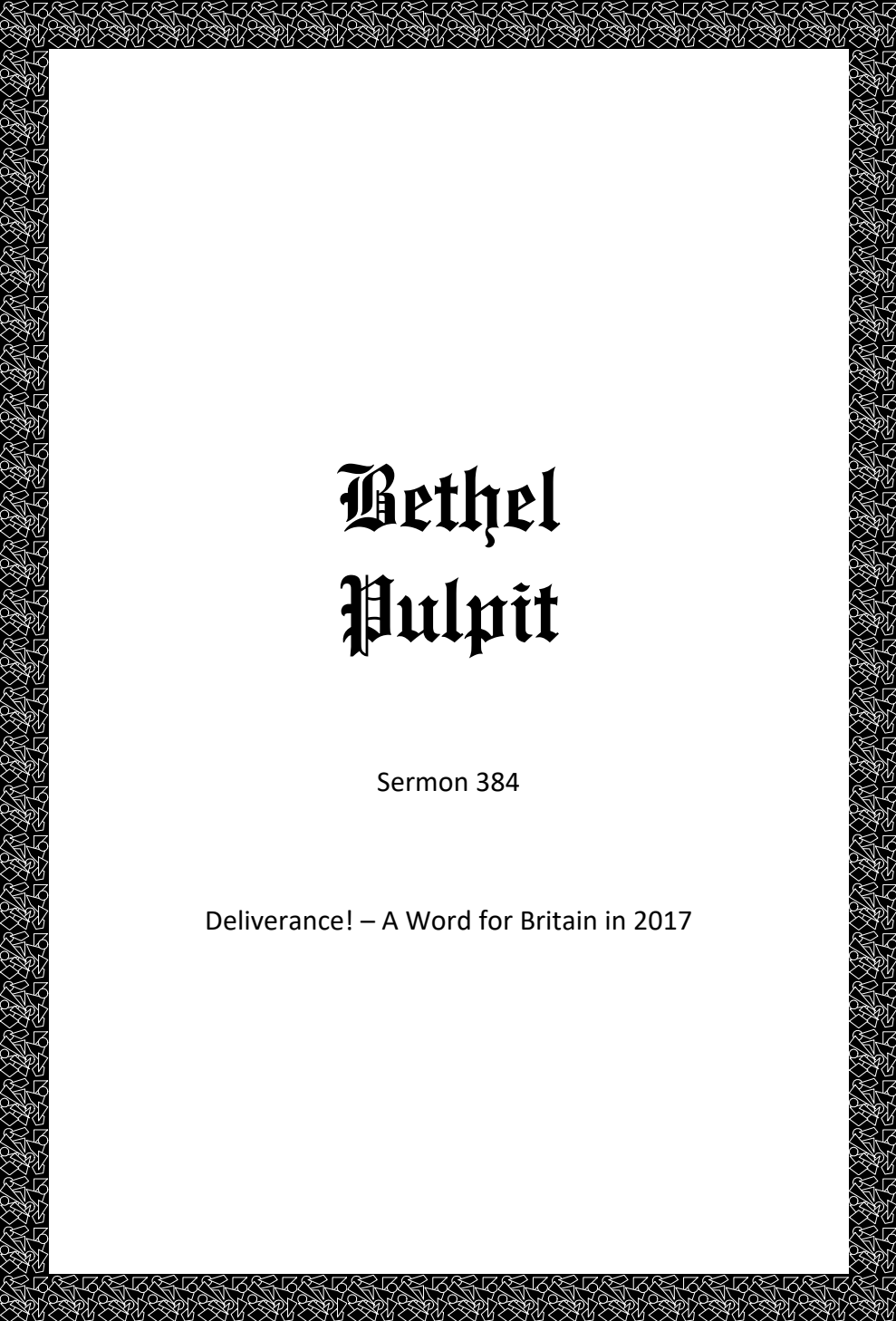




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 384

Deliverance! – A Word for Britain in 2017

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 2nd July, 2017**

Text: *“And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people; between the king also and the people” (2 Kings 11. 17).*

This chapter gives an account of one of the most wonderful deliverances recorded in the Word of God. Can you think of a greater contrast between the beginning of this chapter and the end of this chapter? “When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal,” which means the king was dead. He had been murdered, and this evil woman, Jezebel's daughter, murdered all the king's children, every one of the royal house. It was an appalling tragedy. That is the beginning of the chapter. And the end of it: “And all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet: and they slew Athaliah with the sword beside the king's house.” It was an amazing deliverance. It was a deliverance that only Almighty God could perform. It was an unexpected deliverance. It was something that only the Lord Himself could do.

