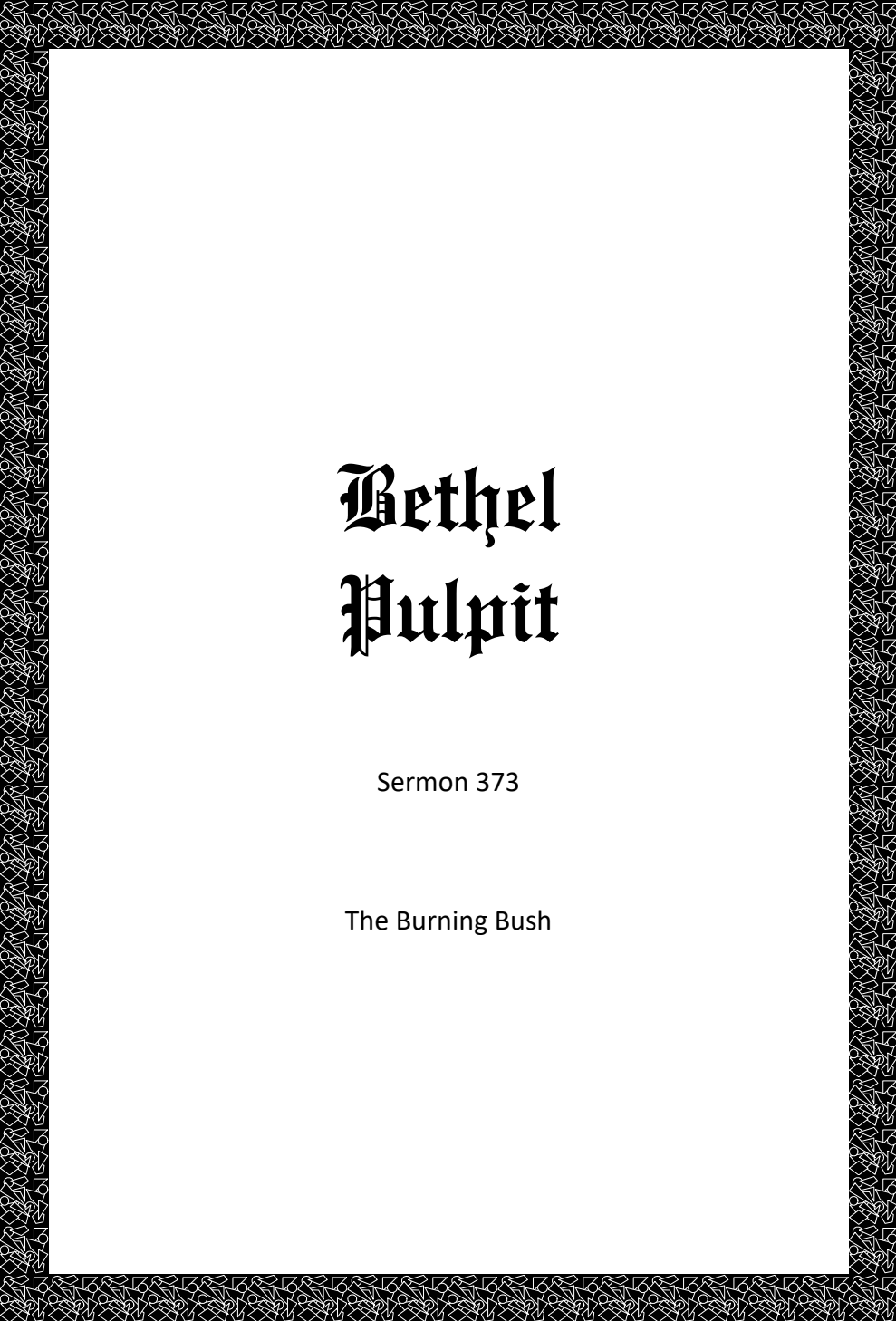




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 373

The Burning Bush

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 10th July, 2016**

Text: *"The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush"* (Deuteronomy 33. 16).

When I was a boy, that question was often asked by the preachers:

"Dost mind the place, the spot of ground,
Where Jesus did thee meet?"

Because if we are the Lord's people, if He has favoured us, there will be certain places and we can never forget them – places where we heard the Lord's voice, or we felt His love, or Christ was made precious. It may be in a chapel; it may be in your bedroom; it may be walking down the street. But you have that spot, that place, that you remember.

