

THE GOD OF BETHEL

NO. 1267

A SERMON

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“I am the God of Bethel.”

Genesis 31:13.

JACOB had been sent away to Padan-aram and he might, perhaps, have stopped there if things had been quite as he wished. As it was, he stayed there quite long enough. He seemed almost to forget his father's house in the cares that his wives and children and the anxious oversight of his constantly increasing flocks involved. But God did not mean him to remain at Padan-aram. He was to lead a separated life in Canaan and therefore things grew very uncomfortable with Laban. He was not a nice man to live with at any time, but he began to show his crochets and his heart-burnings, and a good deal of that scheming spirit of which there was a little in Jacob. It came to him from his mother, who was Laban's true sister, and had her share of the family failing. So there were endless bickerings, bargainings, and disputes, and overreaching the one of the other—till at last, as God would have it, Jacob could bear it no longer. So he resolved to take leave of that land and return to the land of his kindred. An angel appeared to him then to comfort him in going back to his father's house. The angel spoke in the name of the Lord and said, “I am the God of Bethel,” which must have at once suggested to Jacob *that the Lord had not changed*, more especially in regard to him. The occurrence at Bethel was the first special occasion probably upon which he had known the Lord and though many years had passed, God comes to him as the same God as He was before. “I am the God of Bethel.” You remember, some of you, perhaps the first time when pardoning love was revealed to you—when you were brought to see the love of God in the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Well, tonight, the Lord says to you, “I am the same God as you have ever found Me. I have not changed. I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed, even as your father Jacob was not consumed, for I was even to him the same God. Brethren, what a mercy it is that we have an immutable God. Everything else changes. Yon moon, which but a little while ago was full, you see now young and new again and soon she will fill her horns. Everything beneath her beams changes like herself. We are never at one stage and our circumstances are perpetually varying. But You, O God, are the same and of Your years there is no end. Your creatures are a sea, but You are the *terra firma* and when our soul comes to rest on You, Rock of Ages, then we know what stability means and for the first time we enjoy true rest. Trust in the Lord forever and rest in the Lord alone, for He changes not.

“I AM THE GOD OF BETHEL. Does not that mean, first, *that our God is the God of our early mercies*? As we have already said, Bethel was to Jacob the place of early mercy. Let us look back upon our early mercies. Did they not come to us, as they did to him, unsought and unexpected and when, perhaps, we were unprepared for them? I do not know what were Jacob's feelings when he lay down with a stone for his pillow, but I feel very sure that he never reckoned that the place would be the house of God to him. His exclamation showed this when he said, “Surely, God is in this place, and I knew it not!” It was the last thing on his mind that, amidst those stones, the Lord would set up a ladder for him and would speak from the top of it to his soul. So, dear friends, with some of us, when God appeared to us, it was in a very unexpected manner. Perhaps we were not looking for Him, but in us was fulfilled that memorable word, “I am found of them that sought Me not.” We, like Jacob, were glad to meet Him, but we had not expected that He would come, or come in so divine a manner, with such fullness of covenant manifestation and such richness of grace. But He took our soul before we were aware and carried us right away from ourselves. We, perhaps, like Jacob, were sleeping. God was awake. This was the mercy. And He came to us while yet our heart slept and our mind had not felt awakened towards Himself. We seemed slumbering with regard to divine things, but as a dream in the visions of the night, so God came to us. He found us sleeping, but nevertheless He manifested Himself to us as He does not unto the world. Do

you remember all that? Then the God you have to look to is the God of that unexpected grace. Do you need grace tonight? Why should you not have it? Are you unfit for it? Do you feel more and more how undeserving you are of it? Yet it came to you before, when you were in just such a state. Why shouldn't it come again? Sitting in this house of prayer, why should not we again be startled and be made to say, "Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not. I did not think, when I came within these walls that here He would, in such a special manner, reveal Himself to me. But now I shall always think of the seat in which I sat, and say, 'How dreadful is this place! It is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven.'" The God of unexpected manifestations in your early days is still the same God.

