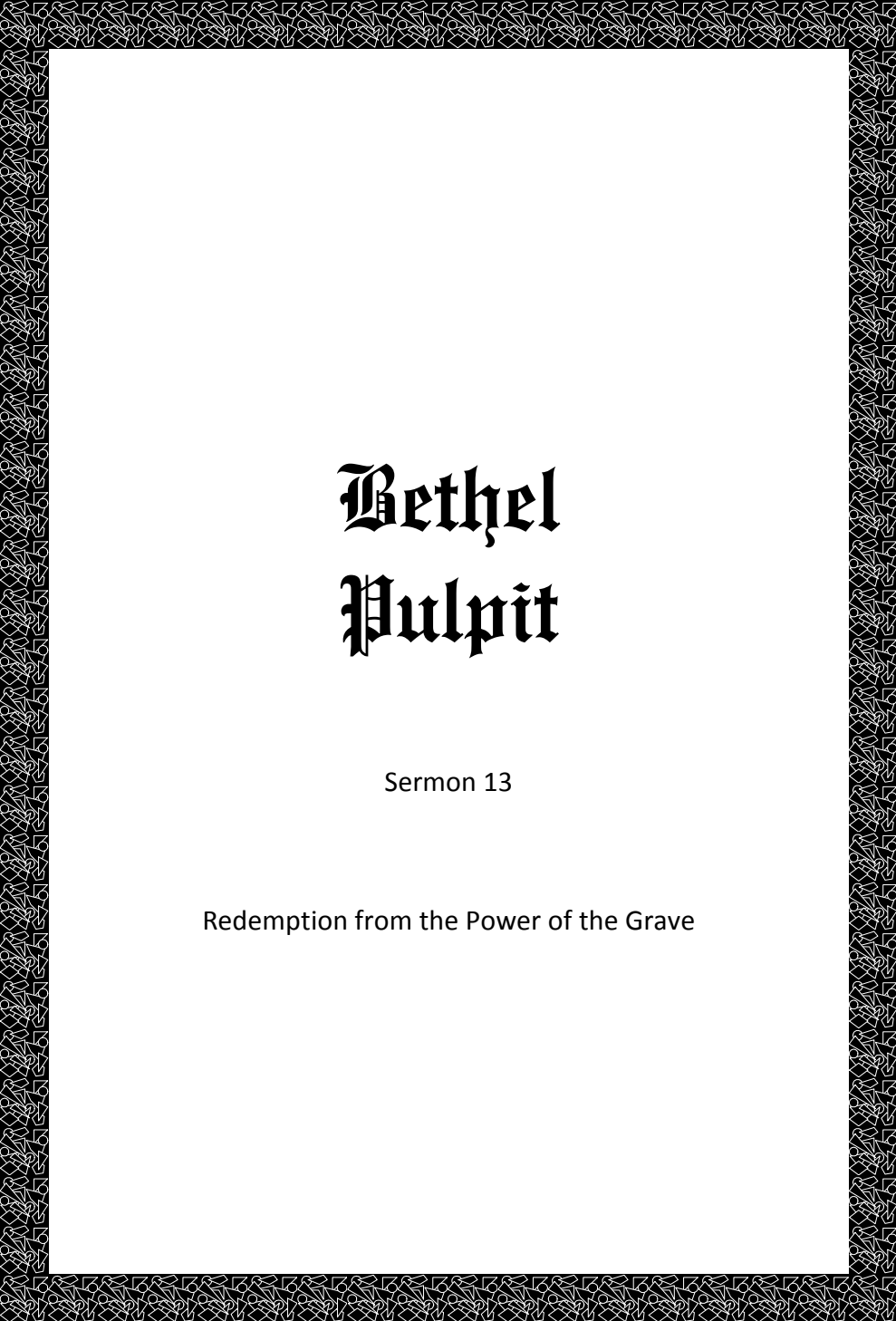




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 13

Redemption from the Power of the Grave

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 7th November, 1985**

Text: *“But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for He shall receive me. Selah” (Psalm 49. 15).*

There is a most solemn line of demarcation in this Psalm between the righteous and the wicked: the wicked with all their prosperity, with all their earthly blessings; the righteous so often tried, perplexed, bewildered. This happiness, all the happiness the wicked ever know; this sorrow all the sorrow that the righteous shall ever know.

