

Bethel

Pulpit

Because He had a Favour

Sermon Number 470

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 5th November, 2017**

Text: *"Because Thou hadst a favour unto them" (Psalm 44. 3).*

You must all have noticed the connection between our two readings this morning (Joshua 24. 1-13, Nehemiah 9. 1-25). One was Joshua looking back on all the Lord's gracious dealings with His people through the wilderness, then bringing them into the land of Canaan, and then Nehemiah at a later date almost covers the same ground, with gratitude, with remembrance of the Lord's loving dealings with His people in Egypt, bringing them out through the wilderness into the Promised Land. And the emphasis with Joshua and with Nehemiah was what we have in this clause here. It was "because Thou hadst a favour unto them." It was not because they deserved it. They were sinful; they were unworthy; they were continually rebelling; and yet the Lord was merciful and gracious, and this was the reason: "Because Thou hadst a favour unto them."

So that is the point we have here before us in this verse and in this Psalm. Let me just remind you of the circumstances. Psalm 44, God's ancient people were in great need. They were in terrible trouble. We are not told exactly which period of their history this Psalm was written, but it was a time of great trial, great trouble, great difficulty. Things were not going well. They were being defeated in battle. They looked back to former days, and they remembered what the Lord had done for them then, and they realised that they did not deserve it then, and, well, they did not deserve it now.

Let me remind you of the beginning of this Psalm: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old." This is exactly the same point as Joshua and Nehemiah – Egypt, the Red Sea, the wilderness, entering the Promised Land, crossing Jordan, overthrowing Jericho – these wonderful victories, these wonderful blessings. "Our fathers have told us, what work Thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How Thou didst drive out the heathen with Thy hand, and plantedst them; how Thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out." Now this is it: "For they got not the land in possession by their

own sword, neither did their own arm save them.” What was the secret? “Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favour unto them.”

So here they were in this time of dreadful need, so helpless, feeling so unworthy, so undeserving. But they remembered what the Lord had been, what He had done, and they remembered that He was still the same. Though they were so unworthy, they realised that all these wonderful blessings in the past were solely on that one ground: of His mercy, the riches of His grace towards them. So this was their plea now: “Because Thou hadst a favour unto them.” So they cast themselves on the Lord. “Thou art my King, O God.” They could see it was this same God, this same almighty Saviour, still on the throne, King of kings, Lord of lords. “Thou art my King, O God.” Then, on this ground, “Command deliverances for Jacob.” In the past, all Thou hadst to do – Lord, speak, Lord, command, and there was deliverance. And now all Thou dost need to do is speak and there will be deliverance. Thou art still almighty. In the past it was Thy right hand and Thine arm, and Thy “hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.” It was the light of Thy countenance. “Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.” “Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.”

Now I am sure you can see the application of this to our country at present. November 5th – the Lord commanded deliverance. It was an impossibility, and that was going to be one of the greatest outrages of all time. These things that are happening, these things with Isil today, they are terrible things, but this was an attempt to destroy the whole of Parliament, the whole of the Commons and the whole of the Lords, and the King and Queen who were going to be present, and the whole of the royal family. The idea was that the Roman Catholics would take over the whole of the country, but the Lord in a most remarkable way commanded deliverance for us. A member of the House of Lords received a mysterious, anonymous letter. He could see it was serious. It was almost telling him, whatever he did, not to be present in Parliament on November 5th. He was so troubled about it, he took it to the authorities, and they searched the whole of Parliament and found Guy Fawkes with this dreadful plot, ready to blow up the whole of Parliament and all that were in it. But then November is the time when we also remember that glorious deliverance when William of Orange came over from Holland and delivered us a second time from the dreadful power of popery. And then next week we think of those two terrible wars.

So in a sense, we are in this today. We remember what the Lord has done. We remember we did not deserve it. England did not deserve it then. We realise the predicament we are in at present. We do not deserve deliverance, but the Lord is still merciful and He is still almighty. “Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.” This is a beautiful word. We have another one: “There the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” We have another one: “Thy God hath commanded thy strength.” He only needs to speak and it is done. But this word: deliverance. All through that reading in Joshua, all through that reading in Nehemiah – deliverances. The history of ancient Israel, the history of our country, coming closer, the history of our churches, and then we come to it personally. We long for it at Bethel; we long for it in our homes and families, our circumstances; we long for it in providence and in grace; we long for it in our own souls. “Command deliverances for Jacob.”

Well then, beloved friends, in these few words I have read to you this morning, we have a plea, and really the plea is this: the Lord does not deal with His people as they deserve; He deals with them in His mercy. “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” All the Lord’s dealings from first to last with His beloved people are because He has a favour unto them. It is a vital word; it is a vital principle. Also, it joins in with our recent thoughts, and that is that throughout the whole of Europe, the whole of the world last week, the Glorious Reformation [the 500th anniversary of Luther nailing his ninety-five theses on the church door at Wittenberg]. Why did it take place? Because the Lord had a favour unto us.

