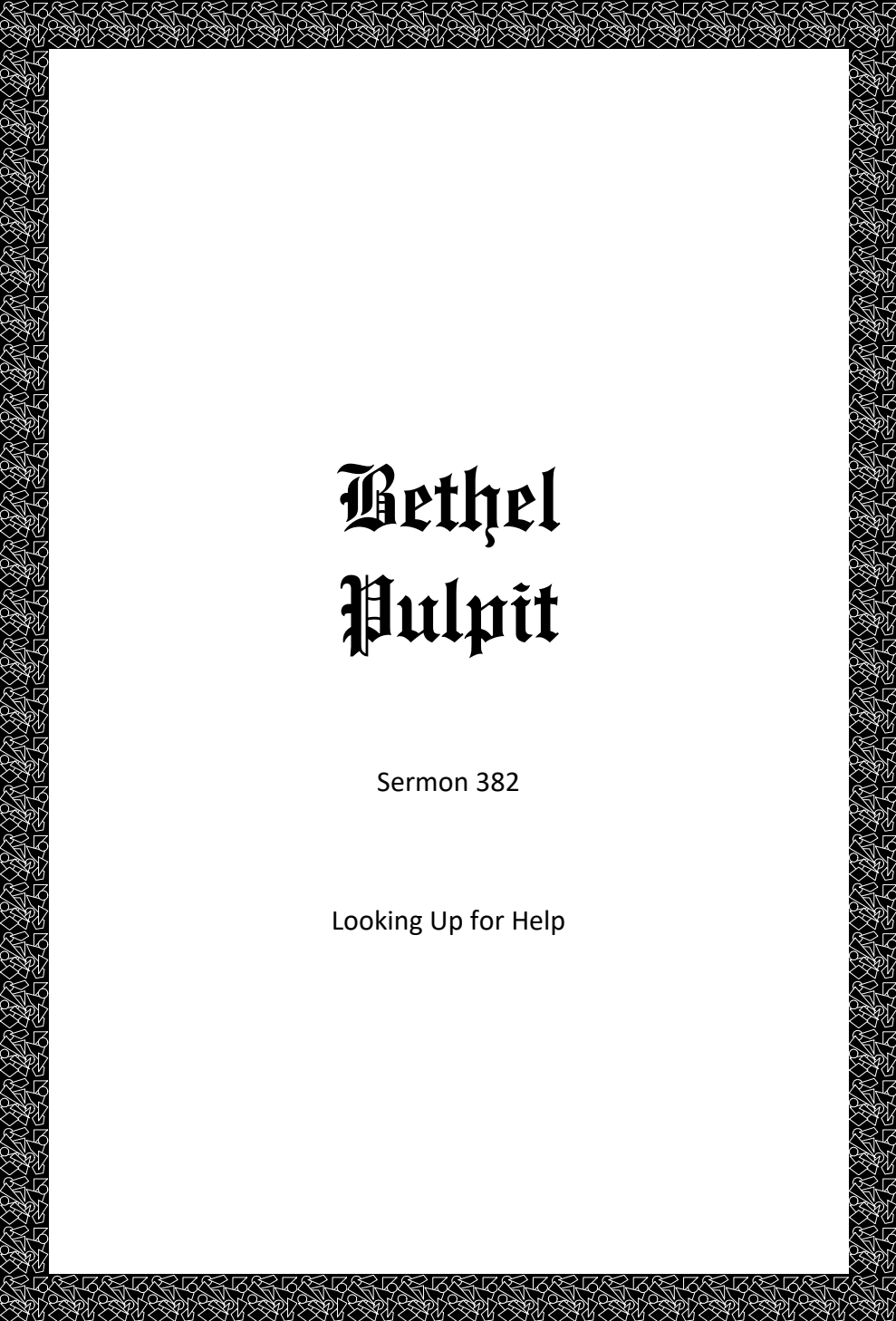




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 382

Looking Up for Help

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 9th April, 2017**

Text: *"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121. 1, 2).*

This is an exceedingly-simple word, and it is certainly a very well-known word, one of the best-known words in Scripture. It seems to be a word which has always been attractive, very precious to the people of God, both ways: spiritually and providentially. I am sure there are many of you here this morning who see an attraction in it – this help, this divine help which comes from an almighty God to those who in different ways feel their helplessness and feel their need of Him.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Well, these days our eyes look around. They look here; they look there; they look in the world; they see all the outrages, all the terrorism, all the sorrow. They look around in our own country and the awful things that are happening, the departure from the Lord. At times we look around among our families and friends and congregations and see the need they are in. And then looking in our own hearts, there is not much to encourage us when we realise our faults and failures and unworthiness. O but that looking upward!

"Sweet to look upward to the place
Where Jesus reigns above."

