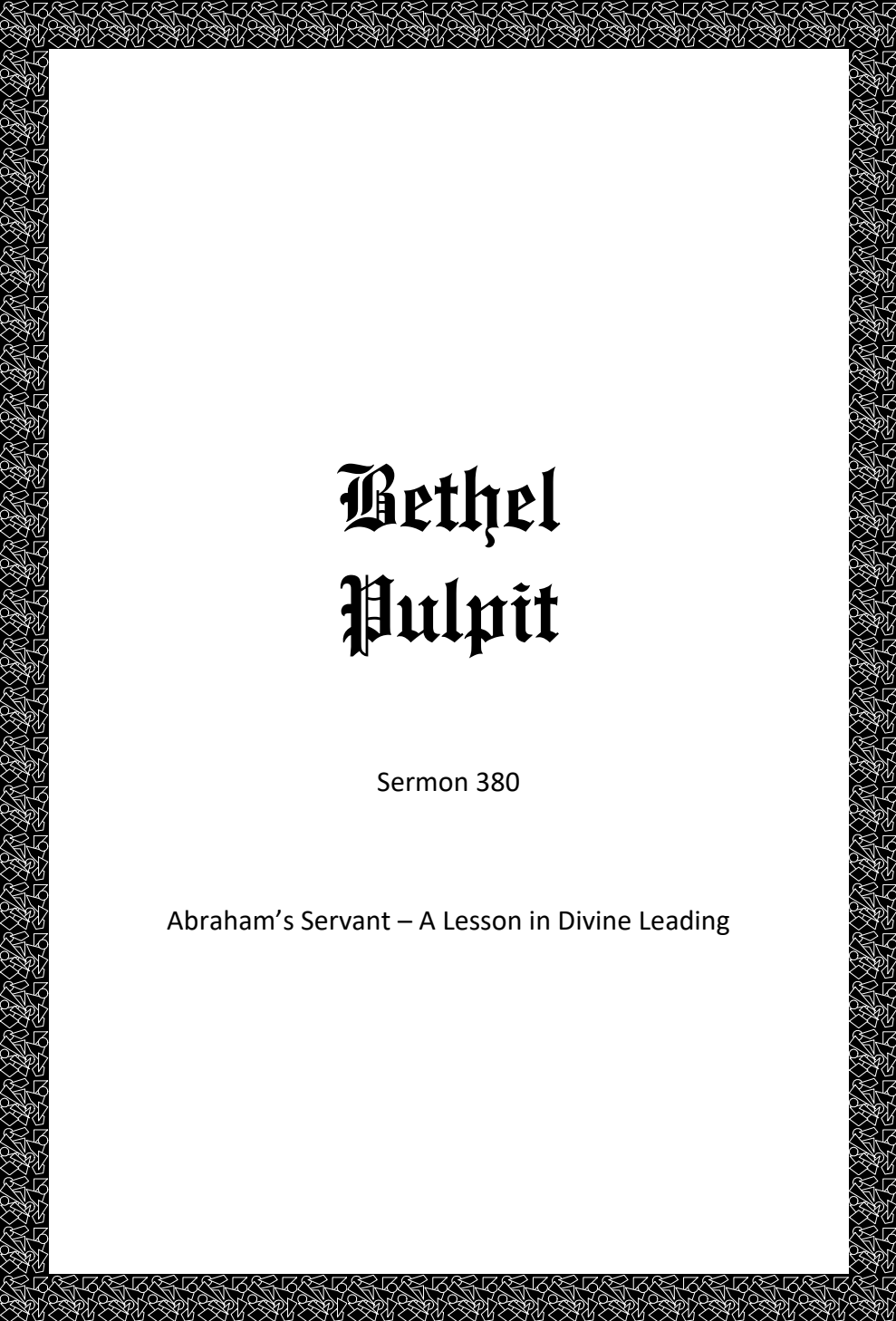




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 380

Abraham's Servant – A Lesson in Divine Leading

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 5th February, 2017**

Text: *“And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day” (Genesis 24. 12).*

This must be one of the most wonderful chapters in the Old Testament. It is a very well-known chapter. I am sure as we read it through, apart from the interest in it, we kept hearing a word and we thought, Well, I know that word well, or, I remember hearing someone preaching from that. What I am coming to, beloved friends: so many well-known texts in this chapter have been taken in a spiritual sense as a wonderful illustration of the Lord's gracious dealing. Let me mention one or two of them to you, and I am sure you are very familiar with them.