There are two things especially on which the psalmist dwells. One is that the wicked, with all their prosperity, with all their wealth, with all their power, can do nothing whatsoever to redeem their souls from death. If they gave everything, it would not suffice to redeem their souls. O “what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

“They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him” (verses 6, 7). And the word I have read to you is in contrast. “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” He knew the difference. He knew that redemption was not by corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.

Now are some of you learning this lesson, that whatever you possess here below, it can never profit you in the day of your death? Whatever name or ambition or riches you amass together, you will have to leave them all behind. Now are some of you learning this lesson? “One thing is needful.” “This is not your rest.” Now are you learning this lesson:

“Were I possessor of the earth,
And called the stars my own,
Without Thy graces and Thyself,
I were a wretch undone!”?

Now divine teaching will always bring a sinner there, to see the solemnity of eternity and the day of your death, that naked we came into this world, and naked we shall go from it. If you possess everything here below, you have got to leave it all behind, and if you have the most eminent name that man can ever know on earth, it is a name that is written on the sand and the tide of time will soon wash it away and it will be gone for ever.

“But God.” O it is a wonderful thing if you have this “but God” in your religion, if this is in the scales, because it weighs heavily. A few times during the past year I have spoken to you from various places from “But God.” In Ephesians 2: “*But God*, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.” And then that word concerning Joseph: “*But God* was with him.” And that word concerning David: “*But God* helped him.” O to have God in the reckoning and to have God on our side, not against us! “If God be for us, who can be against us?” This wonderful “but God,” a foundation beneath your feet! You cannot get beyond it. You cannot sink beneath it. “But God.” Now that is the eternal difference between the righteous and the wicked, that the one have God and the other do not have God. The one have God as their Saviour and the other do not have God as their Saviour. “But God.”

Then the second great point in this Psalm (it is somewhat similar to the thirty-seventh Psalm and the seventy-third Psalm), that the righteous may seem to have everything going wrong, and it tries you. You seek to walk graciously, you seek to honour the Lord, and yet there are these disappointments and crosses and afflictions. Then there are the wicked dishonouring God. God is not in all their thoughts. Everything seems to be going right with them. Everything seems to be prospering with them. Well, the teaching of the Psalm is to view this in the light of God and in the light of eternity. “This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from the dwelling. Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. He shall go to the

generation of his fathers; they shall never see light” (verses 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19). “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.”

Like Asaph in the seventy-third Psalm, when he was so fretful and so distressed, when he looked on the prosperity of the wicked, everything going wrong with him, everything going right with the world: “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Nevertheless I am continually with thee.”

I would that these two points might be well impressed upon our hearts: first that whatever we have, whatever we accomplish, whatever we possess, this can never save our never-dying souls. And then secondly that although the wicked have wonderful prosperity, it will end at the grave, and although God’s people seem to find everything going wrong, really it is everything going right, and it is that right way which leads to a city of habitation, which ends in heaven. Now this is the conclusion as he is brought at last to see the vanity of all these earthly possessions if he had them all, and also that it does not really matter what sorrows and afflictions and disappointments he has if he is saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. “But God.” Now may many of you be established in those two words and may the Holy Ghost write them in many a heart: “But God.”

Now here the wonderful theme in which he delights is redemption. “God will redeem my soul.” There is no greater blessing than this. It is not just providence. It is not just having answers to prayer in natural things. But it is the vast, immortal concerns of our souls and eternity. “My soul.” Have you got one? Who told you that you have a soul? Do you realise that the soul that sinneth, it shall die? That does not mean it will be annihilated. It means it will suffer in the second death. Do you realise that your soul is spotted and stained and defiled with sin, and yet do you realise that that soul can never, to all eternity, have an end? It is unspeakably solemn to possess an immortal soul. “My soul.”

