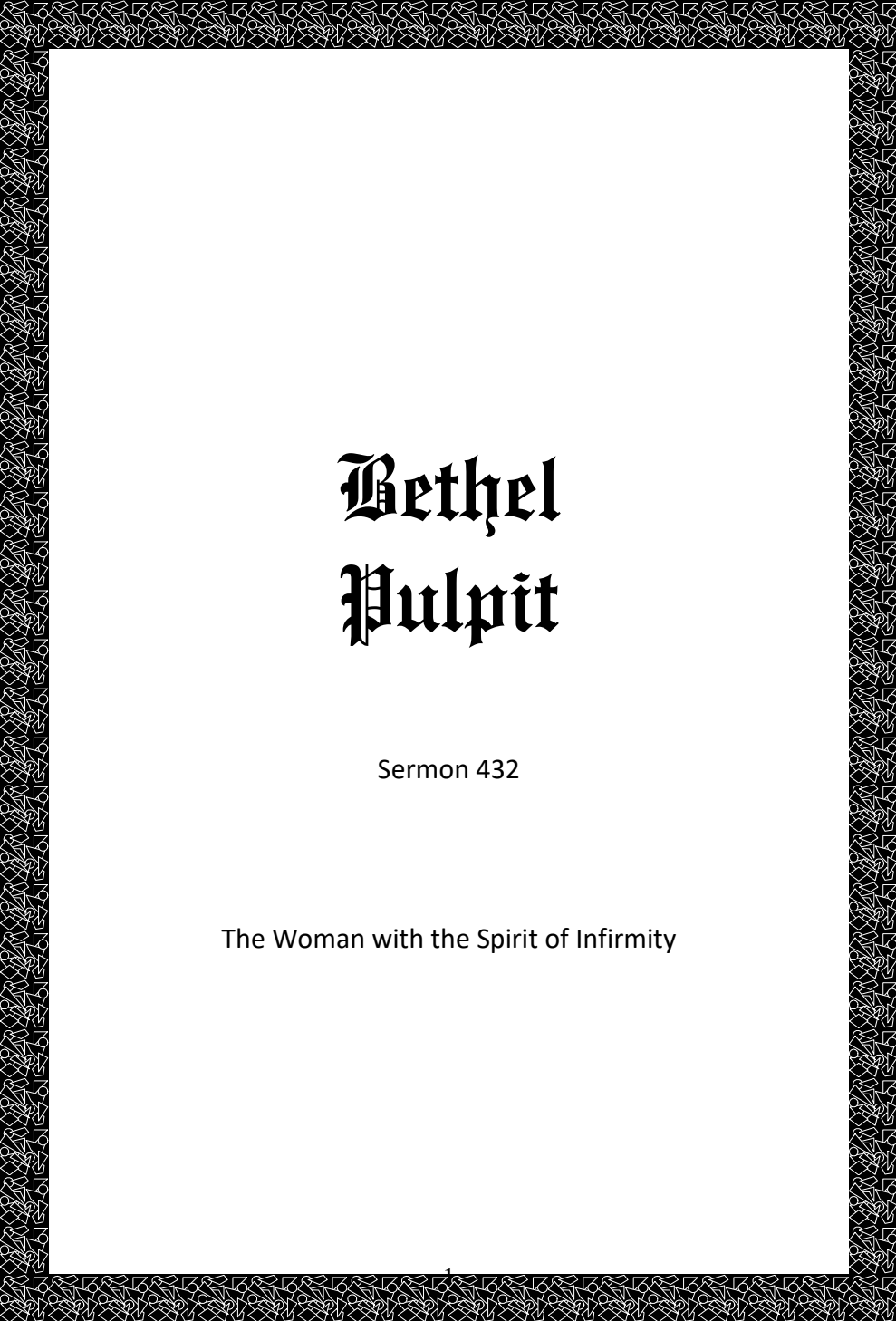




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 432

The Woman with the Spirit of Infirmary

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 14th March, 2021**

Text: *"And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God" (Luke 13. 11-13).*

The miracles of Jesus – what a wonderful subject this is – the miracles which our Lord Jesus wrought while here on earth! There are three special things in the importance of the miracles of Jesus. The first is, they were *miracles of divine, almighty power* which no-one else could do, and the Lord Jesus performed them as an evidence that He was whom He claimed to be: the eternal Son of God.