Now then, beloved friends, the way this chapter, this scripture rests with me today is thinking of our present, sad circumstances in Britain. Have ever things been in such confusion, and so much wickedness abounding, and God's people despised, and His name dishonoured, and evil things allowed and promoted? There does not seem to be any way of deliverance. The point is, our God is a God of impossibilities. But we do need to watch that spirit which sometimes does seem to prevail in our congregations, when we pray for deliverance, almost as if we are better than others. If there is deliverance, it must be on mercy's ground, and if there is deliverance, our country must be brought to repentance. Because one thing that is very clear in the Word of God: that when these solemn, dreadful situations arise, the world has not got the answer; politicians do not have the answer, even the best of them. The best of human wisdom cannot deal with things like this.

Now may it be that the Lord has not forsaken our country finally, but we do not know what might be. May the people of God in His holy fear

still be helped to wrestle and to pray, but may it be on the grounds of mercy, and to see where mercy reigns in the Person of our Lord Jesus. But may there be a humbling of ourselves, and may there be true repentance and confession of our sin and confession of our unworthiness.

Now lingering on this subject for a little while, in the 1700s England was in a shocking state. The days of the Puritans had passed. Religion was very lukewarm. Sin abounded; iniquity abounded. In those days people were almost ashamed to call themselves Christians. They were smiled at; they were mocked at. Where there was religion, it was usually just morality. It is said that the Archbishop of Canterbury was an atheist, that he did not believe in God at all. You cannot say that of our Archbishop today, with all his faults and failures.

When the French Revolution took place, it was said that before that, England was on the verge of a similar revolution. The plague of the country was the gin traffic, gin being sold so cheaply that drunkenness was appalling in the land. The government could do nothing to stop it. It just seemed that England was going headlong to destruction. Suddenly the Lord appeared, and it was through the preaching of the gospel, as one here and one there was blessed, and throughout the country thousands blessed, and England was saved from something like the French Revolution, and that terrible gin trade just disappeared.

What was it? A man called Whitefield was raised up. I think you all, especially you young people, should read Whitefield – preaching in the open air, six o'clock in the morning, and there would be twenty thousand people turning out to hear him. At the same time, without any connection, God raised up John Berridge in Bedfordshire, our quaint old hymnwriter, to speak to thousands in the fields not far from here. Then up in Yorkshire, William Grimshaw preaching to thousands at Haworth, and not far off Henry Venn, till he had to stop through illness. But it was God who did it, and the power of the gospel that did it, and mercy that did it, but it was taken completely out of the hands of the ungodly and out of the hands of the politicians.

What I am seeking to speak of this morning, beloved friends, is that our God is almighty. “The Lord reigneth; let the people tremble”; “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice.” He can perform impossible things – personally, in a church, in a congregation, in a country – and He has done

it again and again. What His will, what His purpose is, we do not know, but here we are reminded of the greatness of our God. I do pray that as a congregation we might be established in that. “O Lord my God, Thou art very great.” Scripture warns us against limiting the Holy One of Israel. Now do you ever limit God in your prayers, in your thoughts? Never limit God. Also, Scripture warns us against counting God to be such an one as ourselves. Now never think of Almighty God in His holiness, His majesty, His greatness, His power, His mercy – never think of Him as such an one as ourselves. He is “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity.”

Now thinking of all these terrible terrorist attacks and outrages and trials there have been in our country recently, what about this in ancient Israel? The king had died, and his mother was the cruel Athaliah, the daughter of King Ahab. So you think of this terrible massacre, arranging for all her young grandchildren to be murdered and all those connected. We just read it in a few verses, but the horror of it in that country, the appalling horror, and no-one could do anything to stop it! This evil woman took charge, and she reigned over the country for six years, and they were terrible years. The temple of the Lord was dishonoured, desecrated. The temple of Baal was honoured. Wickedness, immorality prevailed. The law of God was forgotten. The country was in a dreadful state.

But, “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform.” There was a secret. God knew of it. The wicked queen had no idea of it. This is where divine power and sovereignty reign. When that evil woman massacred all the young children, there was one thing she did not know. There was a godly woman, Jehosheba. She was the wife of the high priest, and she managed to kidnap one of the babies, and she hid him in a cupboard or a little room containing bed linen, and then she was able to translate him to the house of God, and the Lord’s purpose was not overthrown. God’s purpose cannot be overthrown. Athaliah could not overthrow God’s purpose, Satan could not overthrow God’s purpose, and all the powers of hell could not overthrow God’s purpose.

