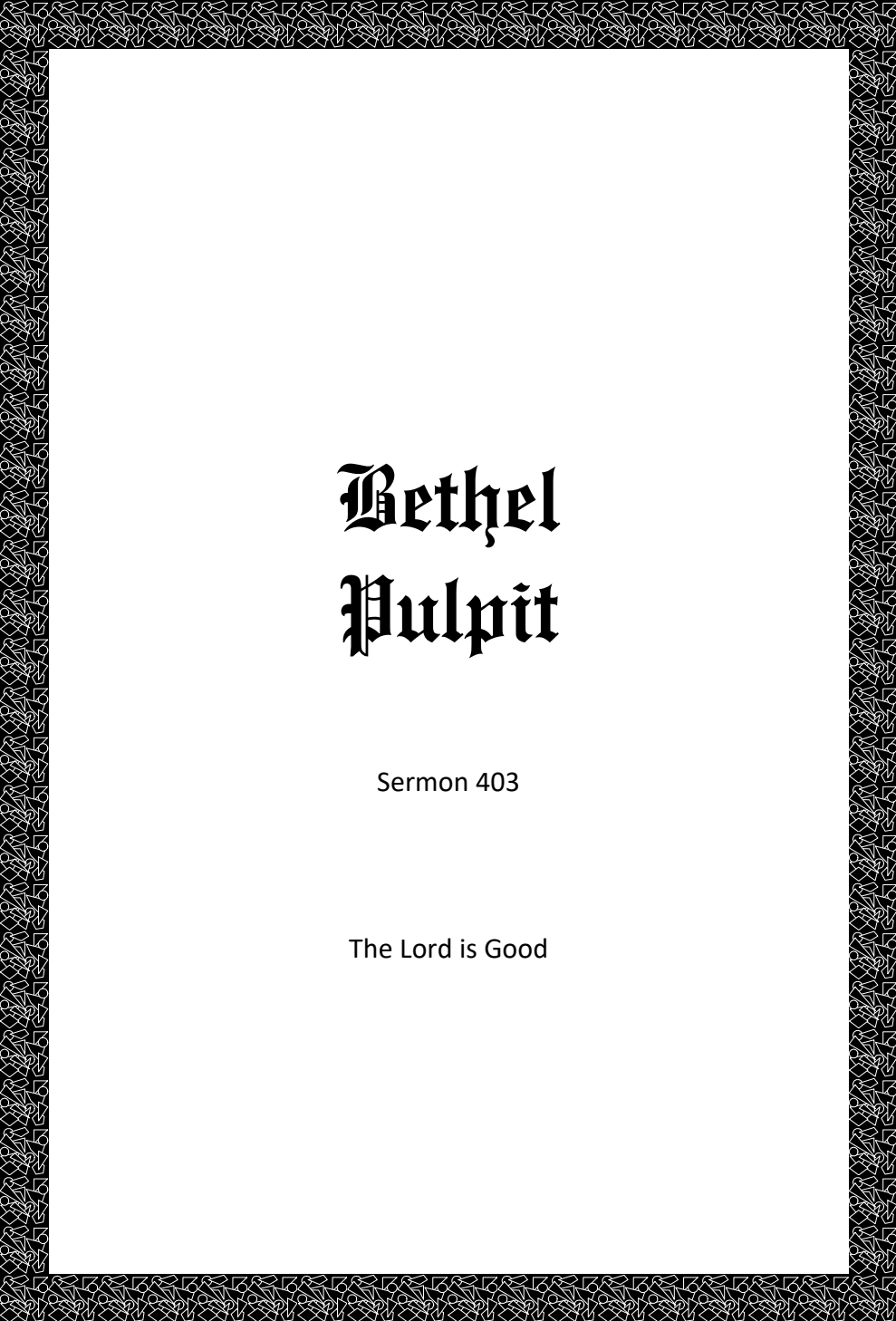




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 403

The Lord is Good

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 30th September, 2012**

Text: *"The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him" (Nahum 1. 7).*