That is a good prayer of one of our hymnwriters:

“O may my blood-washed soul be found
Among that favoured band.”

It is a wonderful thing that our souls may be washed in the blood of Christ.

“God will redeem my soul.” Of course, in this gospel day the work of redemption is past – that is, redemption as viewed in Christ. He is the great Redeemer. He came that He might redeem His people from their sins. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” And the way in which He redeemed His people from the curse of the law was by bearing that curse Himself, by being made a curse. O what a solemn word that is: Christ made a curse. Under the law, anyone who hung on a tree was pronounced cursed, though in those days death by crucifixion was not known. By nature we are under the curse of a broken law. The law of works can never bless. It can never save. It can only curse. It can only bless if it has continual obedience. It is a broken law and a broken covenant. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” Our hymnwriter speaks of the solemn curse of Sinai, and then very beautifully he says,

“But Jesus, Thy dear gasping breath
And Calvary, say gentler things” –

not gentler things to the Lord Jesus as He was made a curse, but gentler things to His people who, believing, see the curse removed. O to look back to see redemption accomplished, the suffering endured, the death died, the curse borne, the sin removed, and to hear that dying cry, “It is finished,” that debt for ever cancelled. “It is finished.” It was one word in the original, the word that was written across a bill when it was paid. “Finished.” May one or two of you who feel your great need of redemption through blood feel the beauty and suitability and fulness of that word, “It is finished.”

“‘It is finished,’ said the Lord,
In His dying minute;
Holy Ghost, repeat the word,
Full salvation’s in it.”

Now that is redemption past, redemption accomplished. But here this is redemption applied. “God will redeem my soul.” Of course, when Israel came out of Egypt, there was redemption by blood, the lamb slain, the blood shed. And then there was redemption by power, the bringing out of Egypt. And experimentally the Lord brings you out of the Egypt of this world, from taking things for granted, from unconcern, and brings you to

seek after Christ. O you cannot be redeemed by blood and left to perish in the Egypt of this world. That is the great mark of redemption, that they are led forth out of Egypt into the wilderness as pilgrims and strangers to feel their need, to seek that heavenly Canaan, the land of promise.

Writing here of the experimental nature of redemption, the psalmist says, “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” Those of you whom God is redeeming – I mean experimentally bringing you out and leading you along and bringing you in – it is this. He is redeeming you from the power of the grave, and that is the very thing you feel to need to be redeemed from – from the power of the grave – the very point that some of you long for.

Well, first of all I believe it means this. A sinner born again of the Holy Spirit, brought to feel his need, looks forward to his dying day and he sees that there is a grave prepared for him, as there is a grave prepared for all lost humanity. (I know that we live in a day when people despise God’s way of burial and they cremate. It does not alter the truth one iota. The things that are said concerning the awfulness of the grave are still the same.) But it is this, as you are born again of the Holy Spirit, you feel how solemn that you must die, how solemn that you must be buried, that you must be laid in the cold, dark earth. This is the power of the grave. You tremble before it. It has a power in that shadow that it casts over the souls of so many. What a power the grave has!

I remember that Mr. Arthur Pearce used to tell us that when he went home day by day, he had to pass a cemetery and as he looked on those graves, he used to tremble and shake, feeling that one day he must come there, and he was not ready, he was lost. But the time came when the Lord spoke that word into his heart, “It is finished.” Then he said he went past those same graves and it was this:

“But when this lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave,
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I’ll sing Thy power to save.”

Now, beloved, that is what it is to be redeemed from the power of the grave.

But O that dark shadow that the grave casts over so many! We read of those who through all their life are in bondage through the fear of death, and perhaps there are some of you here and the grave is holding you in the power of its cold shadow. “Where shall I spend eternity?” And you feel you are not ready, you are not right, you are not fit to die. “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” I believe the Holy Spirit never taught a sinner to tremble concerning death, taught that sinner his inability to save himself, and then left the grave to triumph in its power over him. “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” Only He can do it. The preacher cannot do it, your friends cannot do it, but God has promised to do it.

