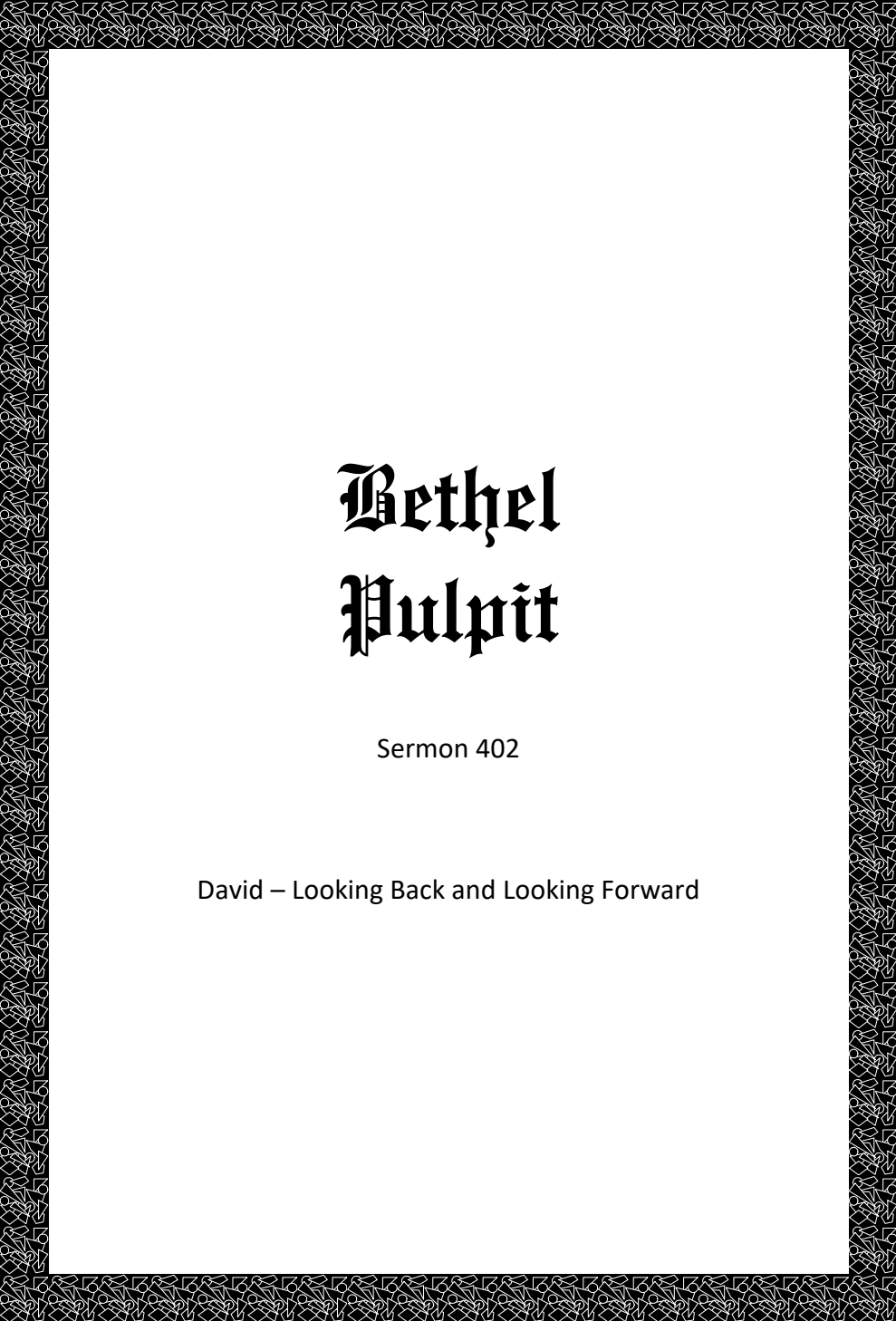




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 402

David – Looking Back and Looking Forward

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 1st August, 2002**

Text: *“David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee” (1 Samuel 17. 37).*

There is some very blessed divinity in these stories that our children learn – Moses in the bulrushes, Daniel in the lions’ den, David and Goliath – some blessed divinity. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.”