O but this little boy hidden in the temple! This chapter calls him Jehoash; the second Book of the Chronicles calls him Joash. But the point here that needs to be emphasised is this: never did the royal line hang on a more slender thread. There was a clear promise that one day Messiah, the

Son of God should come. There was a clear promise that He should come from the royal line. There was a clear promise that he should be an heir of David. And it seemed that that promise had failed for evermore. Why? Because every single one of the royal seed had been destroyed – so Satan thought and so Athaliah thought. But the wonders of God's providence!

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

It seemed that the covenant of grace had been broken, God's promise had failed, His plan had been brought to nothing. What of the coming Messiah, the seed of David? And there, unknown to the world and unknown to the wicked queen, was a young baby being hidden by a godly woman in the temple. The mystery of divine providence! So much hangs on so little! It is not only so in the history of Israel, the history of our country; in your own little life, can you look back and see how much hung on so little? And it seemed that little was going to fail, but it could not fail, because it was in the Lord's hand.

So if you are concerned about these things, and not only in the country, but as you think of them in your own life and family, your own circumstances, it is this, beloved friends: “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” It seemed here that it could not come to pass; it was impossible it could come to pass. “He shall bring it to pass.” Why? Because it was not in the hands of blind fate; it was not in the hands of a wicked woman; it was not in the hands of Satan; it was in the hands of God, a God who is almighty.

So you see the wonderful outworking of divine purpose. This man Jehoiada, the high priest, he was not only a most godly man, but he was a statesman. Surely that is what England is lacking at present. In those last two terrible wars, Lloyd George, with all his faults, was a statesman, and Churchill, with all his faults was a statesman, and they did not fail to honour God. It is when a nation honours God that it prospers, “but sin is a reproach to any people.”

I wonder if any of you saw an article recently upon the two letters D.V. – *Deo volente* – which means *God willing*. It is an expression, of

course, we use continually. When I announced the notices this morning, “If the Lord will” – God willing. Apparently in every royal decree, every royal arrangement for year upon year, if anything was arranged, it was always said, “God willing.” But then it happened in a royal announcement that we had come to a stage when people thought we did not need to say, “God willing,” but we do what we wish – the coronation of King Edward VII. Queen Victoria had died and King Edward VII was going to be crowned king. There was no *God willing* about it. It was something new. And what happened? The coronation could not take place, because he was in hospital under the surgeon’s knife. The coronation had to be postponed.

May you and I, as well as people in high places, be kept to this, as we have it in the Epistle of James: “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.... For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will”; “whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” You know what that means. You have seen a puff of smoke, or steam coming from a kettle. It is there one moment and gone the next, and nobody can take hold of it, and nobody can bring it back. That is your life; that is my life.

But in this chapter you see this great deliverance, and this godly man raised up, not only as high priest, but also as a statesman. One great mystery is that so little is known of this man Jehoiada. It has even been suggested that in the Old Testament he is the greatest man who appeared, next to Moses, if you think of how the Lord used him, not only in the events of this chapter, but restoring godliness to Israel. The emphasis we have in this verse I have read to you, when the remarkable deliverance had taken place – I am sure this man of God prayed about it. He looked to the Lord for help. The Lord blessed him with wisdom. The Lord was in everything. The Lord ordered every detail. But what wisdom and grace! He spoke to the army; he explained his plan. And then he spoke to the priesthood, the Levites; he explained his plan. And then he spoke to the people; he explained his plan.

So there were these three great divisions, and after six years, the appointed time, not just in Jehoiada’s plan, in the plan of Jehoiada’s God, the king was brought forth, the little six year old king, seven years old

before the chapter ends, and there he was set up on a throne and the people shouted, “God save the king,” and the cruel Queen Athaliah came running out in dismay – were her plans thwarted? How would anyone dare to do this? – screaming, “Treason, Treason.” And so she was taken and put to death for all her crimes. So if things are in the Lord’s hands, things go well, but if you and I try to do it, or politicians try to do it, everything flounders and fails.

So not just thinking of all these things in our country, but things in your little lives and mine, things that seem to be confusion, you cannot see any way out, you cannot see any way through. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” If more often in our helplessness and need, realising our unworthiness, we saw these three things: the Lord’s wisdom – He knows what to do, He understands everything; the Lord’s compassion – He sympathises with us, He understands, He knows, He cares; and then the Lord’s divine, almighty power.

Looking over this chapter, these events this morning, there is one word, and it is as true today as it was then: “The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.” I know we are on providence this morning, but it is true in the gospel; it is true in grace. “The Lord’s arm is not shortened, that it cannot save.” You see it in a divine, almighty Saviour. “Him hath God exalted.” “The Lord’s arm is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” O may we hold that fast. It is an oft-quoted word, but not so often the verse that follows: “But” – this is a sad *but*. “*But* your iniquities have separated between you and your God.” That is where we need the great deliverance. That is where we need mercy, and it must be through the Saviour’s blood.