Perhaps, dear friends, some of you can look back upon those early manifestations as having taken place when you were in a very sad and lonely condition. Jacob was alone. He was a man that loved society. There are many signs of that. Perhaps, for the first time in his life, he was then out of the shelter of his tent and away from the familiar voices of his beloved father and mother. He had always been his mother's son. Something about him had always attracted her. But now, no one was within call. He might, perhaps, have heard the roar of the wild beast, but no familiar voice of a friend was anywhere near. It was a very lonely night to him. Some of us remember the first night we were away from home—how dreary we felt as children. The same kind of homesickness will come over men and women and they say to themselves, "Now, at last, I have got out of the range in which I have been accustomed to go, and I have got away from the dear familiar faces that made life so happy to me." Yes, but it was just then that God appeared to him and have not you found it so? Amid darkest shades, Christ appears to you. Have not you had times of real desolation of spirit from one cause or another in which the Lord has seemed more sweet to you than ever He was before? When all created streams have run dry, the everlasting fount has bubbled up with more sweet and cooling streams than it ever did at any other time. Well, recollect all those scenes and the accompanying circumstances which made them seem so cheering, and then say, "This God, even the God of Bethel, is still my God. And if I am at present in trouble, if I am as lonely now as I was then, if I am brought so low that literally I have nothing but a doorstep for my pillow, if I should lose job, home, and friends, and be left like an orphan among the wild winds, with none to shelter me, yet O God of Bethel, You who were the cover of my head and the protector of my spirit, will still be with me, the God of those early visitations in times of my dark distress." Thus the God of Bethel by that visit cheered Jacob's heart. I can hardly suppose that there was an individual more unhappily circumstanced that night than Jacob was. But I question whether ever any individual in tent or palace woke up so happy in the morning as the patriarch did. Oh, it was a night that might make us wish to lie beneath the same dews and look up to the same heaven, if we might see the same vision. We would put from us the downy pillow, the luxurious curtains, and the comfortable well-furnished chambers and say, "Give us, oh, give us, Lord, if so it might please You, that same desert place, if we might but see You and hear Your voice, as Jacob did of old." Oh, how strong he was to pursue his journey after he poured that oil on the top of the stone. I guarantee you he went many an extra mile that day in the strength of that night's sleep. Now he could refrain from pining after his kindred and his father's house. Now he could keep his face constantly towards Bethuel's home, where his father had sent him, for the God of his fathers had said, "I am with you in all places where you go, and I will bring you back again unto this place." Now, do you not remember how you were strengthened and comforted in like manner? Have not you sung—

*"Midst darkest shades, if He appears,
My dawning is begun.
He is my soul's bright morning star,
And He my rising sun."*

Have not you found Him all that you needed and more than you expected? Has not grace for grace been given and strength equal to your day because the Lord appeared of old unto you? Brethren, the presence of God puts the iron shoes on the feet of the weary traveler—no, it makes his feet like hinds' feet, so that he stands on high places. And while he pours out the oil of gratitude, God pours upon him the oil of joy and puts away his mourning. So the pilgrim foots it merrily over the rough way until he gets to the place where he is told to go. The God of Bethel, then, is the God of early visits unexpected, given when much needed and yielding just what was needed of peace to the soul.

“I AM THE GOD OF BETHEL.” This title conveys a fresh lesson. Does it not mean, the *God of our Lord Jesus Christ*? What is “Beth-el” but “the house of God”? Brethren, I hear that term constantly applied to your buildings that are made with stone or iron, with brick and mortar, or with lath and plaster or whatever it may be. Every little conventicle that is put up and every huge cathedral that is built, be it a building with lowly porch or lofty spire, is called the house of God. Well, did you never read where it is said, “God that made heaven and earth dwells not in temples made with hands, that is to say, of this building”? Have you never read that magnificent sentence of Solomon at the consecration of the temple, “Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house which I have built”? Do you think, then, that He will dwell in any of these classic buildings, be they of Greek, or Gothic, or Norman, or mediaeval architecture? Oh, sirs, God is great and greatly to be praised as much outside as inside of your petty structures. He is everywhere. He fills all things. And God’s house is not a place that you can build for Him, artistic as your tastes may be. Your memorial windows are not His remembrancers. They may charm you, they cannot please Him. But there is a place where God always dwells. What habitation has He prepared for Himself and what tabernacle has He built? There is one abode mysteriously fashioned. We speak of its strange conception and its matchless purity of architecture. It was the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. “A body have you prepared Me.” And the house of God, the true Bethel, is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, for, “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” For, “The Word was made flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The house of God is first, the person of Christ, and then the church of God, which is the body of Christ mystically. This is the house and the household of God, even the church of the living God.

