

Bethel

Pulpit

Looking Back: Looking Forward

Sermon Number 480

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 4th October, 2018**

Text: *“Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation” (Psalm 27. 9).*

This little word *help* is an important word and it is a real gospel word in the gospel vocabulary. It is a word which means something, which means everything, to *all* God’s people, because some need one thing and some another, but we *all* need this help. It is divine help. It is almighty help. It is suitable help.

In this verse I have read to you, it says, *“My help.”* Really, this is a little testimony. “Lord” – it is spoken to Almighty God Himself – “Lord ... Thou hast been my help.” This is one thing which all God’s people can say. I trust most of you here this evening can say that the Lord has been your help. I trust you younger ones at school have to ask the Lord to help you, and you find that He does. But whatever stage God’s people are at, it is this help that they need, help they pray for, and help they receive.

Now sometimes this word *help* is in the great sense of being “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” Value providential help, thank the Lord for it, testify that the Lord has been your help, but do not be satisfied short of that great salvation, purposed by the eternal Father and wonderfully obtained in the sufferings, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, and made known, revealed, applied by the Holy Spirit.

But it is a good testimony: *“Thou hast been my help.”* There is a looking back. One of our hymnwriters says, “Sweet to look back.” Sometimes when you feel you cannot really look up, and you are certainly afraid of looking forward, and you find you are looking down, it is quite a blessed thing if you can look back, if you can remember those spots and places. Perhaps some of you had a deep sorrow, but you were not left to sink; the Lord helped you. Or you remember a bereavement, someone you really loved. You wondered how you could carry on, and the Lord helped you. There have been times when you have had to pray. You have been in

trouble, and the Lord has answered, and He has helped you. Sometimes it is a lonely way, but the Lord helps you along and helps you through. There is so much in this word. But there is the greatest blessing in everlasting salvation. In one place there is that quaintly-written word: “Holpen with a little help.” So do not despise a little help.

So there is this looking back. May the Lord help us to look back to what He has done for us, what He has been to us, especially if led by the Spirit, thinking of the cross of Christ, especially thinking of the place where we were first raised up to a hope in the Lord’s mercy. But thinking of those deliverances, those answers to our prayers, and to be able to say it before the Lord: “Lord ... Thou hast been my help.” I cannot deny it. “Thou hast been my help.” So may there be the point of setting up Ebenezers, gathering stones together, setting up waymarks, raising high heaps.

Philpot writes very beautifully on this: those waymarks – those great pillars almost like a memorial or cenotaph of some special help that stands out; but the high heaps, just made up of little stones, a few pebbles – those little helps by the way. But Philpot said in some countries these high heaps rise even higher than the waymarks. Do not forget that hymn, and as enabled by the Sprit of God, to “Count your many blessings, count them one by one,” and in your soul there will be the raising of that Ebenezer.

“Lord ... Thou hast been my help.” And then this point of gratitude. Do not “let His mercies lie forgotten in unthankfulness.” Wasn’t it Tiptaft who said that the Lord is so pleased with gratitude because He gets so little of it, even from His own people! It is to speak this word in gratitude, to speak it in prayer, but with thanksgiving. We have so many mercies. The point is, we think of how unworthy we are. We are “not worthy of the least of all the mercies.” And then this point of divine help. We think of our utter helplessness, spiritually and in so many things in our little lives. “I was brought low, and He helped me.” There are so many things. Lord, Thou art the great God, the Creator of all things. Unworthy me, in Thy mercy not forgotten, not passed by – the wonder of it. “Lord ... Thou hast been my help,” and I bless Thee for it.

As usual, I was tried concerning what the reading should be. So I read you the well-known passage in the Old Testament and the well-known

passage in the New Testament concerning divine help. From the Old Testament (1 Samuel 7): Samuel at Mizpeh when the Lord had answered his prayers, when the Lord had overthrown the Philistines, when the Lord had graciously delivered the Israelites, and Samuel set up that stone between Mizpeh and Shen, saying, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” That was despite Israel’s great sin. “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” It is a wonderful mercy if you and I this evening have a *hitherto*.