So you see this wonderful deliverance, but there is an important point here. Whenever the Lord performs a great deliverance in Israel of old, or in our country, whether it is politically, whether it is in the church of God, there is always a most gracious effect. There is a turning from the ways of sin. There is a turning to the ways of God. So you have this. These were striking events, stirring events, frightening events. “Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord’s people.” *That* was the thing he did immediately. That is the sad thing that is missing in England today. That is the sad thing

with our rulers. Jehoiada put the crown on the little boy's head, but really he put the crown on the head of his God. He wanted Him to have all the honour and glory, and there was not any delay. "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness." I should think there were a thousand things needed to be done in Jerusalem when this cruel queen, who had been ruling maliciously over the country for six years, suddenly was slain. There must have been a thousand things all needed to be done, but the first thing was the things of God. The people needed to repent of their ways. There must be a returning to the holy law of God. What do you see that follows? Well, they went to the temple of Baal and they broke it down and slew the evil priest of Baal.

Where there is a work of reformation, there will always be a sanctifying effect in the hearts of the people, in the hearts of the rulers, and throughout the nation. You cannot have a separation here. The glorious Reformation in Germany under Luther, O the effect it had on the lives, on the behaviour and the morals of the people! God will not only be glorified in these outward deliverances, but there will always be that gracious effect. It will be in your own life. If the Lord wonderfully appears and saves you by His grace, that grace that saves sanctifies. And also if you go on in your pilgrimage, you are in trouble, in a trial, you have a difficulty and the Lord delivers you, that is not the end. In one sense it is the beginning. Don't you want to prostrate yourself and glorify the Lord!

The people of the land broke down the house of Baal, and you read in the next chapter, the restoring of godliness, at least outwardly, in Israel, and the repairing of the temple and the replacing of the vessels of the temple, those things that had been destroyed. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if the Lord raised up a Jehoiada in our country! But may the Lord's people in humility and repentance pray for these things. But you see, grace reigned in it. "Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people" – they were all involved – "that they should be the Lord's people." In one place in the Psalms we read this: "Great deliverance giveth He to His king." Well, that is a word we have so often in the Old Testament: "*great deliverance*." And if ever you see it, you see it here: *great deliverance*.

And the point that rests on my spirit is: "God is the same to endless years." Like the old Puritans said, whenever you read these accounts in

the Old Testament, always remember, “This God is our God for ever and ever.” Always remember that the Lord you are reading about is the same today, and can do the same things today. He is the same in His power; He is the same in His goodness; He is the same in His mercy. We do not deserve it; Israel did not deserve it, but the Lord was merciful. May we together prove this: He waits that He may be gracious.

“And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord’s people; between the king also and the people.” Now this has been almost entirely providence this morning. But surely, beloved friends, we cannot close our eyes to all the awful things happening in our country at present. Surely we ought to be concerned about them. Surely there ought to be concern in our prayers. May we be reminded of what the Lord has done and what He still can do.

But in conclusion, surely we cannot leave the gospel out. O this scarlet cord that you find right through Scripture! I mean, the first promise, and the scarlet cord in the sacrifice and the coats of skin, and the scarlet cord in Abel’s sacrifice of the lamb, and the scarlet cord in Noah in the ark. You can follow it – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But when it comes to David, two things are made very clear: that the scarlet cord is going to find its glorious termination in a Person, the promised Messiah, who should be the Son of God as well as the Son of David. So the first thing, it is going to have this termination in the Person of Messiah. But secondly, it must be in the royal line, the royal line of King David. It is limited to that.

Well, in this chapter it seems that the scarlet cord has been snapped. As anyone thought, there were not any left of the royal line. There was not a single descendant of David alive. But the Lord’s purpose cannot be destroyed. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it?” Who put it into that godly woman’s heart to risk her life when the cruel queen was there massacring right and left, to kidnap that baby boy and hide him for six years? Where did that plan come from? It is all part of the scarlet cord.

Really, there is an intimate connection between the second Book of Kings chapter 11 and that line, David’s line, in Matthew chapter 1, and then the royal seed, a greater than Joash, the Son of God incarnate, born at Bethlehem. With Herod there, it was just like Athaliah here. But the Son of God could not be destroyed. The glorious end of this chapter is not just

“the land rejoiced, and the city was in quiet.” It goes to Bethlehem; it goes to Calvary; it sees its fulfilment in atoning love and blood in the death, and in the glorious resurrection, in the exaltation of King Jesus on the throne, and not a precarious throne, but for ever and ever, King of kings and Lord of lords.