So really the plea is this: that salvation and all its blessings are on the grounds of grace. We have this word *favour* which comes so many times in the Old Testament – the Lord’s favour to His people. Now when you come to the New Testament, you do not find this word *favour* coming very much at all, but it is replaced by another word, and that word is *grace*. So really in all its fulness this little clause here, “Because Thou hadst a favour unto them,” is opened up in all its wonderful fulness in the Epistle to the Ephesians, the glories of free grace, the exceeding riches of God’s grace, God’s grace in the whole plan of salvation, the working out of salvation, the consummation of salvation, all the Lord’s dealings with His people.

“Because Thou hadst a favour unto them.” Well then, beloved friends, this morning let us start with it personally. Some of you at one time had not any real concern about your never-dying soul and eternity. You were drifting along. You were perhaps glad to come to chapel, but you did not really feel your need. If you had gone on as you were, you would have been lost eternally. Then something happened. You were awakened. You began to feel your need. You were concerned about your soul and your sins. You were concerned about eternity, how it would be in the last great day. What was the reason for it? It was not your decision. It was not that you woke up one day and decided to do it. It was the Lord. It was because the Lord had a favour unto you.

So there are many things this morning for us to be thankful for. And then when you began to pray, why did you begin to pray? Who taught you to pray? Who made a difference between you and others? Who made a difference between you and what you once were? It was because the Lord had a favour toward you. But you look back now and see so many answers to your prayers, answers in great things and in small things; answers in providence and answers in grace. Why is it that the Lord has answered your prayers? Because He had a favour towards you.

You come to the time when you were raised up to a sweet hope in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, resting on His name, His Person, His precious blood, that measure of deliverance, and you felt something of His salvation; you knew something of His love. What was the reason for it? You did not deserve it. You know you did not deserve it. It was because the Lord had a favour to you.

You can trace it all through your life. There was that time when your foot would have slipped. You look back. If you had been left to yourself, you would have made shipwreck of your faith. Where would you have been? Where would you have gone? Your weakness, your helplessness, the power of Satan, but you did not fall, you did not make shipwreck of your faith, and you are still here this morning on praying ground. You look back and there was only one reason: because the Lord had a favour towards you. If you had been left, you would have perished there in your sin.

You think of that sorrow, and the Lord helped you, upheld you, because He had a favour towards you. You think of how you have been

brought along day by day, “kept by the power of God.” You think of how all your needs have been richly supplied. You think how you have had strength given to you equal to your day. And this is the reason for it. In all these things from beginning to end, we have to say,

“Our seeking Thy face was all of Thy grace;
Thy mercy demands and shall have all the praise.
No sinner can be beforehand with Thee;
Thy grace is eternal, almighty, and free!”

That is it:

“To see how grace, free grace has reigned,
In every blessing He ordained.”

You come to it on the vital point in the Ephesians: “By grace are ye saved.” Now in the language of the psalmist here, it is because the Lord had a favour to you. That is what grace means. “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

“Because Thou hadst a favour unto them.” So that is starting right at the beginning with you and me personally, and thinking that is the only reason that we can ever be brought safely through at the end, because the Lord has a favour to us.

Now then, having got so far, let us go back to the everlasting covenant. We go back to eternity past, the Three-One God, yet this great God saw His creation, how it was going to be marred and ruined from the Fall, through sin, and the whole of humanity in that lost, perishing condition. Yet He had thoughts of mercy, and He entered into covenant with His beloved Son, and He planned salvation for a number that can never be numbered, the objects of His eternal choice. He gave them to His beloved Son to redeem them. The Son of God in mercy agreed, and there was salvation planned. Now why was it? We were not there; we did not exist. We were only foreseen as lost, ruined, guilty sinners deserving hell. Why did it happen? God could have left the whole of fallen humanity to perish in their sin. He did not, and this is the reason, even from everlasting: because the Lord had a favour unto them.

“Eternal wisdom drew the plan;
In all things ordered well.”

May we ever admire the Father's eternal choice, the wonderful plan of salvation, the covenant of grace.

But when you see it in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, you go to Bethlehem. Why did it happen? Why did the great God, the Creator of all things, why did He come down into this world of sin and sorrow? Why was He willing to become a real Man, to be born of a virgin, to be found in a manger, in a stable? Because He had a people He loved with an everlasting love, and because He had a favour to them.