Not now to insist upon that meaning of the word Bethel, or on Him who came to Bethlehem, and there was born the very house of the divine indwelling, I will rather muse upon that vision which made God, especially to Jacob that night, the God of the Savior. He saw the ladder, the foot of which was on earth and the top reached to heaven—a ladder which can never be explained in any other way than as a figure of that same Christ who came down from heaven, who also is in heaven, by whom we must ascend to heaven and through whom heaven’s blessings come down to us.

The God of Bethel is a God who concerns Himself with the things of earth, not a God who shuts Himself up in heaven. The God of Bethel is a God who has a ladder fixed between heaven and earth. The God of most men—the God of the unregenerate—is an inanimate God, or if alive and able to see, he is an unfeeling God, careless about them and their personal interests. “Oh, it is preposterous,” they say, “to think that he takes notice of our sorrows and troubles—and still more absurd to suppose that he hears prayer, or that he ever interferes in answer to the voice of supplication, to grant a poor man his requests. It cannot be.” That is their God, you see. That is the God of the heathen—a dead, blind, dumb God. I do not wonder that they do not pray to him. They could not expect an answer. But the God of grace is one who has opened a communication between heaven and earth. He notices the cries of His children, puts their tears into His bottle, sympathizes with their sorrows, looks down on them with an eye of pity and a father’s love. He has communion with them and permits them to have communion with Him, and all that through the blessed person of the Lord Jesus Christ. See where the foot of this ladder rests on earth, for He lies in the manger at Bethlehem as a babe. He lives on earth the life of a common laborer, wearing the smock frock of toil. He dies upon the accursed tree a felon’s death that He may be like man even in bearing the image of death upon His face. This is where the ladder stands, in the miry clay of manhood. But see where it rises, for He is equal with God, co-equal, equal in power, wisdom, dignity, and holiness, and every glorious attribute, very God of very God, before whom angels bow. The bottom of the ladder comes down to man, but the top of it reaches right up to God, in all the glory of the mysterious Godhead. Thus, you see there is a link between the two. And the God whom we worship does hold fellowship with us and remains no silent spectator of our griefs. Up that ladder angels ascend and our prayers ascend—our praises, our tears, our sighs. Jesus teaches them the way. And there is a traffic downwards too, for blessings come both rich and rare by the way of the Mediator. We shall never be able to count them. How great is the sum of them! What traffic there is on the rungs of that ladder! Upwards, O my soul, send your messengers a thousand times a day. But downwards God’s messengers are continually coming—mercies, favors, altogether as innumerable as the sands that are upon the seashore, and all

coming down that ladder. There is a way of judgement which the swift-winged angel takes without a ladder, but the way of mercy always needs that staircase of light. No mercy or favor comes to us except through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom we deal with God and God deals with us.

That way in Jacob's dream, you will notice, was eminently a way commended to him, for the foot of the ladder was where Jacob lay and the top of it was where God was. Have we realized this? Do you know God, my brethren, as One with whom *you* can speak—with whom *you* can speak yourself—as real to you as your husband, your father, your friend? Are you in the habit of keeping up constant communication with your God? If you are, you know the God of Bethel. If you are not, I pray that the God of Bethel may reveal Himself to you. You could not have had fellowship with God if there had been no Christ. Without the ladder, how could there be a connection between Jacob and God? But with the ladder, even Jesus Christ, the way is open, open always, open now. Oh, it has been open many and many a time. We have resorted to it and never found it closed. We have cried to Him in deep distress, but the way upwards has been open when all surrounding ways were shut. We have needed mercy and mercy has come when we thought that mercy could not possibly reach us. Yet it came downwards when it could not have come in any other way. And it is just the same tonight. Oh, use the ladder. Use it well. Dart your desires upwards now. They shall tread those rungs. Your thanks, your petitions, your confessions—send them up. They are welcome. The ladder is made on purpose for the traffic. Use it now, and as you use it, bless the God of Bethel with all your heart.