Now so it was with Moses. He never forgot the burning bush, and all those blessings he received that we read about this morning in the Book of the Exodus chapter 3. And now you see, Moses is right at the end. These are the last words that Moses ever spoke, and the next day he is going to go up to the top of Mount Nebo, and there he is going to die. Here he is praying for the blessing, the blessing of the Lord upon the twelve tribes, and he comes to Joseph, and Joseph was the favourite son, and the descendants of Joseph were a special tribe. He pours out his heart for one thing after another for the Lord's blessing on the tribe of Joseph, and then he comes to this, as if to crown it all: "The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush." And it is made very clear that He who dwelt in the bush in Exodus chapter 3 was Christ.

So what a prayer, and what a wish, and what a blessing! Surely this morning we can take this point up in our burdens and exercises and prayers for our children and little ones, and for our families and loved ones, and for the church of God, and for our congregation, and for ourselves. O that we might be sweetly favoured to know "the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush." That is Christ.

But thinking of this beautiful expression, His good will, the good will of Christ to poor, unworthy sinners. In His mercy, in the riches of His grace, the time passed on, the centuries sped away, and there came that sacred night in Bethlehem when the angel announced the Saviour's birth,

the birth of this One who had appeared and dwelt in the bush at Horeb. Can you remember what the angels sang? “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace” – this is it – “*good will* toward men.” Now when the Christmas season comes, people have all kinds of foolish interpretations of good will towards men. They talk about a season of good will, just opening presents and things like that.

What did the angel mean when he said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”? This very verse here in Deuteronomy chapter 33. It was “the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush.” That is what Christ brought to Bethlehem. That is what He fulfilled in His sin-atonement death and resurrection. You see this in all its fulness in the glorious Person of our Lord Jesus, “the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush” to poor, unworthy sinners, and if you want an exposition of this good will, you go to Ephesians chapter 1, and there one by one the apostle opens up by the Holy Spirit the precious doctrines of the gospel. “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” There is a wonderful fulness here.

“The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush.” Moses could not think of anything better to wish for the tribe of Joseph, and surely you and I cannot think of anything better to wish for those we pray for, those here at Bethel, those in our own homes, and for ourselves. It would be a wonderful thing if before we go home today, we knew just a little of these everlasting blessings that flow from Christ.

“The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush.” So of course, this verse sends us right back to the chapter we read this morning (Exodus 3), a remarkable chapter, and there seems to be a special emphasis laid on it here and there. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ referred to the bush, and Stephen in that remarkable speech before he was martyred referred to the bush.

So we go back this morning now to what we read in Exodus chapter 3. What was it that really happened? What really took place at the burning bush? Well, Moses was now eighty years of age. I know some of you might say, But people lived longer in those days. Do not forget it was Moses who said, “The days of our years are threescore years and ten.” It was Moses who put the end of it at seventy years, and Moses was now eighty.

Moses had had most amazing things happening at the time of his birth. You all know the story of Moses in the bulrushes, his wonderful deliverance, and then how he was favoured to have that wonderful education, that bringing up in the court of Pharaoh by Pharaoh's daughter, and yet to be instructed in divine things by his own mother – the wonderful providence.

And then we remember when Moses was only forty years of age, he felt clear his life's work was to be the deliverer of God's ancient people Israel, and he set out on it, and he really took it into his own hands. You remember that he failed completely, and not only so, but he had to flee from Egypt, flee for his life. And now we find him forty years later. Do not forget, when he left Egypt, he was a great man; he was a prince; he had wealth; he had honour; he had fame; he had everything that he could wish for. He forsook it all for Christ's sake. Never did anyone forsake more. "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Wouldn't you have thought that would have been honoured immediately? Yet everything seemed to go wrong.

Now he had been forty years living in the backside of the desert. You know what he was doing. He was doing a job that a little boy could do. He was going out every day and feeding a few sheep, and then he was coming back. The great Moses, the prince of Egypt – it must have been a most monotonous life for him. And what about him going to be the leader of Israel? And day after day passes by. He is forty; he is fifty; he is sixty; he is seventy; now he is eighty. Beloved friends, when we read these things in the Word of God, it is very easy to read, "Forty years." But when you think, forty years ago with us – what is it? – 1976. Some of you were not even born – and all the things that have happened day by day since then!

