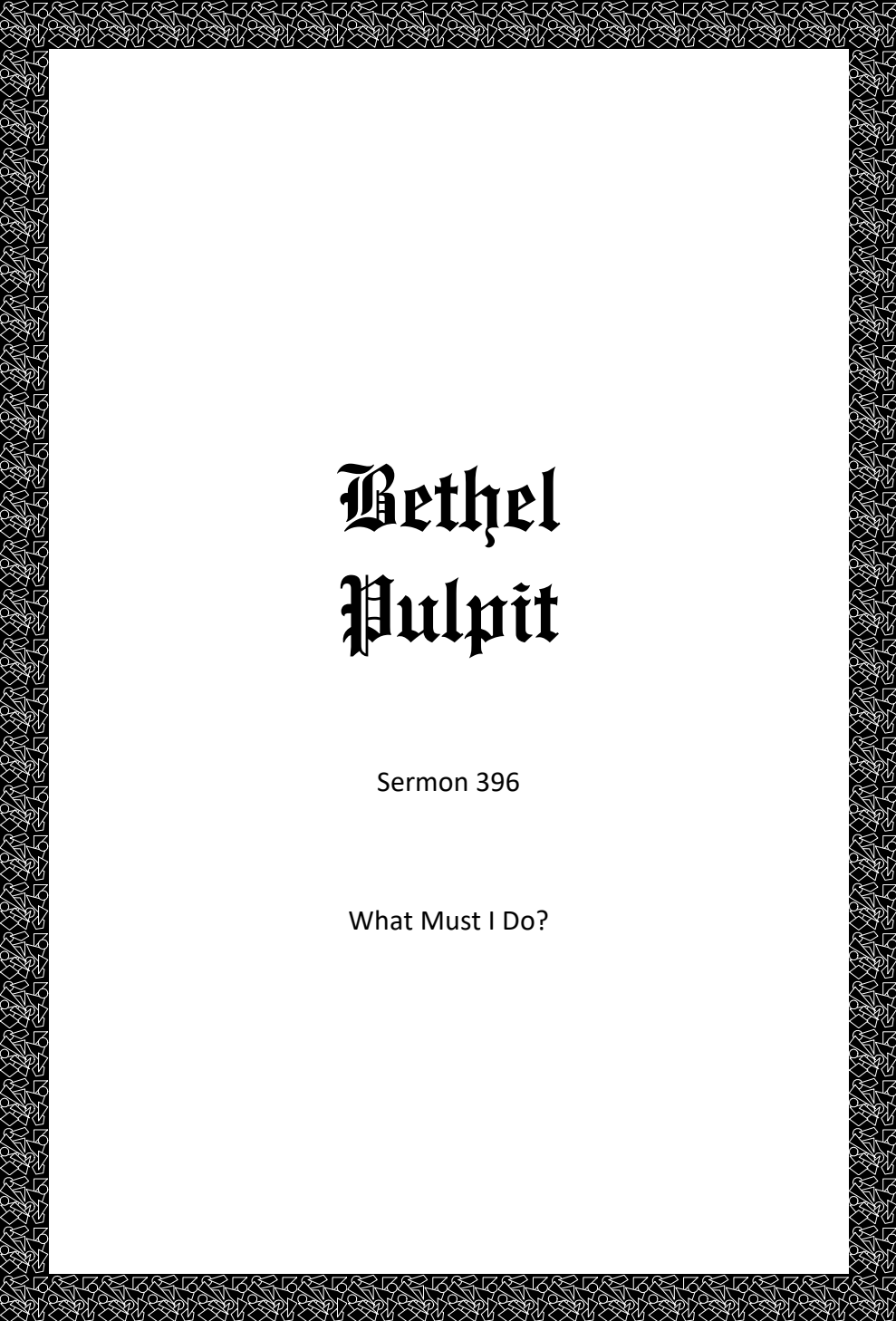




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 396

What Must I Do?

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 13th May, 2018**

Text: *“Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16. 29-31).*

This chapter tells us the wonderful way in which the gospel was first preached in Europe. Now it seems clear that Paul had no idea whatsoever of crossing the sea into Europe to preach. It was not in his thoughts at all. But the Lord says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways.” Sometimes we have to prove that personally in our little lives. But what an unspeakable mercy that the Lord had purposes of grace to poor sinners in Europe, and that over the centuries there have been so many abundant blessings to the nations in Europe.