The second thing: the miracles of Jesus were *a wonderful proof of His tender heart, His loving compassion*. Whilst He was here below, He lived a life of love and mercy. In one place it is put very simply, very truly like this: He "went about doing good," and doing good as no-one else ever did, or anyone else could do. Now almost all the miracles of Jesus were miracles of love and kindness. There were one or two others – for instance, the cursing of the barren fig tree – but in cases like that, there was no human being injured. It was just something inanimate, the fig tree, that was barren. Ralph Erskine sings,

"The miracles by Jesus wrought,
To show that from above
His peaceful embassy was brought,
Were miracles of love."

And the third thing: these miracles that the Lord Jesus performed were *sweetly typical of those spiritual miracles that He still performs*. There are not miracles being performed on every hand today, as they were when the Lord Jesus was here upon earth. There was a purpose in His miracles, but the day of miracles has not passed, and the Lord still is able to perform miracles in answer to His unworthy people's prayers. But the miracles of Jesus were so sweetly typical of the miracles of grace that He performs in the hearts of His people, and which He will still be performing till time shall be no more.

Now here we have this remarkable case of this woman who “had a spirit of infirmity.” We are told it was caused by Satan. We read she “had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years” – it was a very deep-rooted infirmity – “and was bowed together” – bent double – “and could in no wise lift up herself.” So we have a very sad case here. The poor woman could not help herself. She was left in a state of complete helplessness. She was unable to look up. She was unable to walk straight. It was only with difficulty she could get about. It must have been a painful disease, but it was not too hard for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to deal with.

One thing that the godly commentators have specially commented over the years: that she was in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Now with all her infirmity, how she got there, we do not know; but she did get there. In the past in our chapels, before the days of cars and before the days of all this modern help, there were some people who were dreadfully afflicted, but they managed to get to chapel somehow or other. I cannot remember the details or the name, but I remember there was someone in my own district in Lancashire and they said he could hardly walk at all; he was almost paralysed; but in the winter he used to buy a lantern with a belt round his middle and he had two sticks, and he managed to get to chapel. There was another, a woman, and her neighbours said, “We can’t understand how you manage to get to chapel.” “Well,” she said, “my heart is there, so somehow or other my legs have got to get me there as well.”

“He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman.” She was there, and she was honoured in being there, and many have been honoured in being there when they have struggled to the house of God. The old preachers used to quote that scripture a lot concerning this point, though I have not heard it quoted much in recent years: “I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master’s brethren.”

The old divines used to emphasise the two points: the love to the Sabbath and the love to the house of God, and how these are two marks of grace. Because by nature we perhaps come to chapel, and perhaps some-thing interests us, but we have not that real love to it. But grace makes the difference. “Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.” A love to the Sabbath, the Lord’s day. One of the most terrible things we have in this evil day is the desecration of the Sabbath. Now in days of real, spiritual prosperity, the Lord’s day has been especially honoured, and in days of wickedness and depravity, the Lord’s day is neglected. O but the difference! Perhaps you used to be sad when Sunday

morning came. When you were young, you could not do some of the things you wanted to; you could not go to some of the places you wanted to. But now,

“Yes, with a cheerful zeal,
We haste to Zion’s hill,
And there our vows and honours pay.”

“He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity.” We are told that Satan had bound her, so there was something quite deep in it. But we are also told she was *a daughter of Abraham*. Surely that means something more than that she was a Jewess. She was a true Israelite. That is what we need to be, even under the gospel, for we are the true Israel, “which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Well, this poor woman was a sad case. Just turning aside a moment, it is interesting how many woman or girls the Lord dealt very graciously with. You can think of Jairus’ daughter; you can think of the two Marys; you think of Mary Magdalene; the woman who prayed, “Lord, help me”; the one who pressed through the crowd to touch the hem of His garment. There seem to be so many cases where the Lord dealt graciously with women, and this is one of them here.