And that is it, beloved friends, and that is the whole spirit of it: to be sweetly enabled this morning to look up, to lift up our eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh our help, to look up in prayer, to look up in our helplessness and need, to look up in hope, to look up in dependence, to lift up our eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh our help.

Now of course, this is one of the "songs of degrees." As you know, these songs of degrees were sung when the pilgrims travelled up three times a year to Jerusalem. I suppose they had many thoughts, but as they neared the city of Jerusalem, it was with holy anticipation. May we know something of it in a little measure when the day dawns for us to come to the house of God, lifting up our eyes.

Well, as they drew near Jerusalem, they lifted up their eyes. There was Mount Zion; there was the temple; there was the high priest; there was the sacrifice; there was the blood; there was the intercession. I believe many a faithful Israelite in Old Testament days looked beyond all these outward things, and though darkly, they had a little glimpse of the gospel and gospel days and the coming of the Saviour. So as they drew near Jerusalem and they saw the hills surrounding it, they lifted up their eyes to the hills from whence should come their help. O may the Lord enable us in like measure, in the same spirit, to lift up our eyes and to prove,

“Sweet to look upward to the place
Where Jesus reigns above.”

Because that is the great point of it. There is a Saviour there, and He is the One to whom we look for help, and He is almighty.

“My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” The point is, the One to whom we are looking, the One on whom we are depending, He is not weak; He is not helpless. He is almighty. He is merciful; He is full of grace, but He is almighty. It means He is on the throne; He is in control; He can do everything; He can meet your case and mine; He can supply our needs; He can go before us to make crooked things straight; He can give us strength equal to the day.

And the great emphasis in this Psalm is *help*. “From whence cometh my *help*.” But the emphasis: it is divine, almighty help. “My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” I have noticed often in Scripture that the doctrine of creation is brought in as a sweet encouragement to the people of God. How so? That He who created all things by the word of His mouth, He can deal with our case. He can do anything.

You have it again in one of the following Psalms: “Our help is in the name of the Lord.” Well, who is He? He “made heaven and earth.” We have it again in another later Psalm: “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God: which made heaven, and earth.” It is an almighty Saviour that we have to deal with, and in the words here, an almighty Helper, the One who hears in the day of trouble, the God of Jacob who defends us. He sends help from the sanctuary. It is divine, almighty help, and strength out of Zion.

So as sweetly enabled, we do need the Lord to cause us to look up. “I will.” It is a kind of gracious resolve. Some people say you should not make resolves, but the psalmist made a lot of them, but he did it in dependence on the Lord.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” Now of course, we take this in two ways: in our spiritual need, and in our providential need; if you will, in providence and in grace. So, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” As I have constantly reminded you, help in holy Scripture often means exactly the same as salvation. It is not just a little assistance, a little helping hand. It is everything; it is salvation. “I will lift up mine eyes,” as a needy sinner, a helpless sinner, “unto the hills,” where there is an almighty Saviour, “from whence cometh my help,” my salvation.

So beloved friends, do you feel your need of salvation as a helpless sinner? Well, where are you looking this morning? There is such a thing as looking within, and in a sense we do have to look within, and the Lord will bring us to look within. But you know what we sing: “Pore not on thyself too long.” Mr. Frank Gosden said, “Make sure you pore on yourself long enough, that you realise your lost condition.” But,

“Pore not on thyself too long,
Lest it sink thee lower;
Look to Jesus, kind as strong,
Mercy joined with power.”

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help” – all my help. So in a gospel sense, this is “looking unto Jesus” – looking unto Jesus in hope, in complete dependence, looking unto Jesus for everything.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.” Perhaps the best illustration of this is the serpent in the wilderness. You know the story well, how God’s ancient people because of their sin were afflicted, bitten by those fiery serpents, and there they were dying in the wilderness, without any hope. I know our hymnwriter puts it quaintly: “Vain was bandage, oil, or plaster,” but it is true. They could not do anything to help themselves, to save themselves. “Till the serpent Moses took” – that

serpent of brass lifted up, their attention directed towards it, their only hope, the only place of dependence – and as many as looked, lived. Now that was lifting up their eyes to the hills from whence cometh their help. They had not any help anywhere else. They could not do it. Moses could not do it. Aaron could not do it. It was the Lord who did it.

It was a strange remedy – a serpent made of brass. It had the appearance of those serpents that were biting them, but it was a serpent of brass. It had not any poison; it had not any venom. I have always felt it was pointing to Christ as made sin for His people. He was made “sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” It was a strange remedy, but it was God’s remedy, and it was the only remedy, and it availed.

“Jesus, thus for sinners smitten,
Wounded, bruised, serpent-bitten,
To His cross directs their faith.”

O dying sinners, may you sweetly be enabled to look and live!