One is this: “Tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?” I am sure some of you, many of you have prayed that prayer. I hope some of you in the spirit of it are praying it this morning. Unworthy as I am, tell me –

“Lord, in Thy house I read there's room,
And, venturing hard, behold I come;
But can there, tell me, can there be
Amongst Thy children room for me?”

“Tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?”

And then you see another word: “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?” We think of the threefold welcome: sinners to Christ, believers into the church of God, and the Lord's people to heaven at last. What a word that has been, and of course, it is a very familiar word to many of you here. It is the word I spoke to you from the Lord when I received you into church membership here. “Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?” It would be a wonderful thing if we were able to say that to a few more of you: “Wherefore standest thou without?”

And then that word which at times has been a help to some: “The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.” Perhaps some of you have had to come to a parent or an old friend and tell them some of your burdens, and they listened to what you had to say, and it has been very pleasant to you when you have heard them say, “The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.”

And then we think of the beautiful word that was spoken to Rebekah: “Wilt thou go with this man?” The glories of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who He is, what He has done, His ability to save, His willingness to save the most unworthy sinner who casts their hope upon Him, and then that great question: “Wilt thou go with this Man?” this glorious Man of whom we read so much in the Word of God. “Wilt thou go with this Man?”

And just a final word from this chapter: “Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way.” Some of you know it in that well-known hymn of John Ryland’s:

“Hinder me not! ye much-loved saints,
For I must go with you.”

Well then, beloved friends, so much for these various comments. It is not altogether the theme of the text, but they are such beautiful words and they have been made so precious over the years that I could not forbear from mentioning them.

But now to come to the point. This chapter is a providential chapter and it is a chapter of God’s leading in His mysterious, all-wise providence. Now I am not sure whether I have ever heard a sermon on this chapter from that point of view. We do need to be careful – the providential parts of Scripture, the practical parts of Scripture, the exhortations, Christian behaviour – that we do not just pass these things over. That lovely text: “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” But in the context, if you read it carefully, the subject is Christian giving, Christian generosity, and that beautiful verse is brought in as the wonderful example of the Saviour.

Then you have it again, that lovely verse: “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with

the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” But do not forget the beginning of the verse: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church.” It is part of an exhortation concerning the behaviour of husbands to their wives.

So I have always felt it is right to spiritualise these verses I have mentioned in this chapter, so long as we never build a doctrine on them. But surely these things speak so loudly to us, that we must not ever overlook the real lesson of the subject, what the Lord is saying and what His teaching is. Really, beloved friends, this is Christian behaviour.

Here is a man. He is an old man; he is a very gracious man, and something is put into his hands. There is something he has to face up to. There is something he has to deal with. There is something he has to do. He cannot do it. He has not got the ability to do it. It is an impossible thing. But he has to do it. And the whole chapter tells us how he walked it out.

I am sure this touches a few hearts here this morning. All of us in our little lives at some time or another have something that has to be dealt with, something that has to be done. Sometimes we look on these things and we cannot see how they can be done. They seem impossible. We hardly know how to handle them. We look at that word: “He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good.” How can we handle this matter wisely? But here we see this man handle a matter wisely. Really this chapter is a good commentary on that text: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.”

So there are many things here for you children when you are at school, you young people dealing with your friends, or if they are not your friends, your associates; the many difficulties young people have – your choices, your decisions, leaving home, starting work, going to college. There are many things for older people as well, with increasing weakness and ill health. I am sure there are plenty of things here for you mothers with little children. There are things in the church of God. There are large things; there are small things, which brings us to the word: “And he” – the faithful servant – “said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee,

send me good speed this day.” He knew the God of his master Abraham, the God of the covenant of grace. He knew who that God was. Of course, in New Testament days, when we pray this prayer, we can say something better than the God of Abraham. We can say, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day.” But just to linger a moment here – the difficulty, the impossibility of what the servant had to do. With most solemn oaths Abraham bound him on this point of finding a wife for his son Isaac, and not to return without her. It was all dealt with most solemnly in the sight of God. If you think of it, it has been computed that he had a journey altogether of about a thousand miles. He was going to a country he had never been to before. It is also thought his journey would take about seven weeks. If he knew the way there, or how to get there, or what to do when he got there, he did not know the people, how to deal with the matter, what to say, how to manage it, to find a suitable wife for his master, Isaac. And how would he know if someone was suitable, and if he found her, is it likely she would leave her home and family and go along with a stranger, that vast journey, and to be married to a man she had never even seen?

