

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 377

An All-sufficient God and Saviour

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 3rd January, 2016**

Text: *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Corinthians 3. 5).*

If you were to have asked William Gadsby what all this is about sufficiency, I think his answer would have been something this: "Whate'er I need in Jesus dwells, and there it dwells for me."

"Our sufficiency is of God." As we meet together in the evening of this first Lord's day of the new year, we cannot help thinking of the year before us. Some of you know the things that are going to happen. Some of you have arrangements made, subject to God's will. Some of them are happy things; some of them are perhaps the opposite, like hospital appointments, or things like that. Apart from all the natural things, there is your spiritual life and your own weakness and sinfulness and helplessness, and there are things in your family, things in your relationships with other people, problems and difficulties. Really we could go on all evening, but you know the things that are before you, or you think are before you, or you expect to be before you in the new year, and how do you feel concerning it? I wonder if you feel something like the apostle in the previous chapter. He talks of these things. He says, "Who is sufficient for these things?" You can put your own piece in there. "These things" – who is sufficient for them?

And as you contemplate the unknown way – the things you know, the things that are wisely hidden from you, your own weakness and helplessness, your sinfulness – are some of you fearful? Don't you find this your honest confession: "We are not sufficient of ourselves"? We are not sufficient for tomorrow. We are not sufficient to handle all these things. We are not sufficient to deal with the matters that will come in our life. We are not sufficient to walk out our profession of the Lord's name honourably. Certainly spiritually we have no sufficiency in ourselves. We have to say, "In me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." But then there is a glorious answer, and it is really this: that there *is* an all-sufficiency for every day of this new year, and that all-sufficiency is in

grace and it is in providence, and that all-sufficiency is not in ourselves. The hymnwriter never spoke a truer word:

“God is all-sufficient
For the coming year.”

“Our sufficiency is of God.” So this verse looks two ways. It looks within our own hearts and lives and our circumstances, and then it looks upward, and O the difference between those two looks! That look on ourselves in our helplessness and our need, and that look up to the Lord Jesus in that wonderful fulness of love and grace and mercy, whatever we need.

“Our sufficiency is of God.” “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves.” So I read that beautiful chapter, the opening chapter to the Colossians, and the way our reading ended this evening: “It pleased the Father that in Him” – in His beloved Son – “in Him” – who in all things shall have the preeminence – “in Him” – who is the great and glorious Head of the church – “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” Now that is the sufficiency.

“Our sufficiency is of God.” And there it is treasured up in Christ. “It pleased the Father that in Him” – in Christ – “should all fulness dwell.” I believe in the covenant of grace, before the world had any being, the eternal Father saw all the needs of all His beloved people from the day Adam fell to the day the last vessel of mercy is taken safe to heaven. He saw their spiritual needs, and He saw their providential needs, and in matchless love and mercy He made full provision for them in His beloved Son. “For it pleased the Father.” It was His good pleasure. He did not do it in a grudging way, or a half-hearted way, or a niggardly way. It pleased Him.

“The Father’s good pleasure has laid up in store
A plentiful treasure, to give to the poor.”

“It pleased the Father that in Him” – in Christ – “should all fulness dwell.” That is, everything that His people would ever need for time and eternity, the great and the small, in providence and in grace. And it is that wonderful fulness. Perhaps “fulness” is an unusual word. Really it is the same as this all-sufficiency here. “Our sufficiency is of God,” but the fulness, it is like an ever-flowing, overflowing river. We sing sometimes,

“Where the rich fountain of Thy grace
Stands ever open, full, and free.”

The old preachers used to say that when the Lord gives, we are enriched by the Lord giving, but He is never the poorer because He gives. God’s people have been receiving from this fulness ever since Adam fell, but it is still ever-flowing, full and free.

“It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” This all-sufficiency dwells there. It is always there. It will not be exhausted. If you are helped from it today, there is still that wonderful fulness there tomorrow. And it is the Father’s good pleasure that it dwells there, and may we see it is the Father’s good pleasure when poor, unworthy sinners go to receive from that fulness and grace for grace.

“Our sufficiency is of God.” Now spiritually, the way a sinner is brought into this fulness, surely means that he is brought to feel his own emptiness. It is empty sinners who value a full Christ. And so we read in that scripture, being “emptied from vessel to vessel.” What is it? You are emptied of any hope in yourself, and emptied of any confidence in yourself, emptied of finding happiness in the world. This is the day when everyone in the world is wishing everyone else happiness, and the world does not know where to find it. The world has been seeking it these thousands of years. The world does not find it. The world does not know where to find it. O to be emptied of finding any happiness in the world, to be emptied of self-righteousness, and then to come as an empty sinner to the Saviour. I wonder if you have ever entered into that word:

“Empty and bare, I come to Thee
For righteousness divine;
O may Thy matchless merits be,
By imputation, mine.”

There is a wonderful fulness in the righteousness of Christ. There is a wonderful fulness in His finished work. There is a wonderful fulness in His precious, sin-atonement blood. O but here is the emptiness; this is the confession of emptiness: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but” – there is an answer; there is a sufficiency; there is a fulness; there is a supply of our needs – “our sufficiency is of God.”

