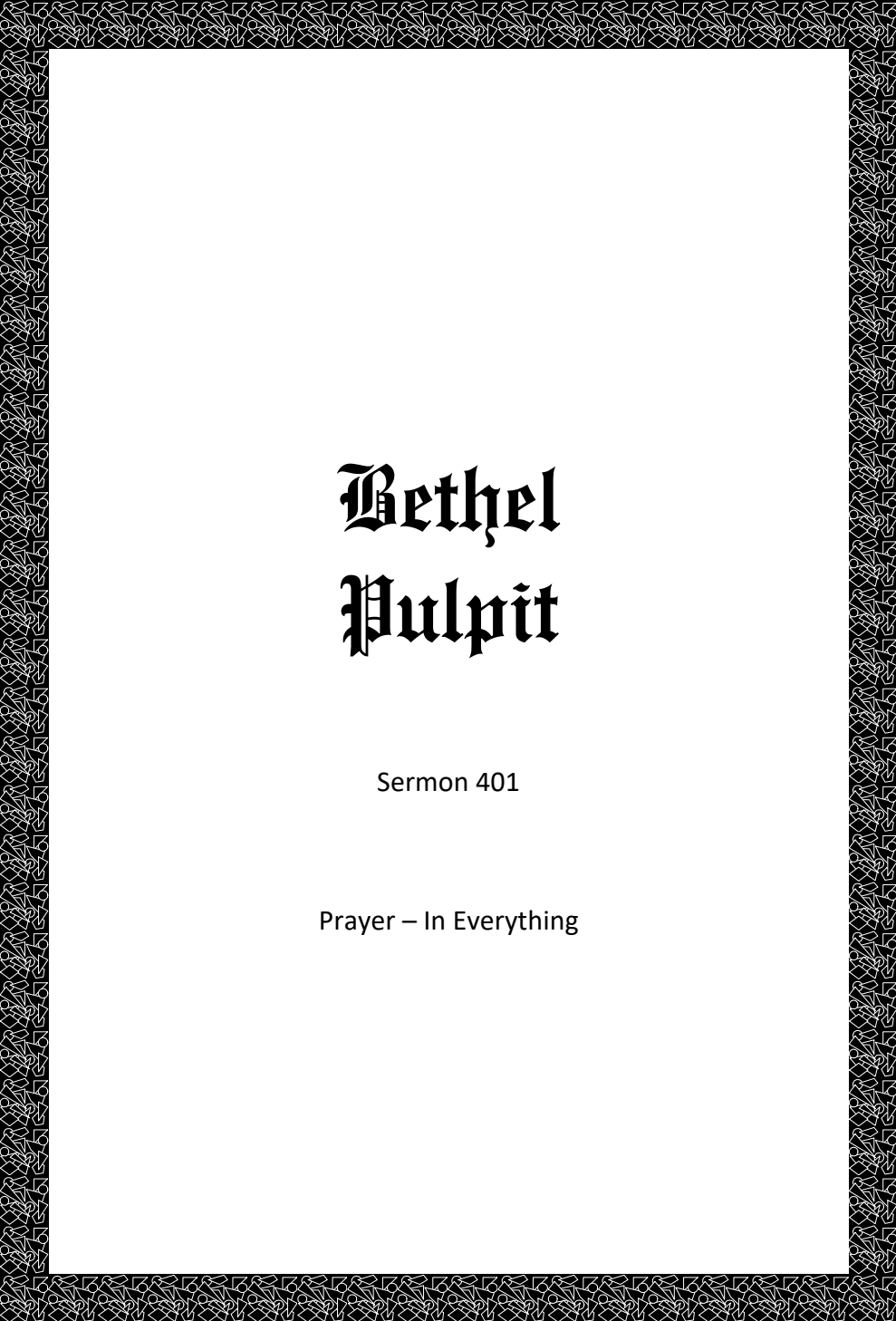




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 401

Prayer – In Everything

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 7th January, 2018**

Text: *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4. 6).*

The question might be asked: This is the beginning of the new year; what has this word to say to us concerning the year before us? And the answer is very simple: the importance of prayer, the responsibility of prayer, the privilege of prayer. Don't we so often take this privilege for granted! If we really believe what we do believe, that the great God of heaven has revealed that He is willing that poor, sinful creatures should speak to Him in prayer and that He will hear and that He will answer, and all this entirely undeserved, all this entirely free! What would you think if the Queen of England were to give such an invitation that people at any time could visit the palace, that they could meet with her personally; they could tell her all their concerns; she would listen; she would promise to help? But what is that compared with the riches of God's grace, Almighty God in giving this privilege of prayer!