Of course, bound up with it all was this: the royal seed, the promises made to Abraham and his descendants. There was salvation in it; there was Christ in it. And Abraham knew that. It *was* a providential detail; it *was* love to his son Isaac. O but he could see the whole of covenant salvation bound up in the success of his servant as he went off to Mesopotamia.

O but this servant! He wanted to do right in the sight of his God. That was his great point. He wanted to do what was right, whatever the cost. He dreaded the thought of dishonouring his Lord, and he was made very tender in the fear of the Lord. And so this is how he started out, and if you have got something to do, that is the way you have to start out, not to come in half way through and ask the Lord to help you, when you think you have got things going right to confirm you, or to bring you out of it if you find things going wrong.

“O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day.” Now that is a suitable prayer for every morning of our

lives when we get up, in the spirit of it: “Send me good speed this day.” Be with me, help me, guide me, supply my needs. I do not know what is before me, but O do “send me good speed this day.” It is a suitable prayer every morning. I am sure it is a suitable prayer for a minister of the gospel when the Lord’s day comes, and it is a suitable prayer for each of you as you come to the house of God, that the Lord will send you good speed in listening to the everlasting gospel. So it is a good prayer for every day, but then you see, there comes a *special* day as it was with Abraham’s servant. He said, “This day.” The day has arrived; the hour has come. O Lord, be with me; help me; supply my needs.

“Send me good speed this day.” Perhaps you noticed as we read the chapter, when the servant was explaining to Rebekah’s household what he had said, he puts it like this. He said, “I came this day unto the well, and said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, if now Thou do prosper my way which I go.” So the two are the same thing: “Send me good speed this day”; “Prosper my way which I go” – realising this: if the Lord does prosper our way, things will go well. If the Lord does not prosper our way, things will not go well.

“O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day.” Now there are a lot of lessons for us, how we have to deal with all these things that come in our little lives, and some of you may have them now. The servant did not feel he could manage things himself. He did not think that he had the wisdom. He did not think he had the grace. Yet it seems clear he was a most godly, gracious man, but he could not depend upon himself. He felt he was unworthy. He felt the matter was too great for him. He felt he could not handle it. He felt he just was not fit. He felt he just had not got the wisdom, that he had to be completely dependent upon his God, that he had to look to his God alone, that he had to rely upon his God alone for success in this venture, and that he might be prospered in the way that he had to go.

“O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day.” But he saw the opposite, and he was well established in the opposite, and may you and I be. We need to be saved from unbelief in these things. We certainly need to be saved from trusting in ourselves, resting in ourselves, but we need the Lord to give us this living faith to look to our God, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God

of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He possesses all wisdom.

Whenever we speak of that point, we cannot help but think of that other impossible case, John chapter 6, the feeding of the five thousand, and none of them knew what they should do. None of them had the wisdom. You have one disciple making a calculation, another counting the people, another wondering whether they had any bread, another thinking whether there was anywhere they could go to buy some, and then you have that sublime word that rings down the ages: “He Himself knew what He would do.” And He still does, beloved friends. The Lord is never taken by surprise. There is never anything with Him where He does not know what to do.

Before Abraham’s servant started out, the Lord knew it all. He knew how to lead the servant. He knew how to move Laban’s heart, how to move Rebekah’s heart, how to move the mother’s heart. He knew how to order every detail – so much hanging on so little. “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.” And how much in our lives hangs upon so little. Perhaps you look back this morning at one little thing and it affected the whole course of your life. Well, the servant knew one thing, and he proved it: “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” The beautiful end to this chapter. “*He*” – not the servant – “*He* shall bring it to pass.” Not Isaac, not Abraham – “*He* shall bring it to pass.” O but it is this: if Abraham’s servant did not know what to do, if he felt his unworthiness, his helplessness, but if he was determined he must do what is right in the sight of God, seek the honour and glory of His name, seek His people’s good, he knew that perfect wisdom there is with the Lord.

“Leave God to order all thy ways,
And trust in Him whate’er betide.”

That wisdom of the servant’s God, Abraham’s God, your God, my God, His loving, tender compassion!