How the Lord Jesus took it up! What a commentary! “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him” – which in the spirit of it here is lifting up your eyes to the hills; it is looking unto Jesus – “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.” O it is the gospel, but it is for perishing sinners who know that out of Christ they must perish. “Dying sinners, look and live.” “That whosoever believeth in Him should *not perish*, but have eternal life.”

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Now that is spiritually; that is grace; that is salvation; that is that wonderful word that the Father spoke of His eternal Son: “I have laid help upon One that is mighty” – the eternal Father in eternity past seeing all the help that all His poor people would ever need to the end of time. He saw it and He laid that help on His dear Son. He laid that help on One that is mighty.

So may we be enabled to lift up our eyes unto the hills, to see that help laid on One that is mighty, and to seek our help there, and to place our help there, and to hear that reply: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea” – He puts a *yea*

upon it – “*yea*, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.”

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” But then providentially, I am sure you all have things in which you need God’s help. You have many, many things, different things you need, but surely all of you in one way or another feel your need of God’s help. You need His help in your pilgrimage. You need His help to bring you along, to keep you. You need His help to overthrow Satan. Some of you need His help bodily, because of your afflictions. We think of our feeble ones, our old ones in Bethesda. You mothers, you need help with your children, and some of you need help with those you are concerned about.

Then as you look forward into the unknown way, you can see that mountain before you, and another mountain behind, and how are you going to manage? “My help.” O if we can say it – whatever the world thinks, wherever the world looks, we know something better: “*My* help cometh from the Lord.” I am going to seek it there. “My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth,” and, “He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” O the mercy in this divine help, this suitable help, this promised help!

O but there are so many things. You children, you need help at school. You older ones, you need help in your disappointments; you need help in your work; you need help in your relationships one with another. What help we need continually at Bethel, here in the church of God. But I might this morning speak of needing help in this way, needing help in another way, and I may miss out the help you personally need.

You know the well-known story of the poor old man in one of our chapels. All he had was one or two pigs for his livelihood, and he woke up one Sunday morning, and they were all dead. He went to chapel. If ever a man needed help, he did. The minister got on well that morning and the people all came out, and they had felt it so profitable. It was an excellent sermon. The poor old man was silent. They said, “Didn’t you think it was good?” “O,” he said, “he didn’t mention my pigs.” There is a lot of deep divinity there. You come to chapel, and this is touched on and something else, but perhaps you go home feeling like the poor old man: “He never

mentioned my pigs.” But the Lord knows, and the Lord understands, and the Lord cares.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” As you know, one of my burdens as your pastor is not just the text, but what is the most suitable reading, and my thoughts were led to that chapter, 2 Chronicles 20. Did you notice that word *help* coming in? I suppose I noticed it, realising what the text was. But there was poor Jehoshaphat, and he needed help, and he received it.

If I may make just an aside here, if you read the life of Jehoshaphat, he was a godly man – there is not a doubt about it, and the Word of God tells us so – but he was always blundering, and always making mistakes, and doing things that were not right. They were always bringing him into trouble, but he cried to the Lord, and the Lord never failed to deliver him. Really it was, “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.”

But tidings came to him. Sometimes you hear something, and you wish you had not heard it. Well, it was like that with Jehoshaphat. Have you heard: there are two great armies coming against you. But they had come with a third army, and they have joined up. There are three mighty armies coming against you, this vast army of soldiers. Really, Jehoshaphat was in a helpless, hopeless place. Naturally speaking, it was certain death and destruction, and defeat for the Israel of God. Jehoshaphat was greatly afraid, and well he might be. But he knew what the sinner’s only safe retreat was, and he took it.

O that prayer – the simplicity of it, the humility of it, the plea he made! And the well-known conclusion: “We have no might against this great company that cometh against us.” In other words, helpless, hopeless. “We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do.” That is what it often is with you and me – we do not know what to do, what is right, what is wrong. He confessed his lack of wisdom as well as his lack of power. “Neither know we what to do.” And then one of those beautiful *buts* of the Word of God: “*But* our eyes are upon Thee.” I wonder if Jehoshaphat thought of this Psalm: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” “But our eyes are upon Thee” – in prayer, in humble confession, in a felt sense

of need, on the ground of mercy, in complete dependence on his Lord and Saviour.

“Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.”

Well, he was so helpless he could not do anything, but he did not need to do anything. The Lord did it all. And that wonderful word from the prophet: “To morrow go ye down against them.... Ye shall not need to fight in this battle.”

I could tell you a long story about that “tomorrow,” how I came back from preaching in my early days, and there was a trouble had arisen at Bethel. I did not know how to deal with it. I thought the place could be shaken. These are things before the time of most of you; you probably know nothing about it. I had to go to preach, and I had this word on my mind: “To morrow go ye down against them.” When I was preaching, I kept saying, down at Staplehurst in the pulpit, that *tomorrow* may not literally mean *tomorrow*, but may just mean some time in the unknown way. But the Lord impressed it: “*Tomorrow*.”