You might ask the question, Who is permitted to pray? The Word of God is exceedingly clear: “Men” – that is men in general. “Men *ought*” – that is a duty. “Men ought *always* to pray, and not to faint.” When I was a young boy in the Sunday school at Haslingden, there were some old little leaflets dating from the nineteenth century – I think they were issued by John Gadsby – with questions and answers, and the first question was this: “Ought everyone to pray?” And the answer was: “All ought to pray for those things they feel their need of.”

Of course, there are examples in Scripture of most ungodly people having their prayers answered. Just to give one instance: the murderer, Cain. But beloved friends, we want to go a little further than that. Those whose hearts are touched with grace divine, you want by faith to enter even “into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” You want to know the spirit of prayer. You want to be able to pour out your heart before God. You want to know that He is listening to you. You want to know that He will answer you.

Well, here there is the encouragement to pray. “In every thing ... let your requests be made known unto God.” Now that is a big word: “In *every thing*” – the great things in your life, the small things in your life – nothing too great, nothing too small. “In *every thing*” – providence and grace, natural things, spiritual things. Above all, “One thing is needful.” O to pray that we might be forgiven, that we might be saved by grace, that we might be washed in the Redeemer’s blood.

“Let your requests be made known unto God.” If there is an emphasis in this verse, it seems to be this, beloved friends: “*Unto God.*” I do not know how you got on over the Christmas period, whether anything remained with you. One or two things lingered with me a lot. One was this: “The government shall be upon His shoulder.” This is the One to whom your requests are to be made known. He is in complete control. He is on the throne. “He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?”

But then it went on with a few things, and three of them specially have remained with me. He is the wonderful Counsellor. He is completely wise in knowing what should be done, in how to handle our affairs, in the way in which He gives answers. The wonderful Counsellor. Then He is “the mighty God.” This is the One who “with heaven and earth at His command waits to answer prayer. “The mighty God.” He is almighty to deal with your case, your concern this morning, whatever it is. And then He is “The everlasting Father,” not referring to His relationship with His eternal Father in the Godhead, but speaking of His loving, tender, fatherly compassion. He knows; He understands; He cares. What have you got this morning in your life, in your circumstances, in your family, in the church of God, in your soul? “Let your requests be made known unto God” – these three things: that wonderful Counsellor – He understands; that mighty God – He is almighty; that everlasting Father – He is full of compassion.

“Let your requests be made known unto God.” Now there is something a little bit striking to me in this word *requests*. If you went along to someone in your family and you wanted something, you probably would not *request* it. You would just ask, and say, Can I have it? But if you had to go to some person of great importance to seek something from

them, well, it would be a *request*. It seems to imply you do not deserve it. It seems to imply your unworthiness. It seems to imply honour and respect to the one to whom you come.

“Thou art coming to a King;
Large petitions with thee bring.”

“Let your requests be made known unto God.”

“For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.”

“Let your requests be made known unto God.” I know this point of unanswered prayer has troubled many, when the Lord has made such gracious promises to hear and answer prayer. But I learned the lesson well many years ago when one of our children was tiny. She got hold of some razor blades, and was cutting herself with them, and I took them away from her, and she cried, and begged to have them back. Did I answer her request or not? Was I kind or was I not? Sometimes the Lord does not answer your prayer, because He knows it is not for your real good. It is not always easy to submit, but the Lord has promised to answer your prayer – everything that is for the honour and glory of His name, everything that is for your real good.

Do not let Satan this year keep you away from the throne of grace. Satan has some logic, but it is not always good logic. Satan says, “You believe God is almighty; He will do everything that is for your good. You cannot overthrow His purposes.” But his application is false. He says, “Why pray?” The answer to Satan’s question is simply because the Lord has commanded it, because the Lord has said it is for the best, and simply because when the Lord encourages us to pray, He knows everything about the eternal counsels of His everlasting Father, the divine decrees that can never be broken.

“Let your requests be made known unto God.” I am sure all of you have things before you this year, things you long for, things you fear, things which trouble you, things which concern you, things you do not know how to answer, things you do not know how to deal with. And the Lord says, “Let your requests be made known unto God.”