And then I read to you from the New Testament (Acts 26): the Apostle Paul’s witness and testimony before Agrippa. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day.” The point surely is this: it is *only* as having obtained the help of God that we ever can continue. If the Lord had not helped us, we should not be here; we should not continue. But if any of you have anything before you – how can I continue? How can I go on? It is only as you obtain help, and the only place where you can obtain help is from Almighty God in the riches of His grace.

“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day.” “Lord ... Thou hast been my help.” Sometimes you find things, and Satan tries you concerning all kinds of things – concerning your experience, your soul’s standing – and sometimes there is something you can just lay hold of. For instance, you have one in the preceding chapter: “Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.” Sometimes when we have very little else, we can lay hold of that: “Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.” I remember when I was young, I was sorely tried. It was really through someone talking to me and hurling question after question at me, and I went home with no religion left. And then this:

“Could I joy His saints to meet,
Choose the ways I once abhorred,
Find at times the promise sweet,
If I did not love the Lord?”

Sometimes it is a little thing you can lay hold of. Mind you, the great thing – if enabled to take the sinner’s safe and sure retreat, and flee for refuge to the hope set before you in Christ and Him crucified. But these little things. Sometimes you may be tried. You cannot say much, you do not think you

have much, but it bursts out of your heart: This is one thing I know: “Lord ... Thou hast been my help.”

Trying to ponder this subject, there are so many of these texts in Scripture which came upon my mind, perhaps disconnected, perhaps irrelevant, but, “I have laid help upon One that is mighty” – the eternal Father speaking of His beloved Son. He has laid all the help of all His people there. Another one: “There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help,” which means there is no impediment in the way, and there is nothing can stop Him. Another one: “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.”

“Thou hast been my help.” Now this text has a two-fold division. One is looking back; one is looking forward. “Lord ... Thou hast been my help” – in time past, looking back. Now I have today, and I have tomorrow, and I have the coming days. “Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” O what a pouring out of a sinner’s heart there is there! It really means, “Lord ... Thou hast been my help,” but do not leave me now. Still help me, I pray, because unless Thou dost help me, I cannot continue; I cannot endure to the end.

“Lord ... Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” The wonderful thing: this is real prayer. Sometimes it is urgent prayer, but it is prayer to a God who has graciously promised He never will leave, He never will forsake His people. It is perhaps an unusual expression. Do you ever ponder these Scriptures and the little pieces in them? When the Lord promises, He says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” But there is something beautiful in it. A loving mother would never forsake her little child, but sometimes it is necessary for her to leave him for a little while. Now the Lord will never forsake His people, but He will never even leave them.

So there is that very beautiful Scripture – I felt it strongly once – “Be content with such things as ye have: for *He hath said*” – I cannot tell you the power of those three words: “*He hath said*.” That is the faithfulness of God. That is the authority. “*He hath said*, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” I remember Mr. J.H. Gosden wrote to me once and he said, “I do feel pleased that the Lord gave you that word, because be sure

you will need it.” The wonderful point is, it is that word *never*. It touches today, tomorrow, and it touches all our future days to all eternity. But this is the prayer for it, a sinner who feels it so necessary. “Leave me not,” Lord. If Thou dost leave me, what shall happen to me? It is especially a cry in the time of trouble, difficulty, sorrow, perplexity. O Lord, “leave me not.”

We are not told when this Psalm was written. We are told that David wrote it. But one thing that comes out clearly: he is in trouble. Another thing: he is separated from the house of God. Another thing: he has enemies to face. Another thing: he is being slandered. It all points to that time when Doeg so dreadfully accused him and caused the slaughter of all those priests, which distressed David greatly. Lord, “leave me not” in this. “Leave me not” to sink in it. “Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” But in the New Testament quotation it does not end there. “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

“Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” Now let us be clear, beloved friends. It is not just a looking back and a looking forward. There is an intimate connection between the two. Really it is the sum and substance of what we have in that beautiful, well-known Scripture: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” Yesterday, “Thou hast been my help.” Today, and tomorrow, and for ever, “leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.”