The name *Nahum* means *consolation*. It is a wonderful thing when a minister of Jesus Christ is made like Barnabas, the son of consolation, when he can answer that question: Is there any consolation in Christ? when he can answer that question: "Are the consolations of God small?" When he points out the place to sorrowing souls where this sweet consolation can be found. "Everlasting consolation and good hope through grace." When he can set out that way (a wonderful word, isn't it!), that there is "strong consolation" for those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

I would not be a bit surprised if many of you have come this morning and you long for a little sweet consolation, some of you because of your soul's concerns, seeking the Saviour, not finding Him, or feeling your darkness and death, or things in your circumstances, in your life, in your family, in your relationships with others, your health, the health of those you are concerned about, the unknown way, bereavements. Well, may you know something today of that consolation which is to be found in Christ, and may it be made known to your soul personally by the Holy Spirit.

I suppose some of you would say that if the name Nahum means consolation, in this beautiful word I have just read out, there is sweet consolation there, but there is not much consolation generally in the prophecy of Nahum. Really, the prophecy of Nahum just deals with one subject and one subject only, and that is the destruction of Nineveh and the fall of the great Assyrian empire. That is why the prophecy begins, "The burden of Nineveh" – a weighty message – and the three chapters are almost entirely on the utter overthrow and destruction of Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh.

Well, you say, where is the consolation there? In this. The wonderful way in which the Lord comforts His beloved people is that He is going to destroy and overthrow all their enemies and all their foes. Now the Assyrians were a mighty people. We think of Sennacherib in the days

of Hezekiah; we think of that great empire and the cruelty and the awful oppression of the people of God. But here we are told that the Lord is going to have the last word. The Lord has them completely in hand. He is going to destroy them utterly, wipe them out, and all these things in the Book of the prophet Nahum came to pass, every one of them came to pass, not long afterwards.

So there is the consolation, and this point in a gospel sense: the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ took it up when He said, "Upon this rock I will build My church," His beloved church for whom He laid down His life. He said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," whether they be Assyrians or devils. There is the consolation. "He all their foes shall quell" – spiritual foes, natural foes. Beloved friends, if you have things against you this morning, or people against you this morning, or devils against you this morning, Assyrians, God is mightier than them all, and God is on your side, and God is going to deliver you, and God is going to overthrow them. There is the consolation.

But this verse that I have read to you is a very precious verse, and it stands out like a sparkling jewel amid all this anger and denunciation and wrath against Nineveh. "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him." Well, this is a simple, vital foundation truth: "The Lord is good." Really the whole of the Word of God is a commentary on it, and really the whole of the gospel of the grace of God is a commentary on it: "The Lord is good." I suppose many sermons could be preached on it, but just a few things.

"The Lord is good," *in supplying your needs*. We see the Lord's goodness in that – the many needs we have, great and small, in providence and spiritually, in our weakness and helplessness, as sinners, unworthy. But the Lord is good. His name is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide. "The Lord is good." "My God shall supply *all* your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Now that is the goodness of God to His people. "The Lord is good."

"The Lord is good," *in hearing and answering prayer*. There is a throne of grace. There is a mercy seat sprinkled with blood where sinners are welcome, where sinners are lovingly received, their prayers heard and answered. There is a wonderful word concerning the throne of grace: "Let

us therefore come boldly.” What is your case this morning? What is it? Now, “The Lord is good.” He has provided this safe retreat, the throne of grace.

“With heaven and earth at His command,
He waits to answer prayer.”

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” “The Lord is good,” in hearing and answering prayer. What could we do without a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God? “The Lord is good.”

“The Lord is good,” *in giving strength equal to the day*. So often we feel weak and helpless – those of you with your spiritual burdens, some of you in dealing with people, some of you in your daily work, mothers at home with children, sometimes not feeling well. How can I carry on? “How can I stand the trying day?” Now, “The Lord is good.” “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.” “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” “The Lord is good.” Sometimes God’s people are helped to look back over a long life, and some over a shorter life, and there is an Ebenezer raised: “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” You remember how you were helped through, and how you were graciously upheld, and as you look back, and as you say, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day,” you can come in with this: “The Lord is good.”