Now of course, there is a wonderful foundation for the privilege of prayer. The apostle puts it clearly: “Let us *therefore* come boldly unto the throne of grace.” In other words, Let us *therefore* let our requests be made known unto God. What is the *therefore*? It is a wonderful *therefore*. “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” – this loving Saviour who has laid down His life for sinners, who stands in between as the Advocate, the Mediator, who ever intercedes, who understands, who knows, who cares. “Therefore,” because of this, looking upwards, heavenwards to this great, this glorious High Priest. We love the priesthood of Christ. When I was young, I was asked to give an address at F.L. Rowell’s Saturday evening meeting. I could give it on any subject. The subject I spoke on was this, which when I was only young I think was dear to me: the everlasting priesthood of the Son of God.

“Jesus is our great High Priest;
Bears our names upon His breast.”

“Let your requests” – for this coming year – “Let your requests be made known unto God” – this One who knows how to deal with them, how to answer them, how to handle them, better than you yourself. It is you little ones at school: “Let your requests be made known unto God.” It is you aged ones who are not feeling well. It is you troubled ones in all your sorrows. It is you parents in your families. It is those of you who feel the great matter is your sin and your soul and eternity. It is those of you who feel you have not yet got what you want. He still waits that He might be gracious.

O this encouragement to pray! You will find ten thousand things to hold you back, to draw you back. What various hindrances you *will* meet. But, “Let your requests be made known unto God.” You will find this: at the end of the year, a lot of your time will have been spent in vain. Some of it you will perhaps be ashamed of. You will not be ashamed of the time you spent in prayer. Praying breath was never spent in vain.

But you will have difficulties in prayer, because Satan will be against you and your own sinful heart will be against you. “Let your requests be made known unto God.” But what about when you try to pray and you do not feel much prayer in your heart, and you feel your heart is

hard and your spirit is barren? Still “let your requests be made known unto God.” Wasn’t it good Thomas Hardy of Leicester who used to say, “Try what your poor, hard-hearted prayers will do!”

There are many places in Scripture where Almighty God in mercy answered some poor prayers. Just to mention one: the disciples crossing the sea. “Master, carest Thou not that we perish?” They were almost accusing the Lord Jesus that He did not care, and there was not much prayer in their prayer, but the Lord in His love and mercy answered it, not because their prayers deserved it, but according to His mercy and according to the riches of His grace.

“Let your requests be made known unto God.” So the point is simple, that one of the great things in prayer is asking. It is not the only thing, because the apostle here says, “*With thanksgiving.*” We neglect that a lot, for there is always something to be thankful for. Don’t you feel thankful this morning for all the mercies of the past year, and all the mercies that surround us in our homes?

“Not more than others we deserve,
But Thou hast given us more.”

And that we *have* a throne of grace, that we *have* a God to go to. “With thanksgiving.” May we know more of that spirit of real thanksgiving, our hearts flowing, despite our sins and despite our sorrows. “With thanksgiving. And above all the great point: “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.”

“Let your requests be made known unto God” – “with thanksgiving.” But it is that great point of *asking*. It is quite a sad thing sometimes (and mercifully I do not think we get this at Bethel prayer meetings) but when a person in prayer goes on, and he opens up the Scriptures, and he quotes hymns, and he almost tells that Lord what He has to do, and he forgets this: “Let your requests be made known unto God.” Like the godly old woman who was weary with a person in prayer preaching such a sermon. In the end, she poked him in the back and said, “Ask for something!” “Let your requests be made known unto God.” And it is “in every thing.” It is a little word and it is a great word, and may it encourage you, because Satan does not like this: “In every thing.”

“In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Now you notice that the apostle says, “Let your requests be made known unto God” – “by prayer.” Well, you say, really we cannot see any other way in which we can make our requests known to God except in faith and by prayer. But he does add this: “And supplication.” Now what is the difference between prayer and supplication? The answer is this: in one sense, prayer and supplication are exactly the same. It is a sinner pouring out his heart to God, prayer or supplication. But the difference is the weight of it, the force of it.

To give an illustration, you see in the summer a lovely little stream and it is gently flowing along. That is prayer. But go again in the winter. Perhaps there has been a thunderstorm, and you can perhaps hardly recognise that little, gentle stream. It is rushing along in torrents. It is carrying everything with it. It is overflowing its banks. That is, as I understand it, the difference between prayer and supplication. Surely, as led by the Spirit of God, we should seek every day of our life to make our requests known to God in prayer, but we know, beloved friends, it is not always supplication.