So with David there is a kind of gracious argument here. It is almost as if David is saying, Lord, I know Thou hast helped me in the past; I cannot deny it. But now things are not easy, things are difficult. But surely, Lord, after what Thou hast been to me, Thou canst not leave me now. If Thou didst hear my prayer and answer it in Thy mercy, unworthy as I was, Thou canst not forsake me now. There is a kind of gracious reasoning there. What the Lord has been, He ever will be to His people. What He has been for them in time past, He will not fail to be now. If they have known His presence in the time of need, then they will know His presence in the time of need now. If the Lord helped in that trial, He will not fail to help in another trial now – in seven troubles and even in eight.

“Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” Now there is another little word in the sixty-third Psalm: “Because Thou hast been my help” – it is David looking back again – “therefore in the shadow of Thy wings” – it comes as a little bit of a shock. You would think it would say, Therefore in the shadow of Thy wings I will hide, or, In the shadow of Thy wings I will make my refuge, and that is true, but David says, “In the shadow of Thy wings will I *rejoice*.” Why? Because he felt secure there; because he felt nothing could harm him there; because he felt he could find true happiness there.

“Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” Now prayers like this and reasoning like this are just the opposite of what we would do naturally. If a person has been kind to you, you would be a little bit fearful of saying, You have always helped me, so I beg you to help me again. It is because a person has helped you so much, you cannot really expect him to help you yet another time. Often you find that. If you read John Kershaw’s beautiful autobiography, it used to be a bit hard, but sometimes he was in trouble, and would go to one or two of his wealthy friends who had always helped him, and they said, “Sorry, not this time.” Mind you, he felt that was to throw him back on his God. But the Lord will never say to a sinner, I helped you yesterday, and you are sinful and undeserving, but not again this time. There is mercy here from first to last.

“Thou hast been my help.” Because of this, because Thou hast been my help, because of what Thou hast done in the past, surely, Lord, Thou canst not leave me now.

“His love in time past forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.”

“Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me.” Perhaps this word at the end troubles you a bit: “O God of my salvation.” Well, He is the God of His people’s salvation, but they do not always feel the full, sweet assurance of it. But there is this: if the Lord has been your help in the past, graciously, that is in a way of salvation, He must be the God

of your salvation. But I think there are some of you here this evening, and you have had a little help here and there, a few helps, and as you are pleading for the Lord to help, you think the greatest blessing and the greatest help would be if He assures you personally, in your unworthiness as a sinner, that He *is* the God of your salvation. Perhaps you can pray that prayer: “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.”

“Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.” Just to close, I am going to quote two verses which will be in our closing hymn. Shall I call them the gospel preacher’s earnest prayer when the second hymn is being sung?

“Thou hast helped in every need;
This emboldens me to plead;
After so much mercy past,
Canst Thou let me sink at last?

“No; I must maintain my hold;
'Tis Thy goodness makes me bold;
I can no denial take,
When I plead for Jesus’ sake.”

“Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.”

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Lord, I cannot let Thee go,
Till a blessing Thou bestow;
Do not turn away Thy face;
Mine’s an urgent, pressing case.

Dost Thou ask me who I am?
Ah, my Lord, Thou know’st my name;
Yet the question gives a plea,
To support my suit with Thee.

Thou didst once a wretch behold,
In rebellion blindly bold;

Scorn Thy grace; Thy power defy;
That poor rebel, Lord, was I.

Once a sinner near despair
Sought Thy mercy-seat by prayer;
Mercy heard and set him free;
Lord, that mercy came to me.

Many days have passed since then;
Many changes I have seen;
Yet have been upheld till now;
Who could hold me up but Thou?

Thou hast helped in every need;
This emboldens me to plead;
After so much mercy past,
Canst Thou let me sink at last?

No; I must maintain my hold;
'Tis Thy goodness makes me bold;
I can no denial take,
When I plead for Jesus' sake.

J. Newton

This sermon, number 480, marks forty years of distributing the monthly Bethel Pulpit sermons, and we acknowledge the Lord's goodness and help as we look back over this time.