We find it put before us here that they “were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia” – that is Asia Minor. We wonder why. And then “they assayed” – it was on their mind; they felt it was the right way – “to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.” It seems from reading it, beloved friends, that Paul was at a standstill. The Lord had called him on this journey. He was preaching the gospel. He is trying a door and the Lord shut the door, and he tried another and the Lord shut the door, but he waited for the Lord's appearing, and that is where you and I sometimes go wrong. This door is shut; that door is shut; so we open another one ourselves. May we be kept from that. The Lord is sovereign how He makes His way known.

Here it was through a vision. He saw a man of Macedonia, the other side of the water in Europe. He must have recognised him by his speech, by his appearance, and he was beckoning to him, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” How often since there has been the Macedonian call, and when the Lord gives it, He always follows with His blessing. Paul was in no misunderstanding what he meant: “Come over ... and help us.” They were not seeking for food, or provisions, or anything like that. Paul knew what he meant. He said, “Immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to

preach the gospel unto them.” In other words, Paul realised this simple, sacred truth, that the best way poor, unworthy sinners can be helped is by sending the gospel to them, preaching the gospel to them.

Now we find that they came over and they came to Philippi, which was one of the chief cities in Macedonia. What a witness we have in that beautiful Epistle to the Philippians, the blessing that there was following Paul’s obedience to the Macedonian call. But there is something here: “We were in that city abiding certain days,” which seems very clearly to suggest when they came to Philippi, nothing happened, and they were there certain days, and nothing happened. You often find, especially if the Lord gives a clear leading, that you are tried on it afterwards. Perhaps you find that in your life. If you have more of a gentle leading, and you are a little bit fearful about it, but you venture, then things seem to go more clearly. But sometimes when the Lord gives a clear leading like this Macedonian call, things may seem to go wrong.

In the end, there was a very small beginning.

“Behold, from what beginnings small
Our great salvation rose.”

“On the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side,” and it was just a company of a few woman. But what follows in this chapter – the conversion of Lydia, the conversion of the Philippian jailor. You could not have two more different cases. O but doesn’t that teach us the mysterious sovereignty of God! We must never, as Huntington said, chalk down two lines and expect the Lord to walk between, because He never will. He will work, but His way is better than yours. Some of us have known that kind of thing. We read all the old books, these remarkable cases how the Lord deals with sinners calling them by His grace, and we had it all there, the various steps, and we waited for it to happen to ourselves, but it did not. The Lord did it in His way, not our way. And then we read all the books, how a minister goes out to preach, but the Lord does His work in His own way.

“A certain woman named Lydia.” When we come to the jailor, it seems he was a harsh, rough character, but here was a refined woman, and she seems to be a woman of some eminence. She was a merchant woman. She was travelling to Philippi. She was a seller of purple – either purple

cloth, or purple dye – which was in great demand. She knew quite a bit about religion. It seems she had been instructed in the Jewish faith. When you come to the jailor, he seemed to be utterly, completely ignorant. He did not know anything about religion. O the sovereignty of God! But whether it is a gentle work, or whether it is a powerful work, whether it comes suddenly, or whether it comes gradually, it is always the work of the Holy Spirit. It is all to the praise, honour and glory of His name. It always abases the sinner. It always teaches him his need, and it always leads him to Christ for salvation.

“None but Jesus!

None but Jesus!

From His blood their hopes arise.”

So if you young ones are burdened and concerned about your soul’s salvation, and things happening in your life, and you cannot square them all up, and they do not seem like other people, they are not what you expected, the point is this: what is the effect of them? Where are they bringing you to? Are they making you happy with yourself? Are you happy in the world? Or is it this: bringing you in your felt need and your felt concern to pray, making a difference in your life, and above all, leading you to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as your only hope? “None but Jesus.”

“A certain woman named Lydia ... whose heart the Lord opened.” She did not open her own heart. It was the Holy Spirit’s work. By nature, your heart and mine are closed to the gospel, closed to the Lord Jesus, closed to vital things. But when the new birth takes place, the Lord opens your heart, and that makes it a soft heart, and an impressionable heart, because that heart that was closed is now open. There is a space in that heart which none but Jesus can fill.

“Is there a place within thy breast

Which none but Christ can fill?

He’s God, and therefore can give rest;

He’s love, and therefore will.”

And if your heart is opened, your ears will be opened, like Lydia’s, to attend to the things she heard. Your ears will be opened, and your mouth

will be opened to pray, and then later to give thanks, and then later to testify.