Really this verse is the answer to the apostle's question at the end of the preceding chapter. He says, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And the answer is, not in ourselves. Paul did not feel he was sufficient nor his hearers. Not as an apostle was he sufficient. "But our sufficiency is of God." And in the context, Paul is speaking of things in the church of God, and whenever we have anything today with things in the church of God, we have to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Whether it be a preacher, or a pastor, or an apostle like Paul, or whatever it might be concerning the church of God, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But then to find our sufficiency – and there *is* a sufficiency, and it is an all-sufficiency, and it is a complete sufficiency – in the Person of Christ once crucified and now risen, exalted, glorified.

On this point, well do I remember – it is many, many years ago now – after I had been officially sanctioned and commissioned to preach, it was before the first Lord's day afterwards that I woke up in the middle of the night, and if it is the right word, I think I panicked. I thought, there is tomorrow, and the week after, and the whole year. As I lay there, I thought it might be ten years, or even twenty years. How can I possibly hope to continue? I was just filled completely with dismay. And that word came: "Leaning on all-sufficient grace." It satisfied me, and I fell comfortably and peaceably asleep. It has been a lot more than ten or twenty years, but it is still on the same ground on which I began. "Leaning on all-sufficient grace." You can lean on it and it will never fail you. You can lean on it; it will never let you go. But it is still the same as at the beginning.

"Who is sufficient for these things?" When I had just ventured to preach, E.G. Rowell was a very old man in his eighties, coming to the end. He said, "I will tell you something: in a true gospel pulpit you will find a living spring." There is one here in this pulpit, you know. There is a living spring and if a man stands in this pulpit, there is his sufficiency, his all-sufficiency. There is a living spring and it is always there and it will never dry up.

O but, "Who is sufficient?" "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." And that is a sufficiency that can never fail, however we fail. Now it is not just things in the church of God. It is the whole life of a believer, the life

he has to live before the people of God, before his family, before the world, and who is sufficient for it? That life is compared to a *pilgrimage*, and it is a long pilgrimage; it is a hard pilgrimage. In Scripture it is compared to the pilgrimage of Israel through the wilderness. Let us be clear, beloved friends, God's ancient people in the wilderness were not sufficient of themselves to think any thing as of themselves, and they had to prove it, and Moses himself proved it, and so did Aaron, and so did Miriam. O but didn't they prove that their sufficiency was of God!

When they came to the Red Sea, "Who is sufficient for these things?" and the Lord made a way through. When they came to Marah, they could not drink. "Who is sufficient for these things?" The tree cut down, the tree cast in, and they could drink. When they were in the wilderness, not sufficient food, and the manna, an all-sufficient supply. It was there every day. You think of the dreadful rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and think of some of those other terrible times when they sinned. The manna was still there. It was an all-sufficiency of mercy. They did not deserve it. Not a drop of water to drink. The sufficiency of God, that smitten rock. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." The swellings of Jordan. "Who is sufficient?" No boat, no bridge, no ford, and the waters of Jordan divided. That is it. The Lord's people are pilgrims and strangers and they have not arrived yet. There are the dangers, the difficulties, but this: "Our sufficiency is of God." There is full provision for every step of the way. The manna did not cease till they had eaten of the old corn of the land.

"Our sufficiency is of God." But there are all these comparisons of the life of faith. The *heavenly voyage*. Who is sufficient for it? You "leave the world's deceitful shore, and leave it to return no more." You have your profession, and the good wishes of your friends, and the love of Christ in your heart, and the wind in your sails, and suddenly you are out of sight, and it is dark, and the storm and the tempest, and, "Who is sufficient for these things?" "So He bringeth them unto their desired haven." He once stilled the storm. He once said, "Peace, be still," and He once walked on the waves. He once said, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." The Lord Jesus is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." This is the sufficiency.

What is it? A pilgrimage, a voyage, *a fight*. “Fight the good fight of faith.” Who is sufficient to fight with Apollyon, when you realise your weakness? Can you stand against his temptations, the winds of adversity which blow from hell, which would blow you off your course and blow you back? “Our sufficiency is of God.” Christ is greater than the devil and grace is greater than sin.

A pilgrimage, a voyage, a fight, *a race*. “So run, that ye may obtain.” How can you endure to the end of the race when so many fall by the way? Well, the apostle tells us: “Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” – the redeemed who are safely landed, who have run the race and gained the victory – “seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” Those are the instructions for the race, but that is not where your sufficiency lies. “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, *looking unto Jesus*.” That is where the fulness of grace is, and that is where the all-sufficiency is, and that is how you can endure to the end and come forth victorious in the race. Like the apostle: “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” Now there are things in your family, and some of you with ill health, and the weakness and infirmity of old age, and your problems and difficulties, things you cannot manage, and here you are, and here are these before you – the Word of God speaks of mountains, crooked things, rough places. “Who is sufficient for these things?” And sooner or later you come into “trouble, like a gloomy cloud,” and, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Well, didn’t Paul prove the answer! He was in trouble. Of course, he tells us what it was: “a thorn in the flesh.” Some of the divines have said that means this, and some have said something else. We are not told, and it is a wise thing we are not told. You might think, That was Paul’s thorn; it is not mine. But the point is, it was too much for him. All his apostleship and his preaching could not help him. “And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee.” What a word that is for you tried, troubled ones for the new year, and all that lies

before you, if the Lord the Spirit speaks it to your heart: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