In David we see a boy, and yet a boy who is made the possessor of true faith. He has a resting place. He has a purpose in his life. He has a wonderful confidence in God. He trusts in God. It is clear God is very real to David. David knows God and David trusts God. David relies on God. And David has a zeal for the honour and glory of God. It would be a wonderful thing if we had a lot of Davids here, and you were burnt up with those desires for the honour and glory of God. There is so much that is right; there is so much of self. O but to be blessed with some zeal for the honour and glory of God!

David hears of the dreadful state of the church of God, Israel fleeing before one man, howbeit a giant, and David’s heart is grieved. He has that deep sense of shame, that deep sense of sadness, that burning desire for the honour and glory of God. He is willing to risk his life. Let us be clear, in this well-known story, David, a young boy going unarmed except for five stones in his sling, going against a well-armed giant – naturally speaking it was foolishness. He was willing to lay down his life for the Lord’s sake. There is not very much of this religion about today. It was the religion of Israel’s God that constrained him.

But he was misunderstood. He was misunderstood by his own family, misunderstood by those he loved. That is painful. I think you will find in the history of the church of God, whenever there has been a young man rightly constrained for the honour and glory of God, he has been misunderstood. David’s brothers said some very unkind things about him, and they said some very untrue things about him. They said it was just pride, it was just naughtiness, it was just being inquisitive. If you are constrained by the love of Christ, you will be misunderstood, and you will probably have to walk it

out alone. Where are those who should be with you, standing with you, supporting you?

“Companions if we find,
Alas! how soon they’re gone!
For ’tis decreed that most must pass
The darkest paths alone.”

O that there were more of these Davids, consumed with zeal for the Lord’s honour and glory! They said of the Lord Jesus – they “remembered that it was written, The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up.” That was the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now in his own degree it was so with David. He was willing to risk everything – his life, his reputation. He could not bear to hear the name of his God dishonoured, the name of his God blasphemed. He could not bear to see the Lord’s people being put to shame. So he was willing to go single-handed against this giant. Do not forget, it was a real giant, not just a story-book giant, and do not forget, we know the end of the story; David did not when he went forward.

There was one thing that marked David. United with this burning desire for the honour and glory of God, there was this blessed humility. It is difficult to get the balance. It is easy to find those who are willing to be humble when there is a danger, and sometimes you get those who have the zeal, and they are willing to fight, yet they have quite a good opinion of themselves. With David, there were these two things together: this humility, and this burning desire for the Lord’s honour and glory.

Some of the old divines said there were two victories that David gained in 1 Samuel 17, and one was greater than his victory over Goliath. That is, when he was so abused and so maligned, and such evil things said about him, and so misrepresented, he very gently, quietly said, “What have I now done? Is there not a cause?” You can take that two ways. “Is there not a cause?” Is there not a reason for what I am doing? But, “Is there not a cause” – the cause of God and truth? Well, in our day may there be more Davids with hearts inflamed by love, that burning zeal for the honour and glory of Israel’s God.

Well now, this awful moment comes when David ventures. He is willing to venture, and there it is – the giant. There it is – the danger. There it is – the trial. I rather think that Saul looked in pity on David and I think the people looked in pity on David.

Now what did David do? Well, really he did two things. He looked back, and he looked up. O beloved friends, when you come into your troubles and your trials and your dangers and your difficulties – you have tomorrow, you have this giant – may you know these two things: this looking back and this looking up.

Now David was only a boy, but he could look back. He could look back and he could remember. He could remember something that the Lord had done for him. He was only a boy, yet he could look back. What about you older ones? What about those of you who profess the Lord's name? What about those of you who for many years have been followers of the Lord? Can you look back tonight? Can you look back and remember? David could. Can you look back and remember spots and places? Can you say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me"? There is a time for looking back.

The wise man says there is "a time to gather stones together" – Ebenezer stones. There was that trouble, and the Lord helped you; that danger, and the Lord brought you through; that awful moment, and you were delivered; and especially that time when the Lord blessed you, when Jesus was made precious. Surely, surely, beloved friends, there are many of you here tonight who can look back to your spots and your places – perhaps a great deliverance, and some a small deliverance. What about that time when you thought you would sink, but you did not? What about that deep sorrow, but you were helped through? What about that awful bereavement, that terrible loss, but the Lord upheld you? O may there be a looking back tonight with many of you.