Still further, let us remember that this God of Bethel is *the God of angels*. We do not often say much about those mysterious beings, for it is but little that we know of them. This, however, we know—that angels are set by God to be the *watchers* over His people. Jacob was asleep, but the angels were wide awake. They were going up and down that ladder while Jacob was lying there, steeped in slumber. So when you and I are sleeping, when the blessed God has put His finger on our eyelids and said, "Lie still, My child, and be refreshed," there may be no policeman at the door, no bodyguard to prevent intrusion, but there are angels always watching over us. We shall not come to harm if we put our trust in God. "I will lay me down to sleep, for You make me to dwell in safety." These angels were also *messengers*. "Are they not all ministering spirits?" And are they not sent with messages from God? To Jacob they had their errand. On more than one occasion, angels bore him messages from the Most High. How far or how often they bring us messages now I cannot tell. Sometimes thoughts drop into the soul that do not reach us in the regular connection of our thoughts. We scarcely know how to account for them. It may be they are due to the immediate action of the blessed Spirit, but they may, for all we know, be brought by some other spirit, pure and heavenly, sent to suggest those thoughts to our soul. We cannot tell. The angels are watchers, certainly, and they are messengers without a doubt. Moreover, they are our *protectors*. God employs them to bear us up in their hands, lest at any time we dash our foot against a stone. We do not see them, but unseen agencies are probably the strongest agencies in the world. We know it is so in physics. Such agencies as electricity, which we cannot perceive, are, nevertheless, unquestionably powerful and when put forth in their strength, quite beyond the control of man. No doubt myriads of spiritual creatures walk this earth, both when we sleep and when we wake. How much of good they do us, it is impossible for us to tell. But this we do know—they are "sent forth to minister to them that are heirs of salvation," and they are, in God's hands, the means oftentimes of warding off from us a thousand ills which we know not of. Therefore we cannot thank God that we are kept from them, except we do so by thanking Him, as I think we ought to do more often, for those unknown mercies which are none the less precious because we have not the sense to be able to perceive them. Perhaps in mid-air at this moment, there may be battles between the bright spirits of God and the spirits of evil. Perhaps full often when Satan might tempt, there come against him a mighty squadron of cherubim and seraphim to drive him back. And those strange battles of which Milton sings in his wondrous epic may not be all a dream. We cannot tell. We know they dispute—the good angels dispute with the wicked and contend. We know that they are mighty in battle and strong on behalf of God's people. Anyhow, this is true—Omnipotence has many servants and some of those least seen are the strongest it employs. If there is an angel anywhere, my friend, he is your friend if you are God's friend. If there is in heaven or earth any bright intelligence flying swiftly at this moment, he flies upon no errand of harm to you. You can be sure of that. Occasionally I meet with very foolish people who believe in things which are unrevealed, in things su-

perstitious and baseless fancies. Oftentimes they are not a little frightened about I scarcely know what—about enchantments, divinations, or sorceries. There is such a credulity that still survives among the extremely ignorant. But whenever I have heard such observations, I have always thought of that wonderful text in the Book of Numbers, “Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel.” There can be no spiritual powers which you or I have any need to fear. I remember hearing a good brother speak about courage against the devil, and in reference to spiritual power he said that he believed that a man of God when he had faith could kick his way through a street full of devils from one end to the other. I admired his simile. It was worthy of Martin Luther, for it was the kind of thing that Martin Luther would have said. Oh, if the air were as full of devils as it is of fogs, a man that has God within him might laugh them all to scorn. Who can hurt the man whom God protects? Unseen powers and terrible they may be, but they cannot injure us, for there are other unseen powers more terrible still—the hosts of that Lord who is mighty in battle—and all these are sworn to protect the children of God. “You have given commandment to save me,” says David, and if God has charged His angels to protect and save His people from all harm, depend upon it, His people are secure.

Moreover, *the God of Bethel is the God of Providence*. That He is the God of Providence and that He revealed Himself as such, is very clear, for He told Jacob, “Behold I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you go, and will bring you again to this land, for I will not leave you till I have done that which I have spoken to you.” So He gave Jacob a promise that he should have bread to eat and raiment to put on—and should come again to that place in peace. Christian, your God is the God of Providence. He is the God of Bethel. Doddridge’s hymn, which we sang just now, thus celebrates His praise—

*“O God of Bethel, by whose hand
Your people still are fed;
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Have all our fathers led.”*

Let us think of it, brethren—God is with His people in all places wherever they go. On the land or on the sea, by day or by night, you never can be where God is not. It is impossible for you to journey out of your Father’s dominions. You may live in a mansion or a hovel and yet still be in His house, for His house is of vast dimensions. “In My Father’s house are many mansions.” You may dwell here or there and still be in the great house of the heavenly Father.

