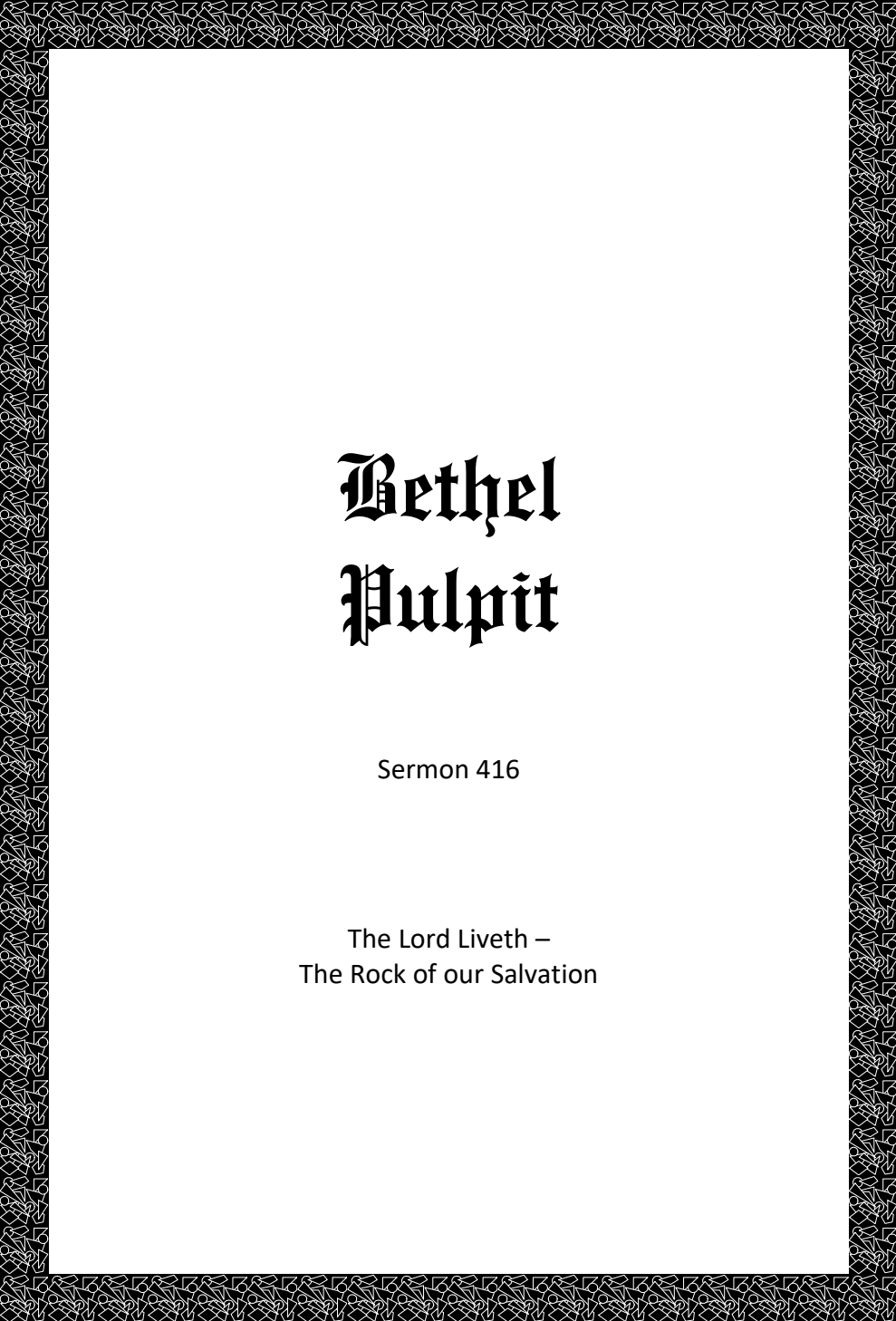




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 416

The Lord Liveth –
The Rock of our Salvation

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 21st April, 2019 (Easter Sunday)**

Text: *"The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted" (Psalm 18. 46).*

What a glorious theme this is: a once-crucified, now risen, exalted Saviour, and *He for ever lives*. As I said this morning, my desire is that our living Saviour might be made known to some of you today in His blessed suitability to meet your deepest needs.

"The Lord liveth." Now at the close this morning, I tried to speak of one or two different ways in which the Lord still lives as His people's Surety, their Advocate, a great and glorious High Priest. No doubt you can think of many of the character-offices and relationships of the Lord Jesus as the risen Saviour. But the one that is brought here before us this evening is one that has always been precious to His people, that the Lord Jesus ever lives, the Rock of Ages. I have been thinking of the well-known hymn:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in Thee."

