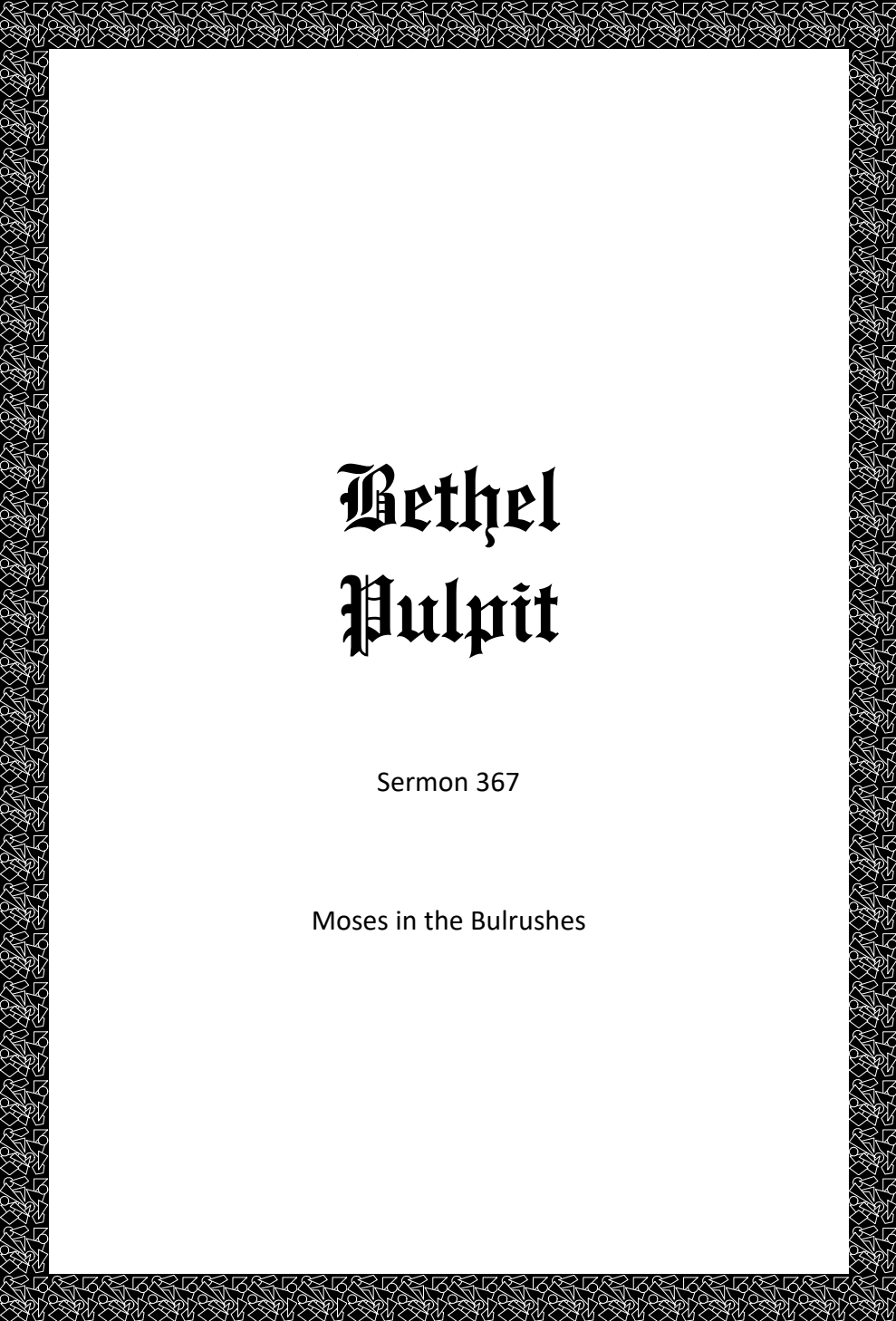




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 367

Moses in the Bulrushes

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 6th July, 1997**

Text: *“And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink” (Exodus 2. 3).*

There is much good divinity in so many of these well-known stories in the Word of God. You think of Moses in the bulrushes. You think of the call of Samuel. You think of David and Goliath. You think of Daniel in the lions' den. There is some good divinity in those accounts. They are not just left there as stories for little children. O what a help some of these well-known stories of the Word of God have been to God's well-trying, well-exercised people in the hour of their need!

For many years I have found an attraction in this account God Himself has given of Moses in the bulrushes. The one thing that stands out is that God is in control. We see Almighty God in His sovereignty, greater than Pharaoh, greater than all the power of Egypt, accomplishing His own purposes, doing “according to His own will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” O beloved friends, may we be blessed with clear views of the greatness of our God, that He is on the throne, that He is sovereign, almighty, that the government is on His shoulder. May we feel personally, “My times are in Thy hand.”