But beloved friends, above everything else, “The Lord is good” *sending His own beloved Son* to suffer, bleed and die, that sinners might be saved with an everlasting salvation. That is the supreme display of the goodness of God. It is the supreme display because it was for unworthy sinners. “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” It is the supreme display of His goodness, because what did it mean, the gift of His beloved Son? “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” O the goodness of God in providing a way of salvation, sending His Son to die, a way to heaven through the Saviour’s blood, forgiveness for those who are brought to feel their need! “The Lord is good.” But this is the supreme display of it. Doesn’t our hymnwriter say,

“But the proof of proofs indeed
Is, He sent His Son to bleed”?

As sinners this morning, may you see the goodness of God in the cross of Christ. May you see the goodness of God at Calvary. May you see it in the atonement. May you see it as we sing:

“Here on the cross ’tis fairest drawn,
In precious blood and crimson lines.”

But may you see it in your own soul and be able to say, “The Lord has been good to me despite my unworthiness, despite my sin.”

“The Lord is good.” But then it is easy to *say* this, but what about when you are found in trouble and disappointment and affliction and long-drawn-out things, and your way is hard, and things seem to be going wrong? To say, “The Lord is good,” then – only the Lord can enable you to do it. Unbelief never said, “The Lord is good,” when things are trying. But you know the old hymn:

“Good when He gives, supremely good,
Nor less when He denies;
E’en crosses from His sovereign hand
Are blessings in disguise.”

Unbelief cannot receive it, but you need the Lord to enable you to say that.

“The Lord is good.” How can a person say it? I was trying to speak at the prayer meeting on Thursday from Moses’ last words. Moses said concerning his God, “He is the Rock, His work is perfect.” I could not help but see this: in many ways Moses died a disappointed man, a sorely-disappointed man. In his flesh he thought the Lord had dealt hardly with him. He thought the Lord had dealt unkindly with him. You know what I am speaking of. Moses badly wanted to enter the Promised Land. For forty years he looked forward to it. It was the great aim of his life, and because he acted unadvisedly in smiting the rock the second time and disobeying God, God said he could never enter the Promised Land.

On one occasion, Moses begged and he wrestled and he pleaded, and the Lord said, “Speak no more unto Me of this matter.” It was a bitter disappointment to Moses. But when the Lord told him to go up into Mount Nebo and die in the mount, and he had to give his testimony to

Israel, he spoke well of his God. He could not say anything wrong, but it was only grace that brought him there. He said, “He is the Rock, His work is perfect.” And do you know what enabled him to say that? Because he saw over and above it all that he was about to enter a better land than the land of Canaan. He was about to enter the Promised Land above, “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” He knew something of this:

“The joy prepared for suffering saints,
Will make amends for all.”

So he could say, “He is the Rock, His work is perfect.” But only the grace of God can bring you there, and only living faith can bring you there.

“The Lord is good.” There is so much about the Lord’s goodness in Scripture, a lot of interesting things, gracious things said about it. One is this: that *it satisfies*. If you know the goodness of God personally and feelingly, it will satisfy you. “My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, saith the Lord.”

“The Lord is good.” Another thing: God’s goodness is *unchanging*. It is not there one day and gone the next. It is something that is with His people throughout their lives. “The goodness of God endureth continually.” Then of course we have that well-known word: “Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” That is the end, the final end of the goodness of God to unworthy sinners. O but beloved friends, whatever be your state or case this morning, in one way or another, may you by precious faith enter into this word and be able to say it and know it and feel it: “The Lord is good,” and to say, “He has been good to me.”