“She attended unto the things which were spoken.” It all seemed so gentle and so peaceful, and just the opposite of what we read later in the chapter, the conversion of the jailor. “She attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” I remember when I was a boy hearing Mr. Gascoigne preach, and if I remember rightly, he said there were three vital things with Lydia: attention, attraction and affection. Now I think you will find that, if the Lord graciously opens your heart. *Attention*. You will pay close attention to the things you neglected before – your sins, your soul and eternity – attention. And then *attraction*. O there will be an attraction. There will be that drawing of your soul to the Lord Jesus. And then *affection*, love to Christ and to His people.

Now later in the chapter, we find some sad, solemn things that Paul did not expect. With the Holy Spirit’s help, Paul performed a miracle in the case of a poor girl who was possessed of the devil, and the whole district turned against them, reported them to the magistrates. They were severely beaten without being tried, and they were flung into prison. Prisons at that time were not particularly nice places to be found in.

There are one or two miracles in this, but this is one: “At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.” O what a witness it was! The Lord was in charge, and there was a terrible earthquake. The prison doors were thrown open. It seems the jailor was terrified. If any of the prisoners escaped, he would have been immediately put to death. It seems he was terrified. He was going to kill himself. But there was more than that: the Holy Spirit was working in his heart.

“And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.” Now this is another miracle. “Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.” Here you see a miracle of grace, and the Lord can perform these things in a moment. He is sovereign; He is almighty.

“Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas.” Now you can see there is something

going on there, because grace will always make a difference in a sinner's life, and that difference will be seen. Even if it is a gentle work in your heart, there will be a difference in your life. What was he doing recently? He was gladly and willingly treating these poor prisoners cruelly. He flung them in the prison and put their feet in the stocks – not a nice way to spend the night. But now he is trembling and he falls down before Paul and Silas. Now there is a difference there, and there always will be a difference. Whether your experience is gentle or whether it is dramatic, your life will be different.

I think I have told you over the years, there was one of the godly Puritans writing – I rather think it was William Bridge. He said he knew a most wicked young man, and the way that wicked young man treated his mother was disgraceful. It was appalling, the awful, insulting way in which he treated her. But when the Lord began with that wicked man, every time he met his mother, every time he came into a room where she was, he fell down and prostrated himself on the floor before her. Now William Bridge did not say he thought people should do that, but his point was, there will be a difference.

Well, there was here, and grace will always make that difference. He came trembling, and he fell down, and look how he addressed them. He treated them like rogues and vagabonds before. He most courteously calls them *Sirs* now. He was in charge of this prison. He was, if you will, a great man. Now he is calling them *Sirs*. He said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So the Lord was working. What he meant by being saved, we are not sure – just what stage he had reached. But he had heard Paul and Silas singing. His heart had been touched. He was affected.

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So he knew something about salvation. But it seems, like so many, he thought it was something he had to do. How many people, when the Lord begins with them, think there is something they have to do to gain salvation, and the glorious revelation of the gospel is that for a poor, needy sinner, it has all been *done*. When the Saviour cried with a loud voice, “It is finished,” for His beloved people it was all done. Do you know that old hymn:

“Lay thy deadly doing down,
Down at Jesus' feet”?

But it is grace that brings the sinner there.

“He ... fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” That really is the great question with a living soul. We need to be saved. We need to be saved from the penalty of our sin, the punishment of our sin. We need to be saved from hell. We need to be saved from the power of sin, the power of Satan. In one way or another, we are brought, and like the jailor, this is what we are praying. We are praying that we might be saved, but we are praying to be shown the way whereby we might be saved.

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” They pointed him straightaway to Christ. That is the gospel, and that is what each gospel minister is commanded to do, to point sinners who want to be saved to the only way of salvation, to the only Person who can save them. But it is a Person. It is a glorious Person. It is Jesus the Son of God. It is He who left heaven for earth, who lived a holy life to be given, imputed, to poor sinners who have no holiness of their own, no righteousness; this dear Saviour who laid down His life on the cross that sinners might be saved, who shed His precious blood that there might be “a fountain opened ... for sin and for uncleanness.” This is where the gospel points that sinner who feels his need of salvation, who wants to be saved.