“A woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years,” which would suggest that it was an impossible case. Do not forget, the writer of this gospel was Luke. He is the only one who mentions this case, and Luke would have been specially interested in it. But it seems the suggestion is that it was a completely incurable disease. If it could have been cured, no doubt she would have tried some natural means. But it was left to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We have these two things here that I mentioned at the beginning: His loving, tender compassion. “When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him.” I have often wondered why the Lord Jesus called her to Him, because the poor woman could hardly walk. But He did call her to Him, and she was able to come, and still He calls sinners to come unto Him. He calls them out of darkness into His marvellous light.

“When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him.” And then His power. He spoke, and He spoke with authority. It was the voice which in creation said, “Let there be light: and there was light” – an almighty voice. When the Lord speaks, the thing is done. “He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity,” and then He not only showed

His tender compassion, but He showed His divine, almighty power. Beloved friends, they are still the same today. You believe that.

“And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight,” and immediately there was a gracious, sanctifying effect. She “glorified God,” which means that she praised Him and thanked Him and blessed Him. But it means also that she honoured Him from henceforth in her life. “She was made straight, and glorified God.” Have you noticed that so many of the Saviour’s cures were immediate? He did not always do it in the same way. Sometimes it was just a word. Sometimes He told them to show themselves to the priest, or to go and wash in Siloam. There were so many different ways. The Lord is sovereign, and we do have to watch that when thinking of the Lord’s dealings with young people or with older ones. There are no two cases just the same, and we have to be very careful. There *is* a standard in the Word of God. We must not deviate from the standard, but we must ever beware of chalking down lines and expecting our Lord, our Saviour, to go the way we think, to walk between those lines.

“He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” Well, when we come to think of the spiritual significance of it, we can think of it really in two ways: in the work of con-version and also in the Lord’s dealings with some of His people in their later days. But, “He laid His hands on her.” Can you remember when Mr. Wood used to preach here, He used to speak of a little prayer:

“O Jesus, lay Thy hands on me,
And make me all I ought to be”?

Well, whether we are little children or whether we are old people, or in between, it is a good prayer, that the Lord in His love and mercy will lay His gracious hands upon us. Those of you who are afflicted, or you have your loved ones at home who are afflicted, it is a good prayer, that the Lord will lay His gracious hands upon them, because there is healing there, there is blessing there.

“He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” So what could she do now? She could look up. A sinner by nature cannot really look up, but when the Lord deals with him, He blesses him with real faith and He enables him to look up really for the first time – to look up to the Lord Jesus, to look up in prayer, to look up, seeking the blessing, seeking forgiveness, seeking to be washed in the Saviour’s blood. She was able to look up now.

And she was healed. O there is healing in a saving touch from the Lord Jesus. She could look up. She could walk straight. She could not walk straight before; she had difficulty to walk at all. Now she could walk straight. By nature we do not walk straight. We do not walk in the ways of God. We walk in our own ways; we walk in wrong ways. But when we have the Lord's healing touch, then we begin to walk straight, to walk in right ways.

And so she was delivered. In so many things we have been trying to talk about this year, this word *deliverance* comes in. *Deliverance*. Now this poor, dear woman did not pray for deliverance. The Lord delivered her without her asking. But we can pray for deliverance – in natural things, in our troubles, in spiritual things.

“Then let our humble faith address
His mercy and His power;
We shall obtain delivering grace,
We shall obtain delivering grace,
In the distressing hour.”

There is a thought there for those of you who seem to be tempted. The Lord deliver you in the hour of temptation. The Lord deliver you from some besetting sin. The Lord deliver you from Satan, deliver you from unbelief. The Lord deliver you at last.

“Deliverance He affords to all
Who make His name their trust.”

And she was set at liberty. She had not any liberty before. She could not get about where she wanted. She could not go where she wished. She was shut up. She had no liberty. And when the Lord first begins to teach you, you feel that you have not got that liberty. But, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” And you will glorify God. That is the standard, and that is where we come so far short. But O to be blessed with more grace to glorify God, both for whom He is, and for what He has done, and especially for what He has done in our little lives. In this beautiful account there is so much encouragement for us to pray – to pray for ourselves, and to pray for our loved ones; to pray for those we are concerned about.