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble.” “A strong hold.” We read in one place, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.” We have another word: “In the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion.” The idea in a strong hold seems to be some kind of castle or fortification, and everything is danger without, and death without, and what hope is there? Only if a person can flee to this strong hold, castle, fortification, and enter in. And the point: once in, well, he is safe, he is secure. This is the example here that the prophet gives of the Lord’s goodness to His people in Christ. He has provided them with a strong hold, and Christ is that strong hold.

I am glad we sang that hymn just now (1090), based on Zechariah chapter 9. It is a lovely word. “Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.” What is a prisoner of hope? Well, by nature every single of one of us are prisoners to sin and Satan and unbelief. If the Lord deals with us in love and mercy, opens our eyes, blesses us with life, we realise we are prisoners, which we did not before, and realising we are prisoners, we long to be set free. So we are no longer just prisoners – prisoners of sin, prisoners of Satan. We are prisoners of hope now. But the point is, we are still prisoners, and we need liberty. It is to be set free.

I think there are a few prisoners of hope here this morning. You are prisoners. You have not got the sweet assurance of faith. You have not got gospel liberty. You have not got what you want. You are prisoners. “Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing,” because you know you are a prisoner and you long to be set free. This is the word of the Lord to you: “Turn you to the strong hold” – to Jesus. Look to Him. “Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.” And then as you go on, “By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water” – by the blood of Christ.

In the very early years of my pastorate I had someone come to see me wanting to join our church. He gave me such a clear account of his beginning and how he felt his need and he felt his sin. Well, his concern was as clear as anything, but he did not seem to have a glimmer of hope. He had not any knowledge of Christ at all. I was only a young pastor, and I said, “Look, my friend, I don’t doubt the reality of that work, but surely we can’t really bring you forward until in some way you are brought to believe on the Son of God, some way you are raised up to a sweet hope in Jesus.” Well, he accepted it graciously. Not very long afterwards, very shortly afterwards, I tried to speak on that word: “Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope,” and he did, and he was enabled to look to Jesus, and he was brought into liberty and set free, so with delight we brought him forward straight away. It is a good word.

“Prisoners of hope, to Jesus turn;
He’s a Stronghold, ordained for you;
Gird up your loins, and cease to mourn,
And to the Lamb your way pursue.”

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble.” But there are many different days of trouble. There is spiritual trouble, soul trouble, trouble in the beginning. But you have a pathway to walk out. You have a fight to fight. You have a race to run. You are tempted by Satan. You feel the power of sin. That is a day of trouble. “Turn you to the strong hold.”

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble.” I often tell you this: I am always burdened and exercised on the various passages to read in our services. I never want this to be automatic. Why did I read the forty-sixth Psalm? Because at the time of the Glorious Reformation, that was the part of Scripture which was made such a help, such a blessing to Martin Luther, and he wrote that beautiful hymn on “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,” which translated from the German into English is this: “A safe strong hold our God is still.” Now that is how Luther proved it.

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble.” I would like you young ones to read the account of Luther. I remember reading it when I was only a boy. I never forgot it, how he stood alone before all the power of Europe, the emperor with all his magnates, the pope and all his envoys, and this vast, magnificent gathering in the city of Worms, and he stood alone there, and he said, “Here I stand; I can do no other. So help me, God.” They said he should never go, he should flee. They said he would never come back alive. He said, “If every tile on every roof in that city was a devil, still I will go in the name of the Lord.” But that is the point he rested on all the time: “A safe strong hold our God is still.”

Of course, his close friend, Philip Melancthon, was of a different temperament, and sometimes he would get cast down and think everything was going wrong. Luther would say, “Philip, stop trying to rule the world”; “Philip, come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm.” But you think of those great days, and those solemn days, and those awful days, and what a word that was made: “A safe strong hold our God is still” – greater than all the power of Rome, the power of the empire, the powers of hell. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” This is it: “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.... Be still, and know that I am God.” There

are three words: “Sit still”; “stand still”; “be still”; and it is a hard thing sometimes. “Be still, and know that I am God.”