And here was Moses, day after day going forth. It must have been a trial. We do not read much about Moses, we do not hear much about him during those forty years. We read of how he married Zipporah. We read of how he had two children. We are told their names. But there did not seem to be much going on. That time in his life – everything seemed to be dead; everything seemed to be ended.

And then suddenly one day he went out just as he always had done. His life was never the same ever afterwards. Almighty God met with him and revealed Himself to him, and commissioned him. You do not know what might happen to you. I was only young, in my twenties. It was just over sixty years ago, and I woke up one morning, nothing happening in my life. I think it was school holiday time, the first day or two in January, and a letter came through the post. I opened it casually. I remember what a shout I let out. The family wondered what the matter was. It was an invitation to preach for three Lord's days, and sent by a man who would not have "anyone" in his pulpit, a cutting, austere man. Of course, I wrote back and refused it. I said I was not a preacher. But my life was not the same and never has been from that very day. [In the end I fulfilled all three engagements.]

So you boys and girls, you do not know what is going to happen to you. It may be a sudden friendship with some of you. You never thought that person would write to you. Or it may be something concerning an opening when you leave school, where you go to. You older ones, it may be some job. With some of you, may it be something spiritual, when you get up as usual in the morning, and when you go to bed at night, your life is never the same again.

It was not only this with Moses here; it was the same with David. He was only a boy. He got up; he just went out. Really he was doing a very simple job. He was taking some cheese and other provisions for his three older brothers. Before the day ended, he was the greatest man in Israel, the conqueror of Goliath. You do not know what a day may bring forth in your life, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. But it is the Lord's hand, and we need to wait upon Him. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."

But especially a loving word to those of you who are like Moses. You are growing older, and you have not got what you want. You are growing older, and you are disappointed. You thought the Lord had given you a word. It has not been fulfilled yet. O but He waits to be gracious, and with Moses the end of a thing was better than the beginning. But for us looking back, there was wisdom in it. In those first forty years, Moses was trained as a great man in Pharaoh's palace, and in that second forty years, he was trained how he had to live and how he had to behave in that

very wilderness where one day he was going to lead the people of God to Canaan. And now he is right at the very end, and as he looks back, he can see that everything was right, and God had not made any mistakes, and all the Lord's purposes had been fulfilled.

"The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush." So let us just think of what happened at the burning bush. Moses went out and he saw a little bush, and it was burning; it was on fire, aflame. There did not seem to be anything remarkable about that, but the thing was, it kept burning and burning and burning, and it did not burn out. Moses, as you would expect, turned aside to have a look at it. He heard a voice: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." And there the Lord revealed Himself to him and He commissioned him. He sent him to Pharaoh, and He promised Israel would be delivered, and He promised that He would be with him. Moses was so fearful of whatever would happen. It was different from forty years before when he went headlong against that Egyptian and slew him. It was a different Moses now. He was so fearful. He could not manage things now. He needed the Lord to help him. But that burning bush – Moses never forgot it, and what it meant to him. It was a great day to Moses.

Now what were these things that he had learnt at the burning bush which he wished for the tribe of Joseph, for Ephraim and Manasseh, which really, spiritually, he wished for the people of God to the end of time? Well, there were three or four things especially. "The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush." And the first is: he was brought to know *the greatness and the holiness of God*. This is what he wishes for those who follow, that they might know this great God, and that they might know Him in His holiness and in His majesty.

Moses had to take his shoes from off his feet. He was standing on holy ground, and the Lord revealed Himself to him, and He told him what His name was: "I AM THAT I AM." At first it seems a strange name. The self-existent God. You and I can say, "I am," now, as we are sitting in chapel. A hundred years ago, none of us could say, "I am." In another hundred years, we will not be able to say, "I am." Even tomorrow, we do not know whether we shall be able to say, "I am," or not. But this is God in all His greatness, always there, eternally the same in His justice, especially in His holiness, this holy God of whom we sang (hymn 854). O

but always the same in His divine, almighty power, and always the same in His love and favour towards His people.

It was such a revelation to Moses. He had never known this before. But this is made known in Christ, and it is revealed in the gospel, and this is what we long for in the churches and in our own hearts. “The good will of Him” – this great God, to bless us, to be with us, to answer our prayers, to help us, to supply our needs, to be with us as He was with Moses, to help us along, to bring us safely through. “The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush.” Do you see an attraction in it? Don’t you realise why the burning bush meant so much to Moses?