“And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” It is a wonderful thing to be delivered from those shackles of sin and death and hell. “Woman, thou art

loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

But then secondly, not just to think of it in the beginning of a work of grace, the healing power of Immanuel, God with us. But the Lord’s people as they go on in life, as they grow older, as here and there they stumble and fall, as here and there they come into troubles and difficulties and problems, I think most of them know what that means: “a spirit of infirmity.” We cannot pray just as we would like. We cannot always worship just as we would like. In reading God’s Word, it is not always seemingly opened to us. The spirit of infirmity. We feel our weakness, our helplessness in so many things. “Who is sufficient for these things?” That spirit of weakness, spiritual weakness; that spirit of infirmity. Do you believe it – the Saviour, “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”? And He can still say, “Sinner, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” But if He does not say it in those words, He is blessedly able to do it. If you feel troubled with your infirmities, lay them before the Lord and ask Him to lay His almighty hands upon you.

“He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” But then again, the Lord’s people often feel to be bowed down. A lot of you know what it is to be bowed down – bowed down by your infirmities, and bowed down by your sins at times, bowed down by your troubles, the troubles of those you love, bowed down as you think about the unknown way, bowed down by ill health, bowed down by old age. There are so many things that come in the lives of the Lord’s people when they are bowed down, and when they cannot lift up their head. We read in places of those whose heads were bowed down, and those who cannot really look up, and yet we read of the Lord, one of His titles is, the Lifter up of the downcast (Psa. 3. 3). “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? ... hope thou in God.”

What a mercy when again you can look up to the Lord in prayer and in thanksgiving, in repentance, in confession, when you can walk that beautiful, well-known word out – it is a good word for you children here and listening at home, and our young people – “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills” – the eternal hills, where the Lord Jesus now lives and reigns. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” It is this same Lord God and Saviour here, the Lord which made heaven and earth.

“Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” But whatever stage of spiritual life you are in, you will often feel like this poor,

dear woman, your complete helplessness. Sometimes none can help but the Lord Jesus, and He is an almighty Saviour, an almighty Helper. He delights to help His people. What do we sing of? “Helpless look to Thee for grace.” A helpless sinner and an almighty God and Saviour! This is the centre, the glory of the gospel. You have it here; you have it throughout the New Testament; you have it throughout the Word of God. But it is this: personally, the application. You are that helpless one, like this dear woman. You painfully need the Saviour as much as she did, in grace and in providence. You cry, and what is it you cry for? “No help in self” –

“To Christ for help I fly,
The Friend of sinners lost.”

And you find that help, you receive that help; you are thankful for that help.

“Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight.” And then you can begin to walk properly – to walk properly before the Lord, before His people, before your family, before your children. The closing words in most of the epistles: how you, how I ought to walk, which embraces everything, the whole of our behaviour. How far we come short! But when the Lord touches our hearts with His love, as we prayed for this evening, or when the Lord in love and mercy once again comes right where you are, and lays His loving hands upon you, then you can walk alright. And this seems to confirm it all, to crown it all: “*She glorified God.*” That is what we were created for and that is what we were redeemed for: to the praise and the glory of God.

So beloved friends, it is a lovely account. It is such a simple account, but there is so much grace in it. May you see yourself in it in your helplessness and your need, and may you see the Lord Jesus the same in His compassion and His divine, almighty power, and may you believe, and then may you sweetly prove that He deals with sinners now in this gospel day as He dealt with this poor woman here.

“When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him, and said unto her unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” O the liberty of the gospel! You are loosed from your infirmity, freed from bondage! “Immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

* * *

Heal us, Immanuel, here we are,
Waiting to feel Thy touch;
Deep-wounded souls to Thee repair,
And, Saviour, we are such.

Our faith is feeble, we confess;
We faintly trust Thy word;
But wilt Thou pity us the less?
Be that far from Thee, Lord.

Remember him who once applied,
With trembling for relief;
“Lord, I believe,” with tears he cried,
“O help my unbelief.”

She, too, who touched Thee in the press,
And healing virtue stole,
Was answered, “Daughter, go in peace;
Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

Like her, with hopes and fears we come,
To touch Thee, if we may;
O send us not despairing home;
Send none unhealed away.

W. Cowper