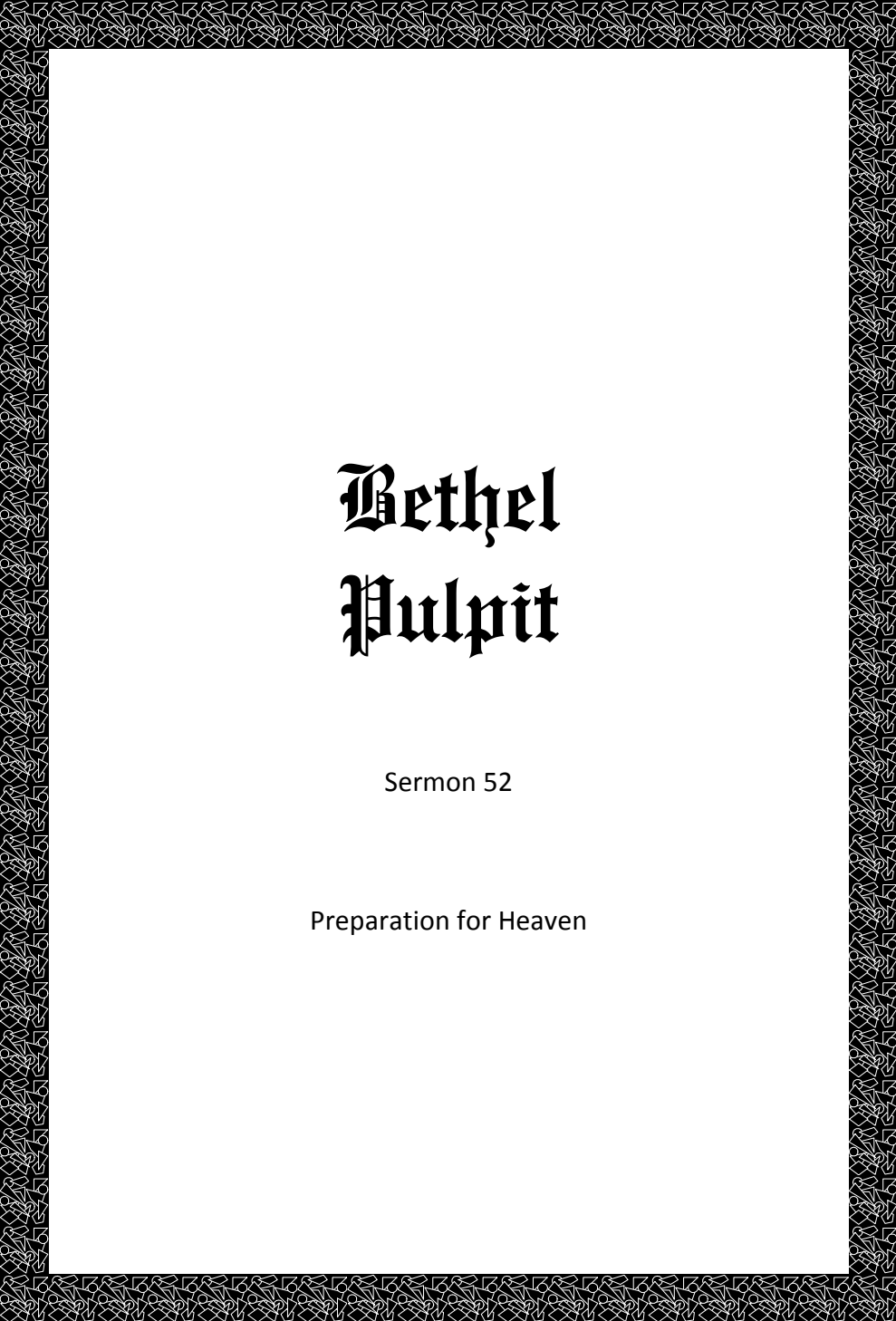




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 52

Preparation for Heaven

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 5th November, 1989**

Text: *"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Colossians 1. 12).*

In this verse we have a very beautiful description of heaven, "the inheritance of the saints in light." Now beloved friends, we believe that heaven is a real place, just as we believe that hell is a real place. I wonder how many of you think about heaven. I wonder how many of you, as you think about it, wonder if you will ever get there, because it is the one thing that really matters, isn't it? In another hundred years' time it will be the *only* thing that matters. We are only here for a moment and then eternity, and then heaven or hell.

