

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 65 The Unknown Way

Text: “*And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there*” (Acts 20. 22).

The Apostle Paul was a most favoured man, and he had most wonderful revelations of the Lord’s will, but one thing he did not know, and that was the future. That had not been revealed to him; it has not been revealed to any one of us. The future is wisely hidden from us – the sad things, the blessed things. We sang of it in our opening hymn:

“What gloomy lines are writ for me,
Or what bright scenes may rise.”

There were one or two things *had* been made clear to Paul: that when he went up to Jerusalem, he was going to be bound and put in prison, but he did not know the outcome of it, and so he was bound in his spirit, and as he bade farewell to the elders, and as he set out on his journey to Jerusalem, and as he went forth into the unknown way, he simply gives this as his testimony: that he did not know – *he did not know* – the things which would befall him there. He knew so many things, but he did not know the things which would befall him there. And surely this is the spirit in which we leave the old year and venture into the new year. We do not know the things which will befall us. The Lord has wisely hidden them from us.

We look back over the past year. So many things have happened during this year that this time at our new year’s eve prayer meeting a year ago we had no idea they would take place – some of your joys, some of your sorrows, the fears some of you have had, the mercies day by day – these things were hidden from us as we look back. And now the new year before us. Samuel Medley’s new year hymn is good, and towards the end he says,

“Prepare us for Thy will,
Whatever may appear;
And let Thy lovingkindness still
Preserve us through the year.”

So surely that is the way we venture, begging the Lord to prepare us for His will, depending on all-sufficient grace.

“Not knowing the things that shall befall me there.” But beloved friends, there were some things – not the details, not the events – but there were some things that the Apostle Paul did know, and there are some things that each of us knows as we pass from year to year. One is that though there will be joys, there will be sorrows. The Lord’s Word has told us no less, that “man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” Now the Lord has told us that; He has warned us of it. Another thing we know: that during the coming year there will be death, for “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Who, and when, and where, we do not know. But that is a good word we sing in the Sunday school hymn book:

“To the saints while here below
With new years, new mercies come;
But the happiest year they know,
Is the last, which leads them home.”

“Not knowing the things that shall befall me there.” Beloved friends, there are two exceeding vital things, two exceeding precious things that have been revealed concerning the unknown future, the unknown way, and the coming year, and the first is this: that *the Lord will still be on the throne*. That is our confidence. We are told that wicked men will wax worse and worse. We are told of awful things during the last days. But though we know not what may befall us – as a country, as churches, in our families, as persons – we know this, infallibly know this, that Almighty God will still be on the throne, which means this: that He will be in control – not Mr. Cameron, not the government, or not these people in the Middle East, or not President Obama. We know this: whatever may be, whatever may not be, that the Lord is in control and will be in control, and at the end of next year, *still* in control, *still* on the throne. It is not a precarious throne; it will not be vacated. It is a wonderful thing to see this. This is something we *do* know as we venture forward. “The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and because of this, He will accomplish His own will, and He will fulfil all His own purposes, and He will care for His beloved people, and whatever strange things may befall them, what unexpected things may befall them, He will surely make *all things* work together for their real good and His own eternal glory.

Now there is a divine certainty there for tomorrow when new year’s day comes, and every day throughout the year, and the whole of the unknown way. You little children, you sing it in Sunday school:

“I cannot see into the future,
Or tell what tomorrow will bring.”

But to believe what we do believe: Almighty God in control, on the throne, with full authority, and this: “My times are in Thy hand.” “All my times shall ever be ordered by His wise decree.” Now we know not the thing that shall befall us, but we know the Lord is there, that He is still there, and that He ever will be there, and as He is there, He lives and He reigns and He is almighty. That is the first thing.

Now the second thing that we know: whatever may transpire, whatever may take us by surprise, the things we do not know this evening, but we know that *the Lord will still be with His people*. There are two divine certainties there, and we know them infallibly; we know them without a shadow of a doubt. There are a multitude of things we know not – we know not what may befall us, what even may befall us before the new year comes, or even tomorrow – but “the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name’s sake.” Now there is a ground of confidence here. There is a ground of hope. There is a security. So we do not need to know what may befall us. There used to be a kind of proverb: we do not know what the future holds, but we do know who holds the future in His hand. O that we might sweetly feel it this evening: “My times are in Thy hand.”

“Not knowing the things that shall befall me.” But if you read through this same apostle’s Epistles to Timothy, the last things he wrote, especially his second Epistle to Timothy, though he does not know the things that are going to befall him, and though he dreads what they may be, and though he fears the worst, there are a few things he knows. So to come to it, not just the Apostle Paul, but to you and me personally. We know this: that what the Lord has been to us in the past, that what the Lord has been to us during this year coming to its close, He will still be the same to us in the new year, because of His divine immutability, which means not only He does not change, but He cannot change. The rock foundation, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

As in gratitude we come to the end of this year and we look back, things like this seem to flood into our mind and across our spirit. Can you go with me? Can you echo what I am going to say? Prayers answered; promises fulfilled; help given; deliverance granted. You can look back on all these things. Well, we know that because it is the past. Now we do not know what a day may bring forth. “Boast not thyself of to morrow,” and not knowing the things which shall take place. But beloved friends, we *know* that we will still experience these same things. There will still be prayers answered. There will still be promises

fulfilled. There will still be needs supplied. There will still be help given. There will still be deliverances granted. Why? Because the Lord is unchangeable. What he Has been He ever will be.

But above all, to come to it personally, the things we do not know, and then there are these things that we do know, but the vital thing is a great and glorious Person that we know. Now the apostle here was bound in the spirit. He said, “Not knowing the things that shall befall me.” But there is one thing he did know above everything else. I think you all know what it was. “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”

Well, we do not know what tomorrow will bring, what the new year will bring. It is hidden from us; not knowing what shall befall us. But we know whatever does befall us, it will fall out of a gracious, all-wise, merciful hand. We do not know what it will be, but we know the Lord is still in control, and we know the Lord is still with His people, and we know that what He has been to us, He still will be, He ever will be. O but above all, if we know not just the fact, even though the fact is certain, but if we know the Person, and that is the vital thing – whom to know is eternal life – to know the Person of the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; to know Him personally and savingly.

“Jesus, my Lord, I know Thy name;
Thy name is all my trust;
Nor wilt Thou put my soul to shame,
Or let my hope be lost.”

And beloved friends, as a congregation and in our families and personally, it is in that spirit that we enter into the unknown way.

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Monday, 31st December, 2012