“God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” How does He do it? When He grants you a little, sweet assurance that in Christ you have everything, that He has conquered sin, death, hell and the grave. “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from Mine eyes.”

Now your only hope must be in God, that He will do it for you, to be shut up to it, that through His precious, sin-atoning blood and His glorious righteousness and His all-prevailing intercession you might have that sweet hope in your soul that when you die, and when you are laid in the grave, then it will be well with you, that you may no more fear the grave than you fear your own bed tonight, that you may see that the Lord Jesus has gone before and taken all the sting out of it, that He has perfumed the grave by His presence, that concerning the grave of every believer we may say, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” That is your only hope. It is God who must do it and God who will do it.

Now the second meaning of the power of the grave is this: hell. We believe in hell, and it would seem that so often in the Old Testament when the word “grave” is used, it does not just mean a literal grave, either in a cave or dug in the earth. It means eternal separation from God. Some of us look back to the time when we did tremble at the thought of a lost eternity. There is not so much of that nowadays, is there? It will make you solemn. There will not be all the frivolities of the world, when you

see a lost eternity, that place where hope and mercy can never come, and when you feel that it is your deserved, but dread abode.

“God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” O but that awful power that the grave has! Doesn’t the wise man in the Proverbs say it is one of those four things that is never satisfied, that continually says, “Give, give”? Hell and the grave have been swallowing up lost humanity ever since Adam fell, and apart from the death of the Redeemer, they must have swallowed up you and me.

What a word is that that the Lord spoke to the beloved apostle on the isle of Patmos: “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for ever more, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” Do you believe it, that the Lord Jesus has the keys of hell and of death – not Satan, but the Lord Jesus? Of course, in its fullest sense it means that He has the power, the authority over hell and death. But when He cried, “It is finished,” He turned those keys and locked the gates of hell for ever against all His people.

One of the Puritan divines made a very strange, striking remark, but I believe it is true. He said that if it were possible for the Lord’s people to sink into hell, they would have so much of Christ dwelling in them in their hearts that would quench those flames of hell. It is an impossibility for a sinner saved by grace to sink into that lost eternity.

When I was a little boy, this was mentioned often at Haslingden. They said that Dr. Ryland the hymnwriter’s wife was so tried and tempted, and continually said she would go to hell. Her husband said, “What will you do when you get there?” She said, I would try to get in a corner by myself and pray.” He said, “Well, I am sure the devil and all his angels could never keep you there, because they do not want any praying souls in hell.” O but the power of it, the power of the grave, the power of hell that swallows up its thousands! “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.”

But you say, “Who is this one who is delivered?” Elihu tells us, doesn’t he (Job 33. 27, 28, 29, 30)? He says, “He looketh upon men.” The Lord looks down from heaven and hears many things and sees many things. “And if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and

his life shall see the light.” Now that is God redeeming a soul from the power of the grave.”

Just look who this character is. He is a praying sinner. He is a confessing sinner. He does not make any excuses. Really, he goes to a holy God and says, “Lord, I am sorry.” What a wonderful thing that on mercy’s ground you and I can go to a holy God and say, “Lord, I am sorry that I have sinned against Thee.” “If any man say, I have sinned” – that is the fact of sin, we do not dispute it – “and perverted that which was right” – that is the evil of it – “and it profited me not” – that is the foolishness of it – “He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.” “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” “Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.” In a word it is this: “If there be a messenger” – and blessed be God there is – “an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s” – not a mark or a blemish on it. Like Naaman, when he dipped in Jordan seven times, his flesh was like a little child’s. It was not just that he recovered but there were the marks of it. “His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s: he shall return to the days of his youth: he shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto Him: and he shall see his face with joy” (Job 33. 23-26). “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.”