O but you trace it out throughout His life. Why did He do this to poor Bartimaeus, and to Jairus, and the woman with the issue of blood, and the leper? Because He had a favour to them. They did not deserve it. Poor Bartimaeus did not think he deserved it. He cried for mercy, and when they tried to quieten him, he still cried for mercy, and the Lord showed it, because He had a favour to him. Especially when we think of what was taking place in the Garden of Gethsemane, those great drops of blood falling to the ground, and then the judgment hall, Golgotha. O the cruel scourging and mocking and spitting, the crown of thorns, the purple robe, and then that cruel cross! Across it all you can see this written – a multitude of fallen, wretched, ruined sinners and the Lord Jesus was willing to do this, gladly did this, willingly did this – because He had a favour towards them.

O the riches of God's mercy, God's grace! They always used to teach us when we were little: What is grace? It is God's unmerited, free favour to undeserving sinners. That is what we have here, God's unmerited, free favour to hell-deserving sinners. We deserve that wrath should have fallen on us, not on the dear Saviour. O but every wound, every groan, every drop of precious blood – because He had a favour toward them. It is a wonderful truth. It is a principle that runs through Scripture, but it is a principle that runs especially right through the gospel. It is the foundation of the gospel. Without it there would not be any gospel.

Well then, beloved friends, much of this morning has been looking back in wonder, in admiration, in thanksgiving. But then the present, looking forward. You and I are unworthy; we are sinful; we are guilty. But we long to be saved. We need it. We want to be forgiven. We want to be cleansed. We want to be prepared for heaven. How can it be, seeing I am so unworthy? It must be all of grace. The only ground on which we can ever receive any blessing is the free favour of God shown forth in Christ.

Now it is a great point, that mercy is free, that the gospel is free to the chief of sinners. It is one of the easiest things to say; it is one of the truths we have learnt since we were little; it is one of the hardest things really to enter into, that it is completely without anything we can do or deserve or think or feel. We have always got an old, legal sense: if only we could bring a soft heart, or a good prayer, or something. It must be entirely on the ground of God's free favour in Christ.

Now I could take you to the spot where that was revealed to me, and it was not in my first spiritual beginnings. It was really at the time when the Lord was taking me by the hand and showing me I had to preach. As you know, I was receiving invitations for a long time. I kept refusing them. I had a lot of reasons for it, but in all sincerity – I do not think this is mock humility or sanctimoniousness – I just did not feel fit to go in a pulpit. Well, I do not now. I said, "Lord, I am just not suitable; I am not fit; I am unworthy." I thought of all those dear, godly men who stood in the pulpit at Haslingden, and I thought I could not go in the pulpit at Haslingden. I was urging it before the Lord one day, and He was showing me I must preach, and I said, "I can't; I am unworthy." It was almost as if the Lord was smiling, and said, "Everything you are saying is true. You are not worthy; you are not fit. No minister was ever worthy; no minister was ever fit. It is not anything whatsoever to do with the point. It is entirely on the ground of grace." That was the first time I ever saw grace entirely in its fulness. It swept that obstacle away.

"Because Thou hadst a favour unto them." So you are praying for salvation. It must be on the ground of this grace. Or you are in a difficulty, a trouble at present, and trying to pray to the Lord, and Satan is telling you that you are not fit, you are not worthy, and your own heart is echoing: I am not fit; I am not worthy. And then to see this: that the Lord had a favour toward them, and He still has a favour to every poor, longing soul who feels his need and comes seeking mercy for Jesus' sake through the Redeemer's precious blood.

"Because Thou hadst a favour unto them." Two things I have on my spirit with which I will close. The first is the language of Ruth the Moabitess in Boaz' field, speaking to Boaz when he dealt so kindly with her. "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" Now that is it. Why me? Why me? It is, "Because Thou hadst a favour unto them."

And the second thing is this: the prayer – and it is a well-known prayer, but it is a good prayer, a suitable prayer, and it suits you each. It is this: “Remember me, O Lord, with the *favour* that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation.” What is it? The psalmist sees that the Lord has a people, and we see that, and he sees they are a favoured people, a blessed people. The Lord has a favour to them. Now the psalmist does not feel worthy of it, but the point is, he sees their blessedness. He wants a personal interest. Now that is some of you here this morning, I am persuaded, and that is why you have to come in, through mercy’s ground, through the blood of Christ, through grace alone: me, Lord. “Remember *me*, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit *me* with Thy salvation.”

“Because Thou hadst a favour unto them.”

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Now to the power of God supreme
Be everlasting honour given;
He saves from hell (we bless His name),
He calls our wandering feet to heaven.

Not for our duties or deserts,
But of His own abounding grace,
He works salvation in our hearts,
And forms a people for His praise.

’Twas His own purpose that began
To rescue rebels doomed to die;
He gave us grace in Christ His Son,
Before He spread the starry sky.

Jesus the Lord appears at last,
And makes His Father’s counsels known;
Declares the great transactions past,
And brings immortal blessings down.

He dies! and in that dreadful night
Did all the powers of hell destroy.
Rising, He brought our heaven to light,
And took possession of the joy.

I. Watts