It has been sung by eminent statesmen, prime ministers, members of the royal family, presidents of the United States, when they have come to their dying day. It would be a wonderful thing if when you and I come to our dying day, as one day we must, that might be our hope and that might be our prayer:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in Thee."

"The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock." Now then, just a word in passing about David again. I have often said and thought that of all the various relationships the Lord Jesus bears to His people, this one is mentioned more than any other in Scripture: *the Rock*. It is mentioned by David more often than anyone else. Again, we do not know just how much David by faith knew of his greater Son who one day should come, but when David so often spoke of the Rock, it was this: that his God and Saviour was always there; He was always with him; He did not change; He

would not forsake him. That is what the Rock meant to David, and it is a blessed thing if it means that to us.

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock.” You and I can bless Almighty God this evening that there is a Rock of Ages. Now really, in the Word of God, the Rock as representing our Lord Jesus, the risen Saviour, is brought before us in three different ways. The first is *as the sinner’s hiding place*, what we all need, what everyone in this chapel needs, what some of you have felt and what some of you have found: a hiding place in the clefts of the Rock. We do not want to exaggerate or over-spiritualise or anything, but it is in the *clefts* of the rock that a weary pilgrim or a weary dove finds a hiding place. If it is a sheer face of the rock, there is no hiding place from the storm. People speak of Toplady’s *Rock of Ages* down in Burrington Combe. It was a cleft in the rock where supposedly one day he sheltered from a storm. This speaks not just of the Lord Jesus from all eternity. We might admire there and worship, but it is Christ and Him crucified. It is in the clefts of the Rock that a sinner finds a hiding place.

Then, “Blessed be my Rock.” I think a lot of you know that old hymn which speaks of the blessedness of the Rock. What I am thinking of:

“Thou blest Rock of Ages,
I’m hiding in Thee.”

Now lingering on this subject, “The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock.” How this was revealed to Moses: Moses longed to behold the glory of God. He was in trouble. The Lord had threatened to leave His people and only send an angel, and Moses had prayed that prayer which suits many of you: “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” The Lord gave him a good answer – may some of you feel it tonight – “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” Moses wanted to see God’s glory, and the glory of the Lord was going to pass by. But Moses, great man as he was, was still a sinner, and he could not have that immediate view of the Lord’s glory. Then the Lord spoke that beautiful word to him: “Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by.” Now didn’t Moses prove it! And this Easter Sunday, I cannot think of any greater blessing for any of us to seek, above all to experience, than

if Almighty God should say, “I will put thee, sinner as thou art, put thee in the only place of safety, put thee in a cleft of the Rock” – the risen Saviour, our dear Lord Jesus, the Rock of Ages.

We sang of it just now. “I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand.” That hymn 924 is a lovely hymn. I always remember when I was a little boy visiting my grandparents. I took up their hymnbook, and where all the hymns are, in the index, in ink they had written at the bottom of one page, “924, Great Rock for weary sinners made.” I looked through it, and it seemed to be there already in the index. I said to my grandfather, “Why did my grandmother take the trouble to write that in?” He said, “I don’t really know, but I think 924, the great Rock, meant so much to her, that she wanted to make sure it was there.”

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock” – the hiding place for sinners, the One who is a shelter for them from the wrath of God against their sin, a shelter in the time of need, that refuge, that fortress. “The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock.” So we pass on, though we do not like to leave such a sacred point as that. But we pass on.

The second thing is *the rock foundation*, that which the Lord Jesus spoke to Simon Peter about. He said. “Upon this Rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Now that rock was not Peter, as the Roman Catholics believe. What a shakeable rock that would have been, one who denied his Lord and Master when left to himself! This is Peter’s almighty God and Saviour, the One who lives for evermore.

“Blessed be my Rock.” O that sure rock foundation! Well, it is the Lord Jesus, and it is the Lord Jesus in His Person and in His death and resurrection and ascension, but especially in His foundation work. Now we just alluded to it this morning. When the Lord Jesus cried, “It is finished,” it was a solid foundation. “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation”; “and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.”

“The Lord liveth,” as the Rock of Ages. It speaks of His unchanging character. It speaks of His faithfulness. It speaks of His divine, almighty strength. “Blessed be my Rock.” It is the foundation on which the whole church of God is built, and it is the foundation on which

every sinner saved by grace builds his hope. Now a lot of you love that hymn:

“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

I am glad you like it, but O do be careful! Do not take it for granted, because sadly, solemnly, you and I by nature do not build our hope of heaven upon this living Saviour, the Rock of Ages. We build it on all kinds of things. It does not matter what they are – the Lord Jesus declared them to be sand. They are a shaky foundation. It may appear to stand for a time; it will not stand in the great day.