You say, What does it really matter – just a man living in a far-off country and he wants a wife? It is one of the longest chapters in the whole Bible, on this little thing. That is a great point on the teaching of divine providence in the Word of God. You know what we mean by *divine*

providence. Someone once said to me, “You ministers need to stop sometimes and explain what you mean.” Providence is God performing in time what He purposed from eternity. I remember Mr. Foster of Nottingham preaching and referring to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He said, “Why is the God of heaven called the God of Isaac? You do not read a lot about him.” He said, “*The God of providential detail.*” Well, there is more about God finding a wife for Isaac than there is about the creation of the world, and that is an important point. That is not just the wisdom of God, but it is His compassion to us poor, unworthy sinners – His tenderness, His understanding, His compassion. “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.”

And then there is another thing. You see His wisdom and His compassion, and of course mercy underneath it all, mercy through blood, but there is His divine almighty power. The heart of the servant was in His hand, and the heart of Rebekah was in His hand, and the hearts of all the family were in His hand. There are no impossibilities with the Lord. He says, “I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me?”

“O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day.” But of course, the important thing in this chapter is this: the servant *did not take one single step without prayer*. He prayed his way along. He sought the Lord’s help every moment. He did not want to decide one thing himself. He wanted the Lord to guide him. He was praying for help. He was praying for guidance. He was praying that the Lord would appear. He must have known that word, “Jehovah Jireh” from two chapters before, “The Lord will provide.” But he was praying his way along step by step, wherever he came. He was praying, and the things of God were first. He must have been weary, but even before he had had anything to eat, he must tell his case. It was the honour and glory of God, and he wanted to do what was right, and it was this praying his way along.

We have something Abraham’s servant did not have, and that is a risen Saviour, ever living, ever interceding, His wonderful promise to hear and answer prayer. We have that – not whether our prayers are good or bad, or whether we have liberty, or whether we deserve things or we do not. It is an unworthy sinner looking to Christ alone and resting

completely on His death, His resurrection, His endless life, His all-prevailing intercession, almighty to save.

So it is very wonderful the way Abraham's servant walked it out and the way he was led, and then to think that we are more privileged than he was, with the full light of the gospel. But there is a solemn thought here. How often are we really living, walking, behaving in the spirit of Genesis chapter 24? How often we are leaving things, or how often we are thinking it does not really matter; we can manage it ourselves, or it is only a little thing. O to be in this spirit, the tender fear of God, wanting to do what is right in His sight, whatever the cost, seeking His help, seeking His gracious leading! Especially this: in complete dependence, praying our way along. And then the Lord will never fail us.

I suppose all of you expect me to say something about the servant asking a sign. Is it right to ask a sign like he did – who the one was for Isaac? He said he stood at the well and said, Let it be this one who comes out and I say to her, Give me a drink, and she gives me a drink and says, I will draw for the camels also. Now is it right for us to ask for a sign in providence? Well, I think the point is this: this servant did not do it carelessly and casually. It seems clear that in his prayerful exercises the Lord had showed him this was the way to go. Otherwise he had no idea what he was going to do. It was a strange land, a strange country. He did not know anyone. It was a case where he needed some special leading, some special, outward sign. So it is part of an answer to his prayer.

But then it was not a foolish prayer. It was not as if he said, May it be the one I see who walks along wearing a dress that is blue, or someone who stumbles down. It was not anything like that. I am not talking foolishly here; he saw that she was "fair to look upon." I think he realised that Isaac and his father Abraham would want him to bring back someone who was fair. But then he proved this: that this girl was courteous, she was friendly, she was hardworking, she was kind. We read two or three times that she hasted, she ran. Some of those who really understand the customs of the east said that for her to draw water for all those camels to drink was a momentous task, but she did not hesitate; she did it. So those are just one or two thoughts about asking a sign.

“O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day.” So it is right to think of all these beautiful, spiritual applications of these truths, but do not forget the real, day-by-day meaning, what it meant then, what it meant to Abraham, what it meant to Isaac waiting, what it meant to the servant, and then what it meant to Rebekah. But the Lord *did* give him good speed that day. “I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master’s brethren.” And not only were his prayers answered, not only was it complete prosperity, but he said, “The Lord hath prospered my way,” and he fell down and worshipped Him with a grateful heart. It was not just that, but every single detail fell into its place. It was the Lord’s doing and every single detail fell into its place. Then that lovely end to the chapter, that loving union, Abraham satisfied, Isaac with his beloved Rebekah, the servant honoured, satisfied and blessed, the Lord’s covenant purpose fulfilled, all to the praise and honour and glory of the Lord. And then that brings us back to where you are this morning or where you often are. Well, the Lord says, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

“O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day.”