“Our sufficiency is of God.” So it is a sufficiency of grace, reigning grace, all-prevailing grace, abounding grace. It is a sufficiency of love. It is a sufficiency of mercy, and when you fall, to forgive you and to lift you up again. But there will be times with you in your families, and in the church of God, and in your circumstances, and in your relationships with other people, and in your business, when you will have things to manage and you just do not know how to manage them. They are too hard for you, and you feel to lack the wisdom. “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” “Our sufficiency is of God.” And there is a sufficiency of wisdom. I know the great point is to be made “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,” but there is wisdom to direct your way and wisdom to show you what you have to do.

“Our sufficiency is of God.” Now there will be another thing in your lives. There will be times when you feel your weakness. Now it may be bodily, or it may be spiritually, or it may be – if it is the right word – emotionally. But the point is this: you feel you have come to the end. Your strength is weakened in the way. You do not know how to carry on. Now there is an all-sufficiency of strength, strength made perfect in weakness. Poor Elijah was weak once. He came to the end of everything. He fell down under the juniper tree and he said, “Let me die and not live.” But he proved where his all-sufficiency lay. He was able to go on; he had to go on.

“Jesus Christ, your Father’s Son,
Bids you undismayed go on.”

He went in the strength of what the Lord did for him many days.

“Our sufficiency is of God.” Now there will be very many times in your life, in spiritual things and in providential things, and in great things and in small things, when you need God’s help. You feel your helplessness. And this is all embraced here. There is a sufficiency of divine help, help laid on One that is mighty, help that is promised, help for those who realise their own helplessness, whether it is spiritually as a sinner, whether it is in the things in your life, those of you who of necessity have to pray, “Lord, help me.” And to prove this all-sufficiency! It is not

just a little aid; it is not just to help you a bit and then you manage the rest yourself. It is divine help; it is almighty help; it is suitable help.

“Our sufficiency is of God.” And then, beloved friends, there is a wonderful promise that covers all this. I think you know what the promise is: “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Now there is the all-sufficiency. And what a beautiful expression: “His riches in glory by Christ Jesus”! And the promise to every needy sinner. Mind you, one thing is needful. That is the great point. “Jesus, engrave it on my heart” – that personal, vital knowledge of the Saviour and redemption through His blood. And He says, “All your need” – the all-sufficiency, the riches in glory by Christ Jesus, the “never-failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace.”

“My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” So I felt constrained this evening at the beginning to read to you about Elijah. There was not much sufficiency in Israel – that terrible drought, that terrible famine, the people starving, even the beasts of the field, the grass not growing. But the Lord has His brook Cheriths and He has them for you, and they are hidden away, and perhaps this evening you are in some special need, but the Lord has a brook Cherith for you. It is hidden away. You do not know where it is, but the Lord knows where it is, and He will lead you to it.

O but you see, the brook Cherith dries up. The Lord is not bound by one brook Cherith in fulfilling this glorious point, the all-sufficiency of His goodness, of His grace. He can use a widow woman, the least likely support, and didn’t that all-sufficiency flow there! Only a little in that barrel of meal and that cruse of oil, but the all-sufficiency is not cast in any doubt. You and I would like to have a sufficiency for tomorrow and next week, how to manage this and how to deal with that. O but what is it? *“When I come there.”* When the day arrived, when the need was pressing, there was that blessed provision. The cruse of oil did not fail; the barrel of meal was never empty. And your barrel of meal will never be empty, either spiritually or providentially, nor your cruse of oil.

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” But it is day by day. There is an unusual word on my mind. It is the closing word in the second Book of

the Kings. The king of Judah, Jehoiachin, had been taken into captivity and for thirty-seven years he had been a captive. But the time came when the Lord turned again his captivity, and in a strange way. He gave him favour in the sight of the king of Babylon, and this is it: the king of Babylon lifted up his head, and brought him out of prison, and “spake kindly to him ... and changed his prison garments; and he did eat bread continually before him.” Now these are the things you want. But what a beautiful picture of the all-sufficiency! “He did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life.” He did not deserve it; he was a captive.

Now this is the closing word in the second Book of the Kings, and it is all bound up with this all-sufficiency. May some of you prove it in this new year: “His allowance was a continual allowance given him of the king, a daily rate for every day, all the days of his life.” I know that is an unusual word and a little-known word, but it fits in with this subject of all-sufficiency in Christ, and may some of you prove it this year.

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” Beloved friends, in a word it is this:

“For the year before us,
O what rich supplies!
For the poor and needy,
Living streams shall rise;
For the sad and sinful,
Shall His grace abound;
For the faint and feeble,
Perfect strength be found.”

“He will never fail us,
He will not forsake;
His eternal covenant
He will never break.
Resting on His promise,
What have we to fear?
God is all-sufficient
For the coming year.”

Now may we prove it so!

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”