And He is with you to provide you with all necessary things. Has not it been so until now? You may have had some very hard pinches. Perhaps you have partaken the bitter fare of widowhood. Your children may have cried about your knee for daily bread. Perhaps you have been very poor and the supply you have received has been scant. Still you are alive. Your food has been given you and your waters have been sure. Your garments are worn, but not quite worn out. Your shoes about you scarcely defend you from the damp, but still you are not altogether unshod. Until this time the Lord has helped you. Jehovah-Jireh has been your song. The Lord has provided. He whom Jacob worshipped as the God of Bethel has been the God of Bethel till now. Can you not trust Him? The little birds in the winter morning sit on the bare branches and sing when the snow covers all the ground—and they cannot tell where their breakfast will come from. They do the first duty—they sing—and they sing before they have had their breakfast. And God somehow provides for them. Seldom do you pick up a dead sparrow. For the most part, the birds of heaven are fed. Perhaps you would like to live in a cage and be fed regularly and have a pension. I believe that more of those birds die that are taken care of as pets by men and women than of those that are taken care of by God. So it is better for you to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. He has not let you starve, nor will He, even to your journey’s end. Take this from His own mouth. “Trust in the Lord and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and *verily* you shall be fed.” There is God’s “*verily*” for it. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but that “*verily*” shall never fail.

He promised Jacob, too, that he should have a seed and posterity. It did not look like it as Jacob lay there, but yet He proved its verity before Jacob came back. Why, when he returned he had some 12 children about him. There was a God of Bethel! He had, indeed, granted him the desire of his heart. As the good man said a little while after, “With my staff I crossed this Jordan and now have I become two bands.” Ah, Jacob! He promised to provide for you. Look at the troop of children. “Yes,” but Jacob

might have said, "That is part of the burden." No, then, but listen to the bleating of those sheep. Listen to the lowing of the cattle. What do they mean, Jacob? "That is the provision that God has given me in the land of exile." Ah, and you have, most of you, got far more than you ever reckoned upon. You have, some of you, to thank God, indeed, for what He has done for you in providential things, and even those that have least have got more than they deserve. Let them remember that and however poor we may be, we shall never be as poor as we were when we were born. We brought nothing into this world. Come as low as we may, we shall have enough to float us into heaven, depend upon that—just enough manna to last until we get across Jordan and then we shall eat of the old corn of the land that flows with milk and honey.

But God had also promised Jacob that he would bring him back to that place again. And that was another engagement of providence—that he was to go there and be brought back again—and by this should it be known that He was the God of Bethel. Now this really looked, at one time, very unlikely. Seven years he had to serve for Rachel and then got Leah instead, so there were seven more years to serve for Rachel. Then there came one year during which he had to be after the spotted sheep, and then another after the ring-streaked, and so on. So it did not look as if he should ever get away from Mesopotamia at all. But God had said that He would bring him back there in peace. Would He do it? Yes, He would drive him out of Laban's house somehow, for return to his fatherland he must. Yet as soon as he gets out of Laban's house, Laban is after him in hot haste. I do not know what Laban was not going to do—something very horrible, indeed—slay the father and mother with the children? But by the time that he gets close up to Jacob he cannot help himself, his heart is changed. He wants to kiss his daughters and his grandchildren and he has not got any thought of anger in him. God had warned him in a dream not to speak to Jacob either good or bad. So Laban tells Jacob that he is very sorry that he did not know that he was going, for he would have sent him out with mirth and with songs, with music and with harp. Though the truth is, he would not have let him go at all. But God knew how to manage Laban, though Jacob did not. And when Jacob left Laban's land, Jacob had dwelt there long enough and he was never to pass into it again, for they had left a heap of stones and that reminded them that neither of them was to go over those stones to hurt one another. And they said, "The Lord watch between us when we are absent from one another." And they did not interfere with one another any more.