And the Lord put a *must* on it, and there will be a *must* with you. It is vital; it is necessary. “What *must* I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

I did notice this: “They spake unto him the Word of the Lord.” So there must have been many blessed things they told him. But apart from anything else, you think of the kindness and the consideration of Paul and Silas. The jailor had done nothing but harm them, hurt them just before. There is no thought of revenge. When some poor, wretched sinner who has been such a problem to the Lord’s people, when he comes like the jailor, beseeching, God’s people do not shun him, or remind him what he used to be. They are only too glad to “point out the place where grace abounds; direct them to the bleeding wounds of our incarnate God.”

Just a few chapters before this, there is a rather fuller explanation of the gospel. “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that

through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Now there is everything there. You cannot be justified by seeking to obey the law of Moses, but there is justification in Christ. A glorious Saviour declares that unworthy, guilty sinner to be just through the righteousness and atonement of the Lord Jesus, and on this ground: forgiveness, a gracious forgiveness, a lawful forgiveness. And the apostle said it is “through this Man,” this glorious Man, once crucified, now risen, exalted in heaven. “This Man.” “But this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They could hear the anxiety in his voice. They could see his wretchedness and his need. “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” I want to be very clear and I want to speak very carefully here. This was not some kind of Arminianism – forbidden be the thought! It was not just some kind of freewill act: believing on the Lord Jesus. Often you see this beautiful text on a placard or a postcard: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” But never forget, there was something that went before. It was in answer to a question, and it was a question spoken by a sinner in deep concern.

If we were to go out of chapel, and walk down Chapel Street, and stop someone, and say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,” they would not know what we were talking about. But if we met someone and we knew that person was really concerned about his soul, with joy we could encourage him, as enabled by the Spirit of God, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with sweet assurance of salvation.

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Now then, what is this believing? It is not just believing that the Lord Jesus is true, almighty God. That is good. It is not just believing that He lived and died and rose again. That is good. But it is more than that. It is being brought by the Holy Spirit to look to the Saviour, as a sinner, in prayer, in complete dependence, looking unto Jesus, looking to Jesus alone, looking away from everyone, from everything else, resting completely on Him alone. “None

but Jesus.” It is resting on the work He performed, the work He finished, relying on His precious, sin-atonement blood, relying on His glorious righteousness. It is that living foundation being laid in your heart, that foundation, Christ the Rock of Ages, and it is to be brought by the Spirit to look to Him alone, to rest on Him alone.

Really, it is like that Israelite under the ceremonial law, under a sense of his need, his sin, his guilt (Leviticus 1) – where must he go? He knew he could venture to the priest. He was permitted to venture, he was welcome to venture, but he must bring a lamb of the flock for an offering, and that lamb must be slain, and there he must lay his hand upon the head of that dying lamb and confess his sins there, rest his hope there. We read, “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”

Now then, which of you can come in here:

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin”?

And can any of you go on to say,

“My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there”?

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” – that living faith which is the gift of God. Now that is a glorious conclusion, but really it is not the end. Do you know what the first thing was that the jailor did? “He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes.” Grace will always have an effect. It is not just an empty believing. This faith works by love; it purifies the heart; it overcomes the world. You see the difference. Before anything else, he bathed their bleeding wounds, and then he “brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.” Through the grace of God, his whole household was blessed with grace to believe.

You say, "It is not anything much to set meat before them." He was a representative of the Roman empire, and he had some prisoners under his guard, in prison. What is he doing? He has them in his house, entertaining them. It will be death and destruction for the jailor, unless the Lord intervenes. There is a word, "The love of Christ constraineth us," and every true believer will know that sweet constraining of the love of Christ, to walk it out and display it before the world, that this grace that saves also sanctifies, this grace that saves makes a glorious difference, an eternal difference, to the praise, honour and glory of the Lord.

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

* * *

Salvation! O my soul, rejoice;
Salvation is of God;
He speaks, and that almighty voice
Proclaims His grace abroad.
How wonderful, how grand the plan!
All Deity's engaged
To rescue rebel, ruined man
From Satan's power and rage.
The Father loved us ere we fell,
And will for ever love;
Nor shall the powers of earth or hell
His love from Zion move.
'Twas love that moved Him to ordain
A Surety just and good;
And on His heart inscribe the name
Of all for whom He stood.
Nor is the Surety short of love;
He loves beyond degree;
No less than love divine could move
The Lord to die for me.
And O what love the Spirit shows!
When Jesus He reveals

To men oppressed with sin and woes,
He all their sorrows heals.
The Three-in-One and One-in-Three,
In love for ever rest;
And Zion shall in glory be,
And with His love be blessed.

W. Gadsby