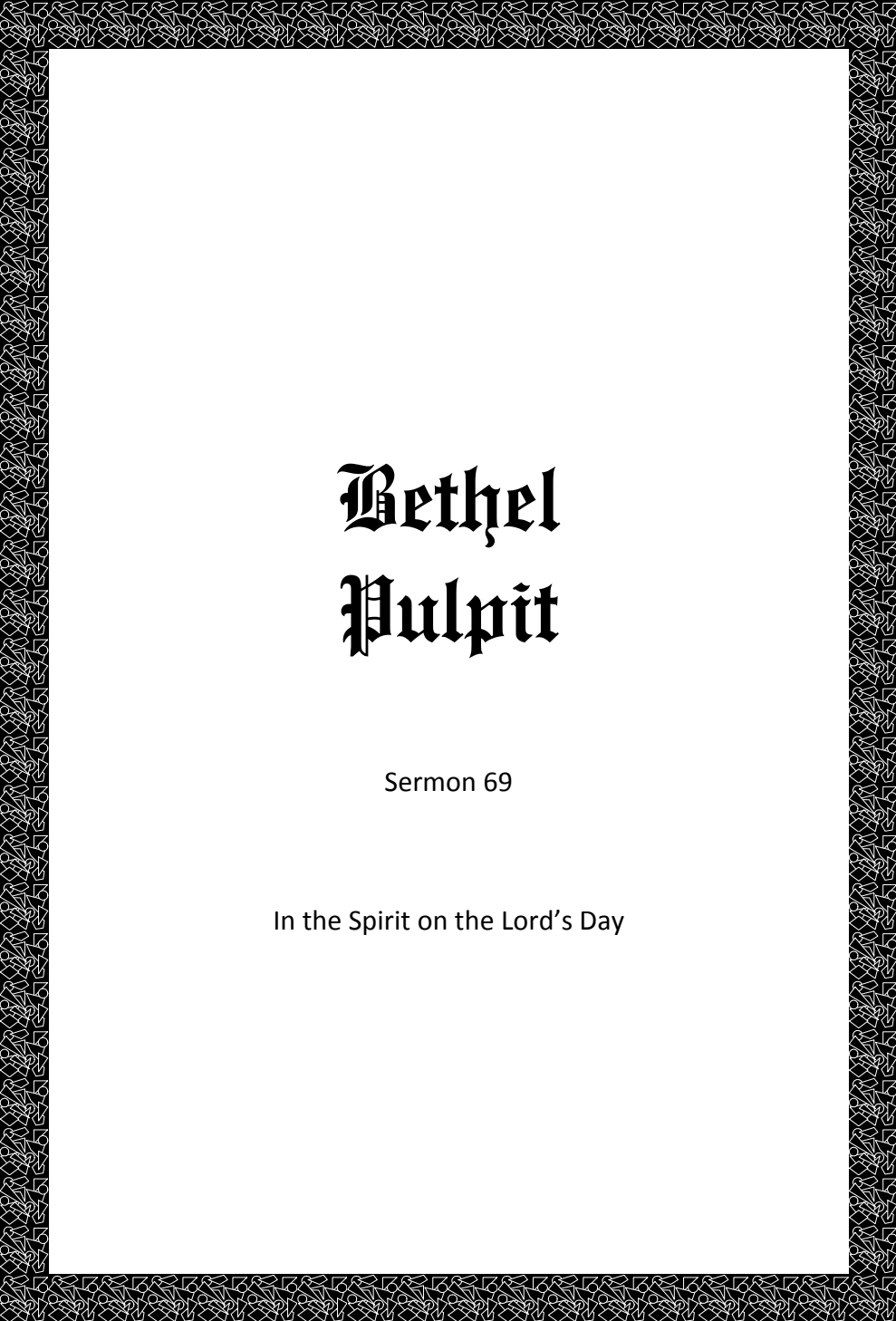




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 69

In the Spirit on the Lord's Day

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 28th April, 1991**

Text: *"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Revelation 1. 10).*

What a wonderful blessing is the Christian Sabbath, and not just to God's people, but to the whole of creation! Never forget that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance. When God created the world, He ordained the seventh day as a Sabbath, and the Sabbath day was given to Adam in Eden in the days of his innocence.

Now in the Garden of Eden, there were two holy ordinances. They have never been abolished. Both were for the good of mankind and both also have a spiritual meaning. One was the ordinance of marriage. It was given in Eden. God Himself married Adam and Eve, and it was an ordinance given to the whole human race, not just to the people of God. That holy ordinance has a deep spiritual meaning, the mystical union between Christ and His church. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it." And the other ordinance in the Garden of Eden was the Sabbath. Never forget, "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Lord gave it in love and mercy and kindness, to be a blessing, not as an irksome task. And again, it has a deep spiritual significance. It sets forth the rest which remains in Christ for the people of God.

Now the ordinance of the Sabbath day was confirmed in the giving of the holy law of God on Mount Sinai. It was not instituted on Sinai. It did not initially belong to the law of works. But in the giving of the holy law, the ten commandments, it was confirmed. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Then in New Testament times, the holy Sabbath was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week. After creation, God rested the seventh day, and the seventh day was given in remembrance of creation. But after redemption was complete and the Lord Jesus rose triumphant from the dead, the Lord's day, the Christian Sabbath, was given in remembrance of redemption. Now the Lord Jesus has a sovereign right to change His own day from the seventh to the first.

Being the seventh day was never the very essence of the Sabbath; the essence of it was one day in seven. After the Lord Jesus rose victorious from the dead, the first day was always kept by those early Christians. It is the day of the resurrection. They used to greet one another when the Christian Sabbath came, "The Lord is risen indeed." Whenever you find the Lord's people