“All must come, and last, and end,
As shall please my heavenly Friend.”

There was a mighty Pharaoh here, but there was a mightier God in heaven, and God will always have the last word. I read to you chapter 2. You can go on through chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. You can go all through all those plagues, and there is Pharaoh fighting against God. But Almighty God will always have the last word. “The wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain.”

So we see here Almighty God, Jacob's God, Israel's God, God in all His greatness, greater than Pharaoh, greater than all the power of Egypt. “This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death.” O that together this morning with all our various concerns and

perplexities and fears and sorrows, as we think of today and tomorrow and the unknown way, may we do what we sang just now: “Trust in a wise and gracious God.”

But then we see another thing here, and that is when God requires a man, that man will always be there. The appointed time had come, the time for Israel’s deliverance out of Egyptian bondage, the time when they would be formed into a people, led into the wilderness, on the way to Canaan, and there was a man needed to lead them out. Where was he to be found? Well, he was not yet born. Sometimes people pray, and they look for the man, and they devise their own thoughts. It may be that man is not even born, or it may be like Saul he is hidden away “among the stuff,” or it may be like David he is hidden away in the sheepfold. But when God needs a man, that man will be there.

Look at the Reformation. There had been such darkness, and here is a humble monk in a monastery [Luther], and God calls him, raises him up, equips him and uses him to set Europe free from the dreadful darkness and bondage. When the Lord needs a man, that man is always there.

Israel needed a deliverer. God had not forgotten His ancient people. It seemed as if they were forgotten, and they thought they were forgotten. But, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them.” O the Lord will never forget His people! “He will ever be mindful of His covenant.” It may be you feel the Lord has forgotten you, the Lord has forsaken you. “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me.” So God is in control. God is sovereign, almighty. God remembers His people. They cannot be forgotten.

“Poor though thou art, despised, forgot,
Yet God, thy God, forgets thee not.”

And God has that special, gracious ability to raise up a man, a deliverer, at the appointed time, and that deliverer cannot die till his work is done. It has been said of every sinner saved by grace, and it is true, that they are immortal till their work is done. It seemed an impossibility that

when Moses was born he should ever live, that he should ever grow up – but he did. It was not possible for this infant Moses to die, because God had a work for him, and God’s people are immortal till their work is done. Perhaps some aged ones here or in Bethesda wonder why their lives are spared. Well, none of us can die until the appointed moment comes. But when that day comes, we cannot live a moment longer. The great Queen Elizabeth, when she was told she was dying, said, “The half of my kingdom for one more day on earth.” But her time was come. O to be like Francis Covell, who when he was told he was dying, smiled and said, “Make haste, my Beloved, make haste!” We often sing,

“Plagues and deaths around me fly;
Till He bids, I cannot die.”

We had a generation of ministers – they are all gone now – but I used to listen to them when I was a young boy, and many had fought in the trenches in the first world war. They had seen their friends going down, one on one side and one on the other. How often we heard from them a testimony to that truth,

“Plagues and deaths around me fly;
Till He bids, I cannot die.”

So it was impossible that Pharaoh with all his art and all his power could ever bring an end to the life of Moses.

But then we look at it from a different point of view, and we think of the life and faith and trial and deliverance and witness of Moses’ father and mother. Let me just pause here for a moment or two. I think you will find at times that there are things in Scripture which are difficult to understand, and we do not altogether know the reason why. “There went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.” We are not even told what their names were. Mind you, when we come to Hebrews 11, they are given a most honourable catalogue among the worthies of faith. But here God does not even tell us their names. Later on we learn that Moses’ father was called Amram and that Moses’ mother was called Jochebed. But their names are not mentioned here. We wonder why.

As we read the chapter, it reads rather strangely. “And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the

woman conceived, and bare a son.” You would think this was soon after they were married. You would think Moses was the firstborn. Later we find that Miriam, Moses’ elder sister was at least a teenager at this time. We find Aaron had been born three years before. We find the parents had been married a long time and Moses was the third child. Yet the Bible does not tell us these things here.

I do not want to linger on this point, but I think I will just say this. The Bible is different from any other book. It is not here to tell us the story of Jochebed, the story of Amram. That is not the point. Here Aaron does not really come in, neither does Miriam. So often the Word of God is dealing with some vital point, some important thing, something we need to be concerned about and other important things are left out. Secular historians tell us that perhaps in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles there has been a kingdom destroyed. It is not mentioned in the Bible. The Word of God is a spiritual book, so you find things come in which we would have left out, and things are left out which we certainly would have put it. But, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.”

