute and honour his Lord in the court of the evil King Ahab, and the other one says he was a wretched man and was disobedient to his Lord and God and Saviour by being there. But we have to come to this: it is what the Lord says, and the Lord says, “Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house. Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” There is not a hint here that he had done anything wrong in taking up this position in such a strange place.

Now some of the Lord’s people are called to work in a strange environment, or they are called to a most unusual job, or they are called to work in the strangest of circumstances. But there is one point that does run through Scripture. If the Lord will have a man in a position of authority, that man will be there. If it was the Lord’s will, He could overthrow Mr. Cameron as prime minister and appoint a godly man in his place tomorrow. He has done things like that in the past. We only need to think of Joseph in the court of Pharaoh, and Mordecai in the court of Ahasuerus, and Daniel in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord is able to appoint a person to a place, a position among the most unfavourable circumstances, the most evil circumstances, and help him to stand. We think of the verse of the hymn: “Lord, help us by Thy grace to stand.” May that be a good prayer for those of you who find in your associations at

school, or college, or hospital, or work, or wherever you are, it is not very congenial, not very helpful.

“Lord, help us by Thy grace to stand,
And every trial firm endure;
Preservèd by Thy sovereign hand,
And by Thy oath and covenant sure.”

“Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly,” even in this dreadful environment, in that shockingly evil world and among those appalling circumstances. The Lord was with him and upheld him and brought him through. That is a good word: “Preserved in Jesus.” And the word we think of along with it: the Lord “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”

“Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” And that is the secret of it all. That is the secret of why he was able to stand. That is the secret of how his loving father and mother’s prayers were answered. That is the secret of how his life was consistent. Obadiah, the servant of the Lord.

“Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” Now there is so much in the Word of God concerning the fear of the Lord. People do not seem to speak about it so much nowadays. When I was young, the old people were always talking about it, and the preachers preaching about it, and in my native town even ungodly people would speak of someone and say, “He is a God-fearing man,” or, “She is a God-fearing woman.” Really, the fear of the Lord in all its fulness embraces the whole of vital godliness, and in New Testament terms, the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and His great salvation.

“Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” It is one of those tender graces of the Holy Spirit, and whenever a sinner is savingly converted, turned from sin to God, whenever the new birth takes place, this tender grace, the fear of the Lord, is implanted in that sinner’s heart, and sin, Satan and the world can never uproot it. It will always be there. And as I have told you over and over again, it does not mean being frightened of God. It does not mean that at all. The fear of the Lord – it means a loving, tender reverence for Him, seeking His honour and glory, and having a religion in His sight. There is worship in it. There is humility in it. There is confession of our sin in it. There is repentance in it. There is fleeing for refuge to Christ in

it. There is self nothing and the Saviour everything in it. It is vital, and it is the beginning.

We have it three times (Psa. 111.10; Prov. 1. 7; 9. 10): “The fear of the Lord is the beginning,” which means if you and I do not possess this fear of the Lord, we have not yet begun in divine things – and that comes close, and that separates this congregation. The fear of the Lord, it is the beginning, and if you do not have it, you have not begun. It will separate you from the world, and from your idols, and your past life, and your self-righteousness, and it will make you pray, and it will give you a real religion. It will make you tremble at the thought of eternity. It will make your chief concern be to be right. It will constrain you in the ways which are honouring to the Lord. It will separate you from those things which dishonour the Lord. I was brought up under this; I do not know whether I have ever heard it sung, though it is in our hymnbook:

“Fear is a grace which ever dwells
With its fair partner, love;
Blending their beauties, both proclaim
Their source is from above.”

Now this man Obadiah had it, and that was the secret. That was the secret of his life, his witness. That was the secret why he was able to stand. What is it? “Stand every storm, and stand at last.” O may the Lord bless us as a congregation with the fear of God, and may it be a solemn concern if you and I have a profession, a name to live, and we are destitute of the fear of God.

Now it is *an active grace*. “Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly: for it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord.” That was a terrible time. It was like Syria and these countries in the Middle East at present, people having their heads cut off because they are followers of Jesus. That is what Jezebel was doing. “For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.” Beloved friends, that is the fear of God. Real religion is not just talking; it is not just thinking; it is not just feeling. “The fear of the Lord.” We read so much. It is “a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” “Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long” – so many exhortations,

commandments. Think of Samuel's farewell to degenerate Israel: "Only fear the Lord." But you have some wonderful promises made to those whom the Lord blesses with His holy fear. Two of them just flow into my mind. One is this: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will shew them His covenant." And the other: "Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings."

"Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly: for it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." Well, he risked his job; he risked his reputation; he risked his life. It could not have been easy, and he could have said, Really, it is not my responsibility; and he could have said, It is nothing to do with me. O that principle: the fear of the Lord! You will find just like Obadiah – I do not mean you are going to go after a hundred prophets and hide them in a cave, but you will find something on your spirit: "This is the way, walk ye in it." Or your flesh shrinks from it and Satan will give you ten arguments or twenty: forget about it; it is nothing to do with you; other people can do it better. But, "An unctuous light to all that's right, a bar to all that's wrong." There is a lot of good divinity there. The fear of the Lord will constrain you. There will be certain things you feel you ought to do, but your flesh does not want to, and there will be other things you feel you could not give up and you have to give up. The fear of the Lord will be an active grace. There is a lot of divinity in the old hymn:

"An unctuous light to all that's right,
A bar to all that's wrong."

"Obadiah feared the Lord greatly: for it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." What happened to him? Nothing. He was still the governor of Ahab's house. The Lord can set a hedge round His people as He did round Job and no one can touch you until the Lord gives them permission.

But then in this chapter we read that Ahab said to Obadiah, "Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks." This is dreadful that follows. The whole of Israel was suffering, dying through famine and drought, but Obadiah's work is to go and see if there is any

grass for the king's horses to keep them alive. That is how far iniquity had reached. "Peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts."

So you find these two. "They divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him." I have never really known what to think about Elijah telling him to go and tell his master King Ahab that Elijah was coming to see him, because it is clear from this that poor Obadiah was terrified. The obvious answer from Ahab: well why didn't you arrest him, why didn't you kill him? Or the next thing: you say he is going to come, and then he will not. Poor Obadiah was terrified. Really, that is not a bad thing. It throws him into a much more wonderful light – this poor, fearful, timid man, a man of like passions with you and me, who did not find things easy. It shows him in a lovely light, what he did for those prophets in the cave.

But then he began to protest. I think there are about five verses in Scripture on why he could not go and would not go, but he did go. I do not know whether Elijah was right. Some of the Lord's most eminent servants, thinking of people like Luther, seemed to have been blessed with such grace that they were not afraid of anyone or anything, but whether it is right to expect it of anyone else.

Perhaps some of you have read those letters which passed between William Tiptaft and J.C. Philpot. There was a godly woman, I think at Birmingham, and she had a most cruel, evil, wicked husband, and she felt she should be baptized, but her husband was getting the carving knife and was going to kill her when she got home. She knew it was real. Should she go or should she not? Those two godly men Philpot and Tiptaft were agreed. No-one has a right to tell that godly woman what to do. It is no good just saying the Lord will be with her. If the Lord blesses her with grace and tells her He will be with her, she can go, but it is not right for any person to tell another person what to do.

That could be a lesson in the church of God today. There are so many people who think they know what other people should do. Yet you see with Obadiah who feared the Lord greatly, because trembling as he was, he did go. Elijah said, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I

stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab.”

“Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” Now this is what the Lord said about him, not someone else’s opinion, not even Elijah’s opinion. It is what the Lord said about him. He “feared the Lord greatly.” And when you and I come to the end, beloved friends, that is what really matters – not what our friends think about us – what the Lord thinks about us. There are not many people today could have this honestly in the sight of God written on their gravestone: “He feared the Lord greatly.” I trust if the Lord has done anything for us, we do fear the Lord – well, we must fear the Lord – O but to fear the Lord greatly. It is God who says it.

What is it to fear the Lord greatly? One thing is to put the things of God first, that the things of God should always be first. Then to have a holy zeal for the honour and glory of God, and then to be nothing and Christ to be everything. In a New Testament sense, this could be written: Now Obadiah *loved the Lord greatly*. That is the secret of it. It is not legality; it is not duty. It was not legality or duty that caused Obadiah, who obviously was a fearful man, to be risking his life for those hundred prophets of the Lord. O that our love to Christ and His people might abound yet more and more. Don’t we have to confess our sin here! Don’t we have to say,

“Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is cold and faint”!

O but we would love the Lord, and we would fear the Lord, and this word *greatly* – well, may we know the Lord’s help; may we know His blessing. If He touches our hearts, if His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, then it is the sweet constrainings of the love of Christ, to walk in loving obedience, to seek that in all things He might have the pre-eminence, that self might be denied, that Christ might be exalted. May there be many Obadiah’s in the church of God. O may you and I be Obadiah’s, may our children, grandchildren, the little ones, may they grow up to be Obadiah’s. And may it be this: to the praise and honour and glory of the Lord, walking in His tender fear.

“Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.”