There are many things in providence that God will bring to pass in a very mysterious way. He uses trial and trouble full often to compass His wise designs. It is not the winds that blow directly towards the harbor that are always the best for ships. They speed better with cross winds sometimes, as you might think them not altogether favorable, as some would imagine, because they have a little touch of another quarter in them. And so it appears to me that the best wind to take a man to heaven is not the wind that blows due heavenward all the time, as he fondly wishes, but a cross wind that gives you a little chop of sea now and then and makes you feel the stress of anxiety and adversity. The thing a man wishes for his own welfare is not always the most desirable. Full often the deluge we dreaded has brought us a blessing we had not expected. Some sad reverse has issued in a glad result. We had better leave it with God to order all our affairs. Brethren, God manages providence. You may rest assured of that. He stands in the chariot and holds the reins. Though the steeds are furious, He holds them in with bit and bridle. Nothing happens but what God ordains or permits. Nothing, however terrible it may seem, can thwart His everlasting purposes of mercy, or turn aside one of His dear children from the eternal inheritance to which He has appointed them all. Rest in the Lord, for the Lord lives, and the Lord reigns. Stay yourselves upon Him. Nothing can hurt you. Make Him your refuge and you shall find a most secure abode and rejoice in the God of Bethel, who is God of providence.

Next to this, the God of Bethel is *the God of the promises*. What a many promises He made that night to Jacob! Yet He kept them all. So the God of Bethel is to you and to me the God of promises.

The everlasting covenant was confirmed to Jacob—"I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac." That meant that He was the God of the covenant. And the God with whom you and I have to deal is a God who may do as He wills. He is an absolute sovereign, but He never can do anything but what is right. Nevertheless, He has bound Himself—to speak with reverence—with bonds and pledges to us in the person of Jesus Christ, saying, "Surely, blessing, I will bless you." There is a covenant entered into on our behalf by the Lord Jesus with the Father. It brings to us unnumbered blessings,

assuredly and certainly, for God cannot lie and He has given us two immutable pledges that we may have strong consolation and never doubt His faithfulness. Beloved, the God of the promises has appointed your lot and heritage and you shall stand in it at the end of the days. The God of the promises has appeared to you in Jesus Christ and to you also has He sworn an oath, therefore you also may rest in the blood of Jesus, which makes the covenant sure. He has promised never to leave His people. “I will not leave you,” He says to Jacob—and He says the same to you. He has promised that He will never forget to give what He has declared He will give. “I will not leave you till I have done that which I have spoken of to you.” Oh, blessed Word! I feel as if my mouth were closed, and words failed me. The divine utterance itself is so rich, so full of marrow and fatness, that to talk about it seems like gilding gold, or adding whiteness to the lily’s beauty. Only take it home. May the Spirit of God apply it. The God that changes not has made all the promises, yes and amen, in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us, and every one of His promises made to believers shall stand fast and firm, though earth’s old columns bow—“Though heaven and earth shall pass away, neither jot nor tittle of His Word shall fail.”

But time fails me. I must leave this inspiring meditation just to notice, once more, that the God of Bethel is *the God of our vows*. Do not forget this, for it is the practical part—the God of Bethel is the God of our vows. You remember, brethren, Jacob vowed that God should be his God. You remember when you made a similar vow?—

*“Oh, happy day that fixed my choice
On You, my Savior and my God.
Well may this glowing heart rejoice
And tell its rapture all abroad.
High heaven that heard that solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till in life’s latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”*

God who gave Himself to us has led us to give ourselves to Him. Now we are not our own, for we are bought with a price; looking up from the inmost recesses of our sincere hearts we can say, “My God, my Father, You are mine forever and forever.” And then Jacob, having made that vow, said—“This stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God’s house.” In the fresh gratitude of his heart, he made a solemn dedication to the Lord. And have you not said something like it? Did you not give your house to God when you gave yourself to Him? Have you not given God not only one place to be a Bethel, but have not you asked Him to make your whole life and every place where you are a Bethel to His name? So it should be, and I trust so it is, for this is true Christianity—not to account this place or that edifice holy, but to make every place, be it your kitchen or your parlor, your bedchamber or your workshop, holy—and the pots and the pans, the implements of your daily calling all holy before the Lord. Is that your vow? Let it be your daily desire that that vow should be fulfilled—be resolved to live for God, for God ready to die, if need be—never doing anything but what you can ask His blessing. And whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. And doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus, give thanks to God and the Father by Him. This should be true.