David looked back to a time when in the fields of Bethlehem he was looking after his sheep, and there came a lion, and David fought that lion and overcame it, and there came a bear, and David fought that bear and overcame it. That was something hard; that was something impossible; but David knew the reason. He said it was the Lord who delivered him. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear." David could look back and he could see that great deliverance. O surely, surely, beloved friends, many of you tonight can look back – you younger ones, perhaps a few years; you older ones, many years. May there be that wonderful looking back. We sang the other Lord's day:

"Sweet to look back, and see my name
In life's fair book set down;

Sweet to look forward, and behold
Eternal joys my own.”

O may there be that looking back, the time for gathering stones together. Can you say, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day”? “Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps.” O if you can look back, bear witness, remember anything great or small, and you say, But it was the Lord who did it. Have you any prayers that the Lord has heard and answered? You say, It was only providence. This was only providence, this lion and this bear. Have you any answered prayers, any helps, any deliverances, any mercies? What about needs being supplied? What about being kept to this day? What about promises being fulfilled? But especially, what about that time when you were raised up to a sweet hope in Jesus and enabled to believe to the everlasting salvation of your soul? Now, “The Lord ... delivered me.” There is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak,” and we do need to bear our little witness.

“The Lord ... delivered me.” That beautiful hymn we sang brought back a few memories for me of many years ago.

“I muse on the years that are past,
Wherein my defence Thou hast proved;
Nor wilt Thou relinquish at last
A sinner so signally loved.”

“The Lord ... delivered me.” David looked back and he also looked up. Now he could not help looking forward, and he could not help seeing things. He could not help seeing a giant, he could not help seeing Goliath, he could not help seeing his armour, but he did not look at him. The fault is, there are so many things we see, we cannot help seeing them, but we keep looking at them. Paul says, “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” David could not help *seeing* Goliath, but he did not *look* at Goliath. He looked up. He was looking back. O that humble hope, that humble trust, that humble confidence in God!

“The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.” Well, perhaps some of you feel that you have giants to face. With some it might be when you come right to the end of your pilgrimage and you tread down into the swellings of Jordan, and some of you realise what a monster death is, a greater giant than Goliath.

“Who, except Jesus smiles within,
Can look the monster in the face?”

Perhaps some of you see your own sins as that great giant. Some of you see self – self-righteous self, vain self, evil self – as that great giant. But perhaps the giant is the unknown way, what lies before you; tomorrow, what lies before you. Or the giant may be your health, or the giant may be the trouble, the sorrow you are in. The trouble may be something in your family, or something in your circumstances, or it may be a disappointment, and how can you face it? Well, these are real giants. They have not got flesh and blood on them, but they are real giants, just as real giants as Goliath was. May you be able, when you see the giant approaching – when you feel there is no other alternative but for you to venture forth against the giant – may you be able to look up with sweet confidence, humble trust, but may you be able to look back, and may you be able to pray.

Now this was David. “I was in trouble then, and the Lord helped me. I am in trouble now, in trouble again, but the Lord will not fail to help me now. That is, the Lord who helped me then will help me now.” That is good divinity. That is because He is unchanging. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” What He is today, He ever will be. “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” This is solid ground. “The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” The Lord that delivered me in the past, He will deliver me now, and He will deliver me in the future.

That is what the Book of Job means when it says that the Lord “shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven.” You look back – one trouble, two. You count them up – six, now the seventh one. Is the Lord going to leave you? He will deliver thee in seven also. O that looking back, looking forward and looking up! What the Lord has been, He still is. What He did, He will still do. Did He deliver yesterday? Then He will not fail to deliver today.

And in its fullest sense, it goes right back to Calvary, what the Father did through His dear Son. This is where Paul rises. “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” He argues from the greater to the less. If the Lord Jesus died for a sinner on the cross, then He will not leave Goliath to overcome him now. O to find that humble confidence of faith.