Mr. Gurney¹ gave me an old card, like the kind of cards you send to people when you are on your holiday. There was a place near Bournemouth called Simpson’s Folly. I do not know who Simpson was, but he decided he was going to prove that the Lord Jesus was wrong. So – you know Bournemouth and its sandy beaches – he built a magnificent house on the sands, and it stood for a time. Then there came a day when there was a dreadful storm, and it was left as a ruin. The picture postcard showed this once-beautiful house as a ruin.

That is your religion and my religion if we build on the sand, and there are all kinds of things you can call sand: thinking you are not as bad as others; thinking there is plenty of time; leaving things till later; trusting in the prayers of the godly. We could go on and on. Everything short of a living Saviour, Christ and Him crucified, is sandy ground, and in the solemn parable of the Lord Jesus, we are told that the wind beat *vehemently* – that is a big word and a strong word – *vehemently* upon that house, “and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

“Blessed be my Rock,” that there is a sure foundation laid for sinners in Zion. Beloved friends, make sure that that is where your hope is built. “None but Jesus.” In my early days spiritually, I had to prove that truth:

“Every prop will, first or last,
Sink or fail, but Jesus Christ;

¹ Mr. F.G. Gurney, deacon at Bethel, 1939-1979.

On this sure foundation stone
Let me build and rest alone.”

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock.” But then thirdly, the Rock of Ages – this is slightly different from the shelter, the hiding place, the foundation – *the streams that flow from the smitten Rock*. Don’t we need to bless the Lord for that!

“Is He a Rock? how firm He proves!
The Rock of Ages never moves;
Yet the sweet streams that from Him flow,
Attend us all the desert through.”

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock.” The prophet Isaiah tends to bring a few of these things together. He says, “And a Man” – that glorious Man, that Man who for ever lives – “and a Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock.” The allusion here, of course, is to Israel in the wilderness. They had not any water to drink. The people murmured. How could a great multitude go through the wilderness with no water to drink? And the Lord showed Moses a rock, and he stood on that rock, and he smote the rock, and those streams of water flowed out which followed them and supplied their needs all those years in the wilderness. Doesn’t Paul take it up! He is very bold. He says, “They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and *that Rock was Christ*.”

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock.” We are in a desert condition. We are travelling through this desert, we hope, towards the heavenly Canaan. But don’t we so often feel it is a desert time in the church of God? Don’t we feel it a desert time in our own hearts? There is the dryness and the deadness and the darkness, and don’t we long for streams in the desert? They flow from that one source, a crucified Jesus, the Rock, but it was a Rock that was smitten by the hand of divine justice, and it is from Calvary all these streams of living water flow. Let me speak to you young ones. You hear many things the minister says. Perhaps you feel you do not understand them. You hear people speak about their experiences. You think, I do not think I know anything about that. But I

am sure I am right in saying this: that every awakened, grace-taught, born again sinner will have a spiritual thirst.

What do we mean by a spiritual thirst? Well, that inward longing. If a person is thirsty, there is that inward longing, but there is only one thing that can satisfy it: he must drink. And you come to that. Well do I remember in my university days, at a time when I could hardly ever get to hear a really godly minister, I was listening to an Arminian preacher, and it was unprofitable, but he just quoted that one word: “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.” That is the word of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Remember, He spoke it at the last day, that last great day of the feast. That was the Feast of Tabernacles, when God’s ancient people used to re-act Israel’s stay in the wilderness in remembrance of it. They lived in tabernacles, little booths, and on the last day, it was the custom that the people walked through the streets carrying jugs, flagons of water, and they came to the Pool of Siloam and poured them all in, and cried that beautiful word: “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” But it was just a sham, a formality in those latter days. It did not mean anything. The Lord Jesus could see there were longing, thirsty souls there, and “in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.”

We are told about our Lord Jesus, “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.” But there were two special occasions on which the Lord Jesus did cry with a loud voice. One was on the cross before He died, when He cried, “It is finished,” and the other was on that last day, the great day of the feast. “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.”

“Let him” – let him in Bethel Chapel tonight –
“Let him who thirsts for heavenly joys,
Come unto Me, the Saviour cries,
And drink at My spring-head;
Leave all your boasting self behind,
For from the Saviour you shall find
A glorious life indeed.”