There was a railway strike. I think it was early in the morning (the “tomorrow”) when I got back from Staplehurst. I had to go out and see one or two people about these things. I went to one; everything was simple and made straight. I went to the other; everything was simple and made straight. I came back home. I had two different people separately waiting to see me with an application for church membership. I did not intend to say all this, but what memories of many years ago came flooding back on my spirit! So I can put my *T and P*, tried and proved, to 2 Chronicles 20 – “tomorrow”!

How could it be with this great army, that they did not need to do anything? Well, the armies began to quarrel among themselves. They started fighting against the inhabitants of Mount Seir and demolished them, and then for some reason started fighting amongst themselves until there were none of them left. All Jehoshaphat had to do was to gather the spoil, to sing the song of salvation, to call it the valley of Berachah, the place where they blessed the Lord.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”

Now I do like this word *whence*. “From *whence* cometh my help.” We do not use this word *whence* very much. We say, *where from*. Well, that is it: whence, where from. Where is this help coming from? There is an eternal source. It will never dry up. It is an almighty God and Saviour. It is that wonderful fulness of grace and love and mercy. “For it pleased the Father that in Him” – His beloved Son – “should all fulness dwell.” That is the *whence*.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills” – that is the place; that is the source; that is where it is coming from, your help, my help – “from whence cometh my help.” You remember on one occasion especially the Lord Jesus used this word *whence*, and He used it in a question. It was the feeding of the five thousand, and there they were, that great multitude, besides women and children. Well, how could they be fed? Some were saying, “Send them away.” The Lord Jesus turned to His immediate disciples and asked them a question. He said, “Whence?” “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” Where is it going to come from? Whence? We have that beautiful, sublime statement: “He Himself knew what He would do.” Well, He still does, and He still does with your case and mine.

“He Himself knew what He would do.” But if you remember, Philip was answering one thing, Andrew was answering something else, one counting up the people, one working out the arithmetic, thinking how much bread they would need. They had all kinds of things. Really, they did not know the answer. “But He Himself knew what He would do,” and when they had come to the end of all their vain suggestions, which only showed their helplessness, He caused the multitude to sit down. There was just a lad with five loaves and two fishes, but they were sufficient in the Lord’s hand. He took them, and He brake them, and He gave to the disciples, and there were twelve baskets full over at the end, one for each of the disciples. “He Himself knew what He would do.”

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from *whence* cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” Now beloved friends, the great theme of the chapter really is this. It has been called “the travellers’ Psalm.” It was the Psalm sung by the pilgrims as they journeyed, and it concerns the Lord’s watchful care, and it concerns their safety. A lot of us, before we go on a journey, still read

Psalm 121. Before our Sunday School outings, we always read Psalm 121, praying that the Lord will preserve *our* going out and *our* coming in, as He has promised.

But we think of ourselves. The Lord's people are pilgrims and strangers. "This is not your rest ... it is polluted." If your religion is right, you have left the world and you have left it for ever. You have set out on pilgrimage. You are journeying to that city whose Builder and Maker is God, and there are the dangers by the way, and yet the wonderful promise of the everlasting safety and eternal security of all the Lord's people. But it is not just a doctrine, an automatic thing. It is day by day as they journey along.

So in a sense, the key word of the Psalm: "The Lord is thy Keeper" – the Keeper of all the pilgrims as they journey Zionwards – and just considering this word Keeper in two ways. First of all, that blessed way: "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." O the number of people here at Bethel, thinking of making an open profession of the Lord's name, and they have been so fearful how they will manage afterwards, but, the Lord "is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

"The Lord is thy Keeper." But this second way. When you think of this word *keeper*, the first time it is used in Scripture it is of a shepherd, the keeper of the sheep. Well, it does not just mean that he keeps them from falling. We often use it. You can have the keeper of a museum, the keeper of all kinds of things. It does not just mean they open the doors and shut them. Really it means watchful care, the supply of every need. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills." "The Lord is thy Keeper," watching over you, keeping you day by day, supplying your need, and in the spirit of this Psalm, helping you.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." Just one last thought. I find this little word *cometh* attractive. It does not say help *might come*, or it *will come*, or it *has come*. It *cometh*. If words mean anything at all, it means it keeps on coming. That help you needed many years ago when you were tried spiritually, or that time of sorrow, when you

had that bereavement – that help – well, it is still coming; it still keeps coming. That help you needed yesterday and that help you received yesterday – well, it did not fail to come, but today if you need it, and tomorrow, that help will still keep coming. It is like an ever-flowing fountain. It is a stream that can never dry up, because it is flowing from your God and Saviour who has promised never to fail you. “My help *cometh* from the Lord.

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”