You remember when the gospel was first preached in England, England in those days being sunk in heathenism and superstition, an aged thane made this comment. He said, "Sometimes on a dark winter's day in our great hall with the log fire roaring, we see a little bird. It comes in through the window at one side. Just for a few moments it flies about the hall, and then goes out the other side." He said, "It seems to me that our lives are something like that." And then he said, "What a wonderful thing if these strangers who have brought the gospel could explain what happens in that unknown afterwards!" Well, the Word of God is exceedingly clear, and exceedingly solemn. Isn't it a strange thing, and yet a proof that Scripture is true concerning our dead condition by nature, that we can hear of heaven and hell and eternity year after year and be completely unmoved? But has the time come with some of you when eternity, a never-ending eternity, *is* a tremendous sound?

"Eternity, tremendous sound!
To guilty souls a dreadful wound;
But O, if Christ and heaven be mine,
How sweet the accents, how divine!"

Here we have this beautiful description of heaven, "the inheritance of the saints in light." Of course, in Scripture there are many descriptions of heaven. We think straight away of that beautiful description in John

14: “In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Then we think of those beautiful descriptions of heaven we have in the Book of the Revelation. That wonderful city, the city of God, where the Lord Jesus appears in all His glory.

“The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel’s land.”

This description we have of heaven does not tell us everything about heaven, but it tells us three things. First of all, that heaven is an inheritance, the “inheritance of the saints in light.” Now don’t people who are heirs long for the day when the inheritance is theirs? It may be with some person, a vast sum of money. It may be with another person, a vast estate. Yet another may succeed to an honoured title. If a person is expecting an inheritance, an earthly inheritance, doesn’t he long for it, and doesn’t he wait for that day? It is something so valuable, something to be longed for. Now no earthly inheritance can ever compare with the heavenly inheritance. The earthly one is only temporal. The one in heaven is eternal; it is for ever and for ever.

You know how an inheritance comes: you cannot buy it. If you bought it, it would not be an inheritance. You cannot merit it: it is undeserved. You gain any inheritance because you are an heir, and you become an heir by being born. We read in Scripture of those who are heirs of this inheritance. For instance, there is the scripture concerning a bridegroom and bride, a husband and wife, so often mentioned in prayer at weddings – that they might be “heirs together of the grace of life.” Now that is the inheritance. “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” The emphasis is the wonderful privilege, the rich blessing, “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” We need to be born again that we might be made partakers of that eternal inheritance. Now that is the first thing we are told about heaven.

The second thing is that it belongs to the saints. It is “the inheritance of the saints.” It does not belong to anyone, it does not belong to everyone. It belongs to the saints. Now when the Word of God speaks of the saints, it does not just mean Peter and Paul and John. It means the

whole of God's people in all ages. I wonder if you children know who the only person is in the whole of the Bible, and the Bible says he is a saint? It is Aaron, a man of so many faults, so many failures; but through rich mercy and sovereign grace, he was made a saint of the Lord, and the Book of Psalms (106. 16) honours him with the title: "Aaron, the saint of the Lord." Let us be clear, when the Bible speaks of the saints, it means all God's people in all ages, and it speaks of them in this sense: that they are a holy people, made holy in Christ.

But the point is, if heaven is such a holy place, then only those who are made holy can enter in. What solemn warnings there are, right at the end of the Word of God. It seems as if in love a warning must be given before the canon of sacred Scripture is ended for ever. A solemn warning who will *not* be in heaven. And of course it means those who live and die in this state without repentance, because many have been in this state, but blessed with repentance, have got to heaven. But those who have not got to heaven: "Without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." So this wonderful inheritance is not for all. It is not for everybody. It is for those the Word of God describes as saints.

And then the third thing. It is a place of light. "The inheritance of the saints in light." There is no darkness in heaven. Little children often are afraid of darkness. There will not be any darkness of fear in heaven. There will not be any darkness of sin. There will not be any darkness of sorrow. There will not be any darkness of suffering. It is a place of light, everlasting light, "the inheritance of the saints in light." These wonderful descriptions of heaven, how they set forth the glory of the place! "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." But really the glory, the blessedness, the happiness of heaven will be to be forever with Christ, which is far better; to see the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off, ever to sing His praises: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us unto God by His blood"; and to have the sight of the Lamb once slain, without any veil between. As Rutherford sings,

"The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;

I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace;
Not at the crown He giveth,
But on His pierced hand:
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land."

Here we have this beautiful description of the bliss and the blessedness of heaven. And remember these are realities. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." It is not imagination. It is not sentimentality. "The inheritance of the saint in light."