And then in your own soul, if you can look back and you have that sweet hope that the Lord did favour you, did bless you, did smile upon you,

did appear for you, concerning your never-dying soul and your sins and salvation and heaven. If He did this for you, will He leave you to perish now? That argument from the greater to the less. The Apostle Paul takes it right beyond David, but it is good ground. “The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” The Lord who delivered me from sinking down to the pit, the Lord who delivered me from the pit of destruction, He will not fail to deliver me in providence. Or the Lord who delivered me in that trying hour will not fail to deliver me when another trying hour comes.

“The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” David saw the greatness of God and he saw His mercy, and he saw His compassion, and he saw His faithfulness. And he saw this: it was just as easy for Almighty God to overthrow Goliath as it was to overthrow a lion and a bear. Do you know that? Is this God your God? “Is thy God ... able to deliver thee?” Have you heard Him say, “I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing” – *anything* – “too hard for Me” – any lion, any bear, any giant, any Goliath, any sin, any sorrow, any devil, any providence? “Is there any thing too hard for Me?” O the sweet resting place of faith! “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” “The Lord that delivered me ... He will deliver me.” He did not fail me then; He will not fail me now. O that looking forward and that looking back, and that looking up!

“The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee.” Now I realise Saul was a wicked man, but here he spoke graciously, and here he spoke rightly, and here he spoke in his official capacity as Israel’s king. “Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee.” So we can still say this to you this evening who are venturing forth into the unknown way, and yet like David you are trusting only in the Lord: “Go, and the Lord be with thee.” That was it with David. He had no confidence at all in himself. All his confidence was in his God. David had no trust at all in himself. He dare not trust himself, neither dare he trust Saul’s armour. O his trust must be in God.

Now if that is how you are venturing, feeling your utter helplessness, yet leaning on an arm of almighty strength, “Go, and the Lord be with thee,” whatever the giant is. It may be you have a person you have to meet. “Go, and the Lord be with thee.” It may be you are walking out a pathway you have never walked before. “Go, and the Lord be with thee.” It may be the pilgrimage through this wilderness world. “Go, and the Lord be with thee.”

It may be openly professing the Lord's name and venturing in His despised ordinances. "Go, and the Lord be with thee."

"The ground feels firm and good;
And, lest we should mistake the way,
He lines it out with blood."

A sinner venturing before a holy God for salvation – yes, if all your hope and trust is in Jesus, His mercy, His precious blood – "Go, and the Lord be with thee."

But that solemn day when you have to come to die. "How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" Well, if your only hope, your only trust is in the Lord Jesus, no hope, no confidence in self, looking only to Him, resting only on Him, then, "Go, and the Lord be with thee." David made his ground abundantly clear. He said, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield." That is the most that the world can do, that Satan can do. "But I." This is not pride; it is humility. "But I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts." That is the ground on which you venture into the unknown way, into the burning, fiery furnace, into the lions' den, through the deep floods, facing Goliath, in your problems, difficulties, perplexities, concerning your sins and sorrows, your never-dying soul.

"Then let His name for ever be
To us supremely dear;
Our only, all-prevailing plea,
For all our hope is there."

"But I," of absolute necessity, weak, sinful, helpless. "But I," whatever anybody else does or is. "But I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts."

We think of one of David's descendants going into battle, Asa, seemingly facing death and destruction, an army of a million opposing him. He says, "We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go." Now you young people, you have things before you. You have your plans you are making. There are choices to take. There are decisions. You are seeking God's will. There are interviews. There are new things. There are weddings. There are fresh things in your life. Now may you be blessed with the faith of David, this venturing faith in the name of the Lord. That is, doing only what is right in His sight. That is, seeking only His will. That is, looking only to Him for help. That is, resting in dependence only upon Him. And so may you venture

forward and prove that “the ground is firm and good.” “We rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go.”

So then, “Go, and the Lord be with thee.” All Saul could do was to wish it for David. O but may it be by covenant appointment and divine command, flowing from everlasting love and divine faithfulness, as you venture forward in the unknown way with all your burdens and worries and sorrows and cares and that Goliath before you, but a greater than Goliath, our almighty God and Saviour; looking back, looking up, venturing in humble trust; venturing, looking to the Lord alone; venturing, leaning on all-sufficient grace; venturing, trusting only in the name of Jesus. Then beloved friends, “Go, and the Lord be with thee.”