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble.” There is a sure hope, a sure foundation here. But “the day of trouble.” Well, you know what your day of trouble is. Some of you have had these days of trouble. We are sure to have them, because, “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” And some of you in greater or less measure are in them now. “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” The bereavements, losses, crosses, disappointments, ill health, the health of those you love, sorrow, things in your family, things in your business, hospital appointments, things before you, at last the day of your death, and perhaps you feel you are not right, you are not ready. “The day of trouble.” O but this strong hold!

“Dear Refuge of my weary soul,
On Thee, when sorrows rise,
On Thee, when waves of trouble roll,
My fainting hope relies.”

Now there is a strong hold.

But there is one wonderful thing. The best of figures, the best of illustrations cannot convey the whole of the truth. It is a beautiful figure – a sinner weak, helpless, sorrowful, sinful, in trouble, and there is this strong hold. It is Christ and Him crucified. It is Christ exalted, and that fleeing for refuge to Him, and that entering in by faith. It is a beautiful figure, but there is one thing the figure does not convey and it cannot convey, and that is the blessed truth that the Lord Jesus *gives strength*. This figure of the strong hold is a beautiful figure, and it sets forth the safety and it sets forth the security, but it does not set forth this. There is an additional blessing here, an abundant blessing: that the Lord not only is the strong hold, but that He graciously gives strength, and He promises strength to those who feel weak. It is still true: “And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him.” Well of course, beloved friends, in one sense He knows those who *do not* trust in Him, so it means a lot more than that. When we read of the Lord *knowing* His people – for instance, “The

foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord *knoweth* them that are His” – it does not just mean He knows all about them. He knows all about the wicked. It means His tender, loving interest and concern for them. Now that is it.

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him.” Surely many of you here this morning, if you dare not lay claim to much, you can say from an honest heart that you trust in Jesus. You have not got anywhere else to trust, have you? But surely you are not trusting in yourself. Surely you are not just trusting in your chapel going. You are not trusting in other people thinking well of you. You are not trusting in other people’s prayers. These are sandy foundations. These are not a strong hold. Surely many of you here through grace are trusting in Christ. Let me hold you on this point: how many of you can say this, yes or no:

“To Christ for help I fly,
The Friend of sinners lost,
A refuge sweet, and sure, and nigh,
And there is all my trust”?

That is the religion that takes a lost, ruined, guilty sinner to heaven, and the Lord “knoweth them that trust in Him.”

He knows you are trusting in Him, but it is more than that. It is that loving, kind, tender concern over the little details in your life, as well as over your soul’s everlasting safety; His watchful eye upon you, graciously upholding you. He “knoweth them that trust in Him.” What is it? “Casting 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.’”

“Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you,” despite your faults and failures and sins and amidst all your sorrows.

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him.” Of course, there is a lot in Scripture about trusting in the Lord – that living faith, God-given faith – but I

understand in this verse, the real meaning is those who “betake themselves to Him,” those who of necessity have to flee to Him, those who cannot do without Him, those who must have Him. And seeing their own weakness, helplessness, sin and need, and seeing Him as this glorious refuge, this almighty strong hold, led by the Spirit of God, of necessity they have to flee, they have to venture and enter in. There they are safe, and there they are secure to all eternity. Do you know what ground it is on? The Lord says, “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him.”

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Prisoners of hope, to Jesus turn;
He’s a Stronghold, ordained for you;
Gird up your loins, and cease to mourn,
And to the Lamb your way pursue.

Though fast in Sinai’s fetters bound,
Held in the deepest bondage there,
Yet ’tis the gospel’s joyful sound:
“Sinners, to this Stronghold repair.”

Turn hither, ye who once were blessed
With life the ways of God to run;
But now whose hearts are sore distressed,
Because those golden hours are gone.

Turn hither, ye who oft have tried,
By works, salvation to obtain;
See royal robes your shame to hide,
And blood that takes out every stain.

His name, a tower for strength renowned
Shall save His people from their sin;
Free grace shall o’er their sins abound;
Ye fearing, doubting souls, turn in.

John Kent