Now I want to pause here and I want to bring in a word which is absolutely vital. This word splits the whole human race in two, and it splits this congregation in two. The word is this: "partakers." It is one thing to hear and speak and read and sing of heaven. The vital thing is to be a partaker; not just a bystander, not just an onlooker, but to be a partaker. May that be the great question with each one here this morning. Shall I be a partaker? We think of that exceedingly solemn word that the Lord Jesus spoke to Simon Peter. He said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Peter could not stand before that. He trembled before it, not to be a partaker, not to have any part and lot with the Lord Jesus, now and eternally. Now Peter could not bear that. Peter could not stand that. O, you see, it is to be a partaker. It is to possess something. It is to know something. It is to have something.

Well then, if we have here the beauty, the bliss, the blessedness of heaven; if we also have this solemn point, this vital point, am I or am I not, shall I or shall I not be a partaker? – we have the secret of it. Who are these who will be partakers? Who are these who will get to heaven at last? Now who are they? And the secret is made abundantly plain. Those who are made meet, or as perhaps we should say, made fit. Because we read here, "giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." We need to be made meet. So the implication here is very simple, very clear, yet very solemn. That is, by nature none of us is meet for heaven. That is, not one of us in ourselves deserves to get to heaven, not one of us in our sinful state is fit for heaven, not one of us is ready for heaven, prepared for heaven. Now that is the solemn implication here, and some of you have

realised it, and it has been a solemn awakening to you, that by nature we are not fit for heaven. We are unfit. By nature we are not ready. We are unready. By nature we are not prepared. We are unprepared. Why? Because heaven is a holy, happy place where sin no more defiles, and God has decreed that nothing that defileth can ever enter heaven.

Well then, if heaven is a place of such holiness, such spotlessness, then how can you and I who are sinful creatures, who are brought to know and feel it, who have sinned against a holy God in thought and word and deed, how can we ever get to heaven? Only as we are *made* fit, only as we are *made* meet. So that is the vital point, that is the great question. And really, when all is said and done, it is the one thing that matters in real religion, to be made right for heaven. And it must be in this world. It must be before we die. There is not any opportunity afterwards. As the tree falleth, so shall it lie. He “hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” If you and I are ever going to get to heaven, God Himself must make us meet. He must prepare us. He must fit us. He must make us right. Now have you a sweet hope that you have been made to be a partaker, or is it your earnest prayer, your daily prayer, that you might be a partaker?

He “hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Now this meetness, this fitness, this preparedness for heaven, there are two sides to it, and both are vital: Christ’s work for His people, and the Holy Ghost’s work in them. Now let me simply try to take those in turn. O that wonderful, saving, redeeming work of the Lord Jesus for His people! He who was the Son of God from all eternity came from heaven to earth in the greatness of His love to sinners. There He was born at Bethlehem. He became a real Man, holy, harmless and undefiled, and yet He never ceased to be true, almighty God. And He came to perform the work of redemption. One vital part of the work of the Lord Jesus in coming to this world was to make His people “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” We think of the Lord Jesus living that holy, sacred, spotless life completely free from any stain or sin, completely free from any defilement. The wonder of the gospel is this: that in order to make His people fit for heaven, meet for heaven, that holy, sacred, spotless life of His is reckoned to the account of His people, just as if they had lived that life themselves. So that a holy God views them, not in their ruin and guilt and sin and shame, but He views them as

they stand complete in the glorious, perfect life of righteousness of the Lord Jesus lived on their behalf, reckoned to their account. That is why a holy God can look on a guilty sinner and say, “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.”

And then the other side of it. If the Lord Jesus reckons that spotless, holy life of His own to the account of His people as if it were actually theirs, He takes all their sin, all their guilt, all their defilement, and He bears it. He bears it to the cross where He was crucified. There He suffers the punishment for it. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” We think of His wonderful love in it. We think of the mercy in it, that He died in bitter agonies on the cross at Calvary. He shed His most precious blood that all the sins of all His people might for ever be taken away, for ever be washed away. “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

Now you see, that is Christ’s work for the sinner, and that is his fitness, his meetness for heaven, that when he dies, when he comes to stand before the awful judgment seat, it will be as washed in the Saviour’s blood, it will be as clothed in the Saviour’s glorious righteousness. It is on this ground that the hymnwriter sang,

“Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay,
While through Thy blood absolved I am
From sin’s tremendous curse and shame?”

Now this is the only way a sinner can ever get to heaven, the only way that any sinner can ever be “made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Now that is Christ’s work for His people.