Now there is a third meaning of the power of the grave, and that is these dregs of indwelling sin and carnality that so plague us. Now God will redeem us from them. Perhaps some of you have known this experience. You have a little sweet hope that hell will never be your eternal portion, but you do want to be set free from this indwelling sin that grieves you and dishonours the Lord. Like Lazarus, you feel that although you may have been brought out of the grave, yet you have still got your hands and feet bound fast with the grave clothes, and the napkin about your head. “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.” That is the power of the grave, these grave clothes that bind us fast, that distress us, that take the side of sin, Satan and the world against the Lord. “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave” – not entirely to make His people perfect and free from sin until the day that they exchange earth for heaven, but only this: “Sin shall not have dominion over you.” You

shall be upheld, you shall be kept, and there will be those times when feeling the preciousness of Jesus and His love you will feelingly be delivered from the power of the grave and you will rise above it and tread the world beneath your feet. "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave."

Then there is a fourth and final meaning of it, the power of the grave. That is, a child of God dies and he is buried. Sin digs that grave. Sin lays you there in the grave. But omnipotence will open that grave. Omnipotence will open the grave of all humanity. O but the power of the grave! Since Adam died, since Abel died, the power of the grave. Abel, that godly man, the first man to die, and yet those thousands of years, and the grave has held him fast. That is the power of the grave. But, you see, the loving eye of God has been upon the sleeping dust of Abel from that moment when he fell by the hand of Cain, and in the great day the Lord will open the grave of Abel. You and I do not know where it is. No-one knows where it is. The Lord knows where it is.

Dr. Watts personifies the sleeping dust of a saint:

"God my Redeemer lives,
And often from the skies
Looks down, and watches o'er my dust,
Till He shall bid it rise."

O the power of the Lord is greater than all the power of the grave! It is the power of omnipotence, when He shall speak and the graves shall give up their dead. But with the righteous dead, the blessed dead that have died in the Lord, it is not just the power of omnipotence: it is the power of finished redemption. Those bodies of the redeemed, they had sinned. But not only their ransomed souls are redeemed to be in heaven, but their ransomed bodies also are redeemed to be eternally united in heaven for ever and ever. O the wonders of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus!

"Thine was a bitter death indeed,
Thou harmless, suffering Lamb of God!
Thou hast from hell Thy people freed,
And drowned destruction in Thy blood."

O may some of you see the power of death in the Lord Jesus, that greater power, which is mightier than the strong man armed, He who shall bruise the serpent's head! O but may you feel the personal interest, the personal application. "God will redeem *my* soul" – and *my* body – "from the power of the grave."

"For He shall receive me." It is almost abrupt, isn't it? – so short, and yet so vital. "He shall receive me." That is, He shall receive me now, and He shall receive me when I die, and then He shall receive me when my body is raised from the grave. "He shall receive me." O you have to venture on Him now, a coming sinner on mercy's ground, seeking forgiveness, pleading the blood of Christ. "He shall receive me." "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Despite all my unworthiness and my failures, my hard heart, my poor prayers, "He shall receive me."

"Thou dost promise to forgive
All who in Thy Son believe;
Lord, I know Thou canst not lie;
Give me Christ, or else I die."

"He shall receive me" – now, and at the end.

Our hymnwriter says, "O receive my soul at last!" And perhaps some of you have had to pray it: "O receive my soul at last." The seventy-third Psalm, which in many ways is a counterpart to this, comes to this point: "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." There is that eternal "afterward": to be received graciously now, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously," and then to be received eternally, to have this "afterward." The wicked have an "afterward." The righteous have an "afterward." "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

But what is it whilst here below? To be guided by the Spirit of God, to be guided out of self, to be guided in prayer, to be guided to the feet, of the Lord Jesus. "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." "For He shall receive me." And then in that last great day, when the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, and the dead in Christ shall rise first, "He shall receive me" then. O do I hear someone say,

“Then O my God, prepare
My soul for that great day;
O wash me in Thy precious blood,
And take my sins away”?

“He shall receive me. Selah.” The sweet confirmation of it. You are not to rush over it. You are to stop, to pause, to think about it, to pray about it, to ask the question, “Is it mine?” “Selah.” “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for He shall receive me. Selah.”