The other thing that Jacob promised was that he would give a tenth unto the Lord. I do not know whether any of you have made any vow of that kind. I suppose there are few Christians who have not, at some time or other, made a vow of this sort. Well, brethren and sisters, perform your vows unto the Lord. God forbid that we should ever say anything in the heat of emotion, or make any pledge without due premeditation, for God is not to be mocked. When we have once devoted anything unto the Lord, let us not draw back our hand. I have known Christian men who have said, “If the Lord should prosper me till I am worth such-and-such an amount, all that I gain beyond it shall be given as a free-will offering to Him.” I know one or two of the largest givers in Christendom who are thus fulfilling the vows they made. Yet I have also known some persons entangled by their vows. They have had in perplexity to ask, “What am I to do? I am in such a position that a larger capital than I ever contemplated is necessary for the carrying on of my business. Yet I have pledged myself to give and call my own no more than a definite sum which I have already in possession.” You must take heed how you vow, for you may entangle yourself. Very often it is best not to vow at all. But if in the hour of sorrow you have opened your mouth unto the Lord, take heed that you do not withdraw from the thing your heart has purposed and your lips

have uttered. Sometimes the Lord directs His people to make some solemn pledge which, otherwise, they might not have done. He does this on purpose, that they may do more for the glory and honor of His name than they have ever done before. I remember one night, when I was about to preach, my subject went from me—my text and every thought about it were gone. It was in a village chapel and I sat there, I know not in what state of trepidation. I breathed my soul to God and there came before me, as in a moment, the face of a certain worthy brother—a poor man, exceedingly poor—who wanted me to assist him in his education, but I had not the means just then. I did not know how to do it. I breathed a prayer to God that He would help me, and I promised that that brother should be taken. He was one of my earliest students and he has been honored of God and blessed in the conversion of souls for the past sixteen or seventeen years. I do not think that I should ever have taken him if it had not been for that dilemma of mine. And when I had vowed the vow unto the Lord that I would find the money for him, even if I went without myself, my sermon came back to me and I preached with pleasure—and I hope with profit. I was glad of my vow and I was able to keep it. Sometimes such things are right. At other times, it would be absurd to think of making such a vow. Better to feel that everything belongs to God already, and therefore you have nothing to spare to vow with, because you have already consecrated everything that you had from first to last to His glory. Yet if you ever do set up an Ebenezer in your pilgrimage, be sure to pour some oil out of your cruse at the time to hallow it, as Jacob did. Then the vows you have ratified will be sweet to look back upon. The God of Bethel, who remembers the vow that you vowed unto Him, will be the more precious unto your soul. I should not wonder if that woman who poured the alabaster box of ointment on Christ's head often thought about what a blessed thing it was that she did. I am sure that there was not one time in all her life that she ever said, "Oh, how handy the money of that alabaster box would come in now. I wish I had not spent it." No, she would think it over oftentimes. Perhaps she became a poor woman afterwards. At any rate, Christ was gone and she would say, "Oh, how glad I am that when the opportunity offered, I seized it." Though Judas said, "To what purpose is this waste?" she did not care much about Judas. She would say, "I anointed my blessed Master and filled the house with the sweet perfume, and I am glad I did it, and I shall be glad even when I see His face in heaven." So may you often feel; take no credit to yourself for anything you do. That we could never tolerate. Yet be thankful if the Lord leads you in His providence, and enables you by His grace to do something special for Him. It will make you think with all the more sweetness of the God of Bethel as you read of the way in which God accepts your votive offering, for my text runs like this—"I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar, and where you vowed a vow unto Me." So the vow is part and parcel of the title which God loves to remember, and He would have us lovingly remember too.

Dear friends, I am afraid there are some among you who do not know the God of Bethel. Let me tell you that He is the God you need—the God of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the only ladder for your poor souls to get to heaven by. This is a ladder with easy rungs. It is a ladder strong enough to bear the biggest sinner that ever tried his weight on it. And if you will but come and trust Jesus, you shall go up that ladder, even to the place where Jehovah dwells in all His purity and you shall be with Him forever and ever.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis 28.
HYMN FROM OUR "OWN HYMN BOOK"—214, 125.**

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