But then you see also, there is the Holy Ghost’s work in God’s people, and those two things go together. They cannot be separated. Those for whom Christ died, the Holy Ghost performs this work in their hearts. Those in whose hearts the Holy Ghost performs His saving work are those for whom Christ died. Now it is to make them meet for heaven in this sense: to give them a new nature. If you took a fish, it could not live up in the sky; it has not got that nature. If you took a bird, and plunged it in the depths of the ocean, it could not live there; it has not got that nature. So a guilty, unregenerate sinner could not live in heaven.

There must be the Holy Ghost's work fitting us for heaven, giving us new desires, an appetite for heavenly things before reaching heaven itself at last, bringing out of the world and the things of the world. Now if you are going to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light, then you will know this good work of grace in your heart, by which you will die to your past life, you will die to sin, die to the world, die to yourself. Eternal life is enjoyed for ever and ever in heaven, but it begins on earth in the hearts of the Lord's people. Now apart from this a sinner could not be happy in heaven. There is the preparing, the fitting his heart, experimentally making him meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Let me put it like this. A. B. Taylor of Manchester once said that he knew a man who in a remarkable and strange way inherited a large estate. I understand it was in the nature of a most beautiful mansion. There was a group of servants. It was a rich inheritance, and because of death and various things, the old family line had died out. When they found who was the nearest relative, the one who was the lawful heir, he was a most distant relative. But he was a most ignorant, uncouth man, and suddenly he found himself taken from the squalor where he was living, and put at the head of this most beautiful mansion. The poor man was miserable. He could not even speak correctly. When the beautiful meals were brought in on the beautiful crockery, he did not know how to eat properly. He did not know how to deal with the servants. He did not know how to speak to the other gentry who visited him. He was not "meet for the inheritance." He was completely unfit, completely unprepared, and the poor man, instead of being the happiest man in England for what he had inherited, became completely miserable.

Now you see it is not just the precious work of the Lord Jesus for us. There needs to be the saving work of the Holy Ghost in our hearts, so that whilst here upon earth we learn to love the things that one day we shall love in heaven, we learn to value the things which one day we shall value in heaven. Something of the spirit of heaven must be made known in our hearts, especially that vital, personal, saving knowledge of the dear Lord Jesus, who is going to be the glory, and who is going to be the song in heaven for ever and ever.

Now tell me, beloved friends, have you a sweet hope that you know anything of the Holy Ghost's work in your heart, fitting and

preparing you, and making you meet for heaven? He “hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” The Holy Ghost’s preparation begins with the new birth, “Ye must be born again.” It begins with you being brought out of the world, taught your need, shown your lost condition, blessed with repentance. It is carried on as you are enabled to flee for refuge in Jesus. And then, “He who hath begun a good work in you, shall perform it to the day of Jesus Christ,” when you shall receive that inheritance. So there is the divine teaching, there is the school of Christ, there is the discipline. At times there is the affliction, the chastisement. But it is all preparing you for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Just a word here. There is no contradiction at all between the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Ghost, no contradiction at all between Christ’s work for the sinner, and the Holy Ghost’s work in the sinner. Now look at it like this. That great work of the Holy Ghost in the sinner’s heart is to bring him to know the value of the work of Christ at Calvary. So as the Holy Ghost begins to make you meet by divine teaching, so He shows you your need of Christ. He shows you your unfitness for heaven, your unreadiness for the inheritance, your sin, your guilt, your shame. And then He reveals to you the dear Lord Jesus, what He has done in making an atonement for sin, His precious cleansing blood, His all-availing righteousness, His intercession in heaven, so that as a sinner taught of the Spirit, you say, “I have no hope of heaven, but in what the Lord Jesus did.” So the Holy Ghost in you will bring you to pray for that work of Christ for you. To come to it very simply, the well-known hymn, “Prepare me, gracious God, to stand before Thy face.” know I am not ready, I am not fit, I am not prepared, I am not meet to be partaker of the inheritance.

“Prepare me, gracious God,
To stand before Thy face.

Thy Spirit” (this is the Holy Ghost’s work in you) “must
the work perform,

For it is all of grace.”

And then you see, the leading to the work of Christ:

“In Christ’s obedience clothe,
And wash me in His blood;

So shall I lift my head with joy,
Among the sons of God.”

“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Now may God in His love and mercy, make you and me partakers, and may He bring us here:

“Sprinkled with blood his conscience is,
He feels the sweets of sin forgiven;
While Jesus’ spotless righteousness
Becomes His meetness now for heaven.”

That is it. He “hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”