Why? Because these streams are the streams of eternal life, and they flow from one source and one source alone. That is from a once-crucified but now-living Saviour. So you thirsty ones, do not seek to forget it all. Do

not seek to turn away. Do not seek it anywhere else, but seek it in those streams of living water which flow from eternal love, and which flow only from the smitten Rock. “They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.” So here we have another beautiful title for this loving Saviour: *the God of our salvation*. Never forget it!

“This wondrous Man of whom we tell,
Is true almighty God.”

The Trinity is a great mystery. Some of you young ones may say, “Well, I cannot really understand it.” We are not called to understand it. If we could understand it, it would not be a mystery. But faith believes it: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost – one God.

So this beautiful title here, *the God of our salvation*, speaks of the living Saviour. He is true almighty God. I could not help but think, one of our hymns we sing is a closing hymn for the close of the day, and this is how it goes:

“God of our salvation, hear us;
Bless, O bless us, ere we go.”

That is a good word to end the Lord’s day. It would be a good word to end this Easter Sunday, with a prayer for these wonderful blessings that come from the God of heaven. We are unworthy of them. We do not deserve them. They are all of grace.

“God of our salvation, hear us;
Bless, O bless us, ere we go.”

“Let the God of my salvation be exalted.” Again, just alluding to David, he did know what the salvation of his soul meant. That is very, very clear. He often prayed for it. But especially here he was thinking of that providential salvation. He had been harassed for years. He was hunted like a partridge on the mountain by King Saul, but now he was brought safely through it all, and his enemies were dead, but, “The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.”

Well, our living Saviour is exalted. He was once lifted up on the cross, and there He died that sinners might live, that there might be salvation, and then He was exalted on the resurrection morning. After His glorious ascension, He was exalted in heaven. “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”

“Let the God of my salvation be exalted.” But He is to be exalted in the preaching of the gospel. We sang it last Lord’s day and the Lord’s day before: “Christ exalted is our song.” Well, that is it. There would not be any gospel to preach apart from this: “Christ exalted is our song.” Where are the churches if this is left out of the preaching? It becomes a dry discourse. Now it is Christ exalted. We do want it to be Christ exalted in our midst. But it is this: Christ exalted in the heart of every believer; every sinner saved by grace. In measure we must walk with John the Baptist: “He must increase” – the living Saviour exalted – “I must decrease.”

But when Christ is exalted in the preaching of the gospel, there is a promise. May you plead it: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth” – that is, exalted – “will draw all men unto Me” – which of course means all sorts, all kinds, all conditions of men unto Me. So there is something connected with Christ exalted, and that is this drawing, that is this attraction. Once again, if I can hold you young ones for a moment. When I was young, some of the old ministers used to set this out, and that, and you did not know whether you knew it or you did not know it. But what about this point: do you feel a sweet attraction in Christ? Is there something that draws you towards Him? When you hear His name mentioned, does it have any effect?

“Let the God of my salvation be exalted.” Do not forget that little word *my*. It is a favourite word of David. May it be a favourite word of ours. It is especially well known in the twenty-third Psalm: “The Lord is *my* Shepherd.” Martin Luther said that there is great divinity in the personal pronouns. You know what he meant: little words like *me*, and *my* and *I*. He said there is great divinity in them. It is not just knowing these things generally, not just the God of salvation. Let Him be exalted in *my* heart as the God of *my* salvation.

“Let the God of my salvation be exalted.” We will not leave it here. There will be a gracious effect. If you and I know these things, the God of our salvation, if He is exalted in our hearts the living Saviour, our only hope, then there will be a sanctifying effect of it. It will be a separating effect. There will be a drawing effect. There will be a constraining effect. There will be a going after Him. There will be something real in our lives, something different in our lives.

“This is the Man, the exalted Man,
Whom we, unseen, adore” –

not just in chapel, but in our own homes, and when we meet with the world, and in all our concerns. O to be a true follower – of the meek and lowly Jesus, yes – but the exalted Saviour, the God of our salvation.

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.” Now let us go back where we started this morning. What did I say? I hope the services today would show something of the suitability for us, for you and me, of a risen, living Saviour. Because you have your needs, you have them providentially, you have them in your homes, your family, your life, your work, your circumstances, your troubles, your joys. If your religion is real, you have them especially in your soul as you think of your sins and eternity, and how shall I do in the swellings of Jordan? If your religion is real, you want something that is for *you*, suitable for you personally. Well, beloved friends, may you see it here, and may the blessed Holy Spirit make it known to you personally, in your hearts, that you might be made through grace a partaker, a possessor.

“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my Rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.”

(The morning sermon on the same text was published last month.)

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Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,

Cleanse me from its guilt and power.
Not the labour of my hands,

Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eye-strings break in death,
When I soar through tracts unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me;
Let me hide myself in Thee.

A. M. Toplady