We have it right at the end of the Gospel according to John, that there are many other things that Jesus taught and did, and don’t we long to know those many other things that Jesus taught and did! But the Holy Ghost has seen fit just to limit it to certain things. For instance, from the time the Lord Jesus was twelve years of age till the time He was thirty years of age, we do not have one single mention of those eighteen years. We wonder why. Well, I leave it, but just mention these things in passing – the sovereignty of God in inspiration.

But I want to speak of Moses’ mother. In this we see the amazing providence of God. You know what God’s providence is: God working out in time what He has purposed from all eternity. There is this mysterious providence, this overruling providence, everything in God’s hands, everything ordered by infinite wisdom, everything for His glory, everything for the good of His people, nothing by accident, nothing by chance. “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” If only we really walked in the light of that truth, this mysterious providence of God that orders everything, orders it according to the counsel of His will.

“He must and will at all times keep in view
His glory, and His people’s welfare too;
Bright days, dark nights, the furnace or the flood,
He overrules for Zion’s real good.”

Well, you see the mysterious providence of God here. Moses is born. It is a time when there is this cruel edict that every new-born boy must be immediately put to death, this terrible policy of genocide. But Moses’ mother along with his father decided to brave the wrath of the king. There was the natural love, and it is clear from Scripture there was something else. “She saw him that he was a goodly child.” Not just that he was a lovely baby, not just that she loved him – he was her own child – but she could see he was something special, that God had appointed him. So “she hid him three months.” After that she could no longer hide him. Obviously he was growing too big and his cries could be heard.

Now you see the mysterious providence of God in the preservation of Moses and in God’s purpose for Moses. She made an ark of bulrushes so that she could put baby Moses in that ark and lay him by the river in the rushes. To me, it almost seems a most foolish thing, a ridiculous thing. It has always seemed to me that a modern counterpart is like a loving mother taking her baby and leaving him on the hard shoulder on the motorway. What a thing to do! Now God put it in her heart. It was His mysterious leading, His mysterious purpose. It was all in God’s hands. She made this ark of bulrushes. She daubed it with slime and pitch and made it completely waterproof. How did she know how to do that? It must have been a skilled thing. Who taught her to do this? And then she went and she left her baby in the ark of bulrushes by the river’s brink. It was not a very safe place, with crocodiles about.

See the mysterious providence of God. At that very time someone should come down, and it was not *anyone*. It was the king’s daughter. It was the daughter of Pharaoh. She came right past the very place, and she took notice of this little ark of bulrushes. I suppose she had many high and mighty concerns. But why did she come at that moment? Why did she not come earlier? The cradle would not have been there. Why did she not come later? Probably the cradle would have been destroyed. Why did she come at that moment, and why did she notice it? Why was it at that very moment the babe wept? Why was it her heart was filled with compassion?

O the wonderful outworking of it! It is like the life of Joseph; it is like the life of Esther – so much hanging on so little, so many details. But there see Almighty God ordering everything according to the counsel of His own will. God had a purpose in it all.

Some of you young ones may find you have things happen in your early life and at the time you wonder why. But when you are older, you look back and see God appointed that, and God ordered this. In later life you can see that it was a preparation for your life's work. I look back at so many things in my little life and at the time I did not know why these things were happening, but they were a preparation.

Moses was to be ruler over God's people Israel. He was to lead them out of Egypt. He was to bring them into the Promised Land. What was the preparation? Well, he had to be educated in the court of Pharaoh, the best education in the land. No Israelite could ever think of it – the best education in the world. Do you believe it? Here is a poor Israelite child. God has appointed he is to have the best education in the world, and He orders it all. It almost seems an impossibility – a young Israelite child and he is going to be brought up as an Egyptian prince. God can do it. He orders everything after the counsel of His will. "None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?"

You can see the mysterious sovereignty. Stephen tells us, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." It was not immediately he had that Egyptian education. First of all he was going to be nursed by his own mother, and she was going to be paid for it by Pharaoh's daughter, and there was no power in Egypt could snatch the baby from his mother. In those early days was the opportunity for that little boy to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You parents, what a solemn accountability is laid on you when you have your child in those early years. The Jesuits used to say, "Give me a child for the first seven years and you can have him for the rest of his life." O those lessons Moses learnt from his godly father and mother!

"With mercy and with judgment
My web of time He wove."

And Moses' web of time was being woven. He was first of all to be brought up by his mother and father, and then at the Egyptian court. And

then the third thing: those forty long, silent, seemingly-barren years in the wilderness – all part of God’s eternal purpose. He does not make any mistakes. He does work in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.