But the Lord has promised to pour out – that is it – to pour out the spirit of grace and supplication. If you think of the context, it is that vital point. When the Lord pours out the spirit of grace and supplication, He says, “They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him.” If, feeling the greatness of your need, you have a little glimpse of Calvary, it will be more than that little, tiny, trickling stream of prayer. It will be that supplication, sometimes feeling the weight of your soul and the solemnity of eternity. “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence” – that is supplication. It “suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” I know the “doctrine-man” says that we cannot do it, we cannot create it. Well, we cannot, but the Lord has promised it. There are those times when there is the reality. Let me give you an instance: Jacob – “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.” I believe God’s people are there sometimes.

“Lord, I cannot let Thee go,
Till a blessing Thou bestow.”

That is supplication. “I will not” – I cannot – “let Thee go.”

So we pause here. Passing from year to year reminds us of the solemnity of eternity, the certainty of death, after death the judgment. We have begun this year. Not one of us knows whether we shall ever come to the end. As we have been reminded recently, a young person can be taken away, only twenty-seven, by a so-called accident, unthought of, unexpected. That word must ever stand: "Prepare to meet thy God." People do not like to be reminded of that. Some years ago, there was a godly businessman who used to travel up to London every day on the train, and on his briefcase he had inscribed, "Prepare to meet thy God." He used to put it where he was sitting, so everyone could see it. He often used to find someone would quietly come and turn his briefcase round so they could not read it. But it is still there, beloved friends.

With some of us that time came when it was the only thing that mattered, and then we knew the difference between prayer and supplication.

"Do not turn away Thy face;
Mine's an urgent, pressing case."

I would bring this before each one of you, whether you feel it or not, whether you are young or old. With each of us it is an urgent, pressing case. "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Are you prepared to meet your Maker?

Well, may we be led this year in this pathway of prayer, prayer without ceasing, the spirit of prayer, the attitude of prayer, God-given prayer, prayer that the Lord will hear, the Lord will honour, the Lord will answer.

"In *every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Well, this morning I started the text at the end rather than the beginning, but the beginning is very important: "Be careful for nothing." As we pass from year to year, some of us feel we are careful about everything, and the Lord says, "Be careful for nothing." Now let us be very clear. This word, "Be careful for nothing," does not mean be careless. It does not even mean to be carefree. Really it means do not be swallowed up with anxiety. Now we need to pray for that – if trouble comes, if sorrow comes, if distress comes, that we are not completely swallowed up by it. In this sense: "Be careful for

nothing” – do not be over-anxious. In one sense the Word of God tells us we have to be very careful. We have to be very careful about our lives and our families and our circumstances and our work, and above all concerning our souls. In that sense we are commanded to be careful. O but it is not to be obsessed with things which make us over-troubled, over-bothered, over-anxious.

“Be careful for nothing.” In that parable of our Lord Jesus, the parable of the sower, He speaks of the thorns that choke the growth of the seed, and He mentions two or three things: the pleasures of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, the cares of this life. Without pressing the point too far, it seems to me that it is younger people who are often more entangled by the pleasures of this life, and it is those in middle age who are more entangled by the deceitfulness of riches, and it is older people who are more entangled by the cares of this life.

“Be careful for nothing.” Well, of course, if Paul gives this warning, Peter gives Paul the answer. Paul says, “Be careful for nothing.” Peter tells us how this must be done: “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” So if there are those of you this morning troubled by the cares of this life, “Casting all your care” – all of it – “all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.”

“‘Cast,’ He said, ‘on Me thy care;
'Tis enough that I am nigh;
I will all thy burdens bear;
I will all thy needs supply.’”

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” So really, there is an exhortation in these opening words, and we need it. “Be careful for nothing.” But you say, How ever can a sinner do this? The latter part of the verse is an explanation how we can seek to be free from this anxiety, how we can deal with our cares, how we can approach our troubles, and of course it is this pathway of prayer. So, “Be careful for nothing,” and then there is something to balance it, something to answer it. “Be careful for nothing; but *in every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto

God.” What a word this is! What an exhortation! In a sense, what a loving rebuke is hidden in it as we approach the New Year.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” And then there is a last word. It is a good one. It is a promise, and the promise is the absolute opposite of this over-carefulness, this over-anxiety. “And the peace of God” – what could be better than that, what more suitable than that for the New Year! “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”