“The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush.” Now the second special thing there was for Moses, and that he remembered: God’s people, Israel in Egypt were in a dreadful state, suffering awful persecution, and at the burning bush, Almighty God gave Moses that clear promise that *He was going to deliver them*. It is a beautiful promise, and He fulfilled it. O but you see, Moses now, forty years later, just before he dies, he can look back and he can see them coming out of Egypt. He can see the Red Sea. He can see the manna, the smitten rock. He can see the Amalekites overthrown, and Og King of Bashan. They are on the borders of the land now, and Joshua is going to take them in.

“The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush.” That word is still a good word for God’s people today. This is the word that was spoken at the burning bush to Moses: “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.” What a word that! It is still true today – that is the mercy. The Puritans always insisted on this: when you read the Old Testament, remember that God is the same today, and He is doing the same things today. This is the God who hears, and He sees, and He knows, and He comes down, and He delivers. He did it for Israel then, and what about you?

“The affliction of My people.” Well, a lot of you in your various ways know this affliction – some in your soul, some in your body, some in your family, some in your circumstances. The Lord says, I have seen it. “I have surely seen the affliction.” Perhaps other people have not, and perhaps you do not think anyone knows. But, I have *seen* the affliction. I

have heard your cry, and I know your sorrows. What a word this! You see the Lord Jesus. You see Gethsemane and Calvary. “I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver.” That almighty Deliverer! This, beloved friends, is “the good will of Him who dwelt in the bush.” May you know it; may I know it.

And then a third thing. *Moses personally was commissioned for the work for which God had appointed him*, and he did not take it on himself. He had learned the lesson by now. He felt unfit; he felt unworthy; but it was at the burning bush that God appointed him, and God commissioned him, and the Lord was faithful all the way through. He had his difficulties, he had his disappointments, he had his sorrows, but the Lord was with him right to the end. Do you know what he says on the very next page? “There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun” – He is the One who appeared at the burning bush – “who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky.” And you know what follows: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” That is the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush. That is what Moses learnt when the Lord commissioned him. O may you and I know it, and may we pray for it for others.

“The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush.” And the fourth thing, the last thing, and this is very special. The Lord gave him a promise, and *the promise was of His abiding presence*. Can you remember the words in which the Lord spoke that promise? He said, “Certainly I will be with thee.” There seems something very beautiful in that word *certainly*. Everything the Lord does is sure. Everything He does is certain. But poor Moses was fearful, just like some of you are fearful. He did not just say, Moses, I will be with thee. He puts that *certainly* on it, just as in the gospel so often He says, “Verily.” And at the end He said, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” “Certainly I will be with thee.” “What more can He say than to you He has said?” Beloved friends, this is “the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush,” and Moses now, as an aged man, looks back and remembers it, and how the Lord has been faithful, and this is what he longs for for the people of God when he has gone.

“The good will of Him that dwelt in the bush.” Coming towards the close, I just want to say one or two things about the way in which this

word is usually quoted – not so much the actual word here, but the burning bush. Now it was always the emblem of the Church of Scotland in its best days, and then in all that godliness in the Free Church of Scotland that followed. Sometimes today you might receive a magazine from Scotland, or you might have a letter from Scotland, and it has that little emblem of the burning bush on it. Perhaps some of you have received a letter like that, with an emblem of the burning bush, and if I can remember, the writing underneath: “Nec tamen consumebatur,” which I take to mean, *but not consumed*. It has always been taken as an emblem of the suffering church of God: “The bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” – Scotland in the days of the Covenanters, but the blood-bought church of God in all ages, in all its sufferings and opposition. “The bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” – the everlasting security of the people of God.

And then of course personally, a sinner saved by grace. Wouldn't you think he would be destroyed, with all the hatred and enmity of sin and Satan and the world, just like the fire that was burning that bush? But “the bush was not consumed.” It means this to you as a believer: “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” “It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.” We deserve it. Perhaps we fear one day we shall be consumed. “Not consumed.” “The bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.” Now these are the blessings of the burning bush that Moses knew and experienced, and he wished for those who followed.

“The good will of Him” – Christ – “that dwelt in the bush.”