But “Moses, when he was come to years” – it was the grace of God that reigned in his heart – he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.” Did ever any make such a choice as Moses? You think what he gave up! Perhaps a throne, but he gave up honour, and he gave up pleasure, and he gave up wealth. “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” Now was there ever faith like the faith of Moses!

But then you see, Hebrews 11 mentions the faith of Amram and Jochebed. Strangely, again here there is no mention of their names, but they are given honourable mention among the worthies of faith. Up till now, what have we had? We have had Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. O what a catalogue of eminent people! And then we have the father and the mother of Moses. God did not forget them. God mentions them here. This is God’s comment on what we have before us this morning: “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.” There was faith which works by love. It was faith which cast out fear.

But I want to speak to you about Moses’ mother, and this great trial that she had. Do not forget, you and I know the end of this story, but she did not; and do not forget that Moses’ mother was a real mother, with real love to her child and with real feelings. You see that dear, godly woman, with her heart burdened with sorrow, cast down with sorrow, as she carries that little ark of bulrushes with her precious child and she places it in among the flags by the river’s brink. Have you ever thought of what her feelings were when she left him there and went back home? Do you know what she did? When she placed Moses by the river’s brink, she put him right into the hands of God, and he was never safer in the whole of his life than when he lay there on the banks of the River Nile.

What a lesson there is there! Some of us have walked along with Moses’ mother. Some of you have when you had to take your little

children to hospital and when you have had to leave them there. [This was before the days when parents were allowed to remain with their young children in hospital.] O we go back to those days when by faith we had to put them right into the hands of God and leave them there. But may you know that spirit. This morning it may not be a little child that you love that you have to leave in sorrow. It may be an aged relative that you love, and leave in sorrow. May you be able to walk along in love and union with Moses' mother and be able by precious faith to put them right into the hands of God and to leave them there.

With some of you it may be not a tiny child, not an aged person, but it may be one of your children you are concerned about spiritually. There do not seem to be any marks of grace. There does not seem to be any working of the Spirit. They seem to be "as far from God as sheep can run." May you be blessed with precious faith to take them like Moses' mother did and put them right into the hands of God. Or it may be someone in trouble whom you dearly love, who rests heavily with you. You feel so helpless. Moses' mother must have been so convinced of her complete helplessness. May you be able to take that one you are burdened about, that one in sorrow, that one in trouble, and may you be able to take them and put them right into the hands of God.

There again, it may not be a person, a young child, an aged person; it may not be a person at all. It may be a thing, a circumstance, a burden, an exercise. It may be a trouble. May you be able to take it and may you be able to put it right into the hands of God, leave Him to order it for you. Do you know that well-known hymn?

"Leave God to order all thy ways,
And trust in Him whate'er betide,
Who trusts in God's unchanging love,
Builds on the rock that nought can move."

She put him in the flags by the river's brink. He had never been so safe in his life. There are times in your life when you cannot do any more; you are helpless; you have to leave it in the hands of God. "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." I am so weak and sinful and unworthy, but do everything for me. Do "engage to manage all, by the way and to the end." To come with that person, that thing, that circumstance, and amidst

all your sorrow to place it in the almighty, gracious hands of your God and to leave it there.

So there are a few scriptures. “Commit thy way unto the Lord” – that tiny child, that one you love, that person growing up, that one in the midst of life, that thing, that circumstance, that burden, that affliction, that care – “thy way.” If you had said to Moses’ mother, “Thy way,” she would have known what it was. One thing lay on her heart. It was that babe, that venturing down to the River Nile, leaving him there. Well, she knew what it was to cast her burden on the Lord. “Cast *thy* burden upon the Lord,” that which lies heavy on your heart, “and He shall sustain thee.” “Commit thy way unto the Lord.” David said, “Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord.” “Commit thy way unto the Lord” – today, tomorrow, the unknown way, your sins, your soul, eternity, the things in the church of God that burden you, your family, your friends, all your trials. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.”

Now another: “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” O didn’t the Lord care for Moses’ mother here, and Moses’ father, and didn’t He care for Moses Himself! “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” So that helpless babe laid there in the ark of bulrushes by the river’s brink, that dear sorrowing woman returning home. “And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.” I wonder if Moses’ mother had any thoughts of what might be done to him. Was there hope amidst it all? But then it was all in the Lord’s hand. Then the Lord began to work right through this chapter for the salvation of Moses, the answer to the prayers of Moses’ mother, for this wonderful deliverance, the honour and glory of His name.

“His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfils some deep design.”

O if we were only blessed with more faith, more precious faith, to see a good and gracious God, to see that He is almighty, to realise our helplessness, unworthiness, unfitness, and then to be enabled to take our burdens, our cares, whatever they are, and to put them right into the Lord’s hands and to leave them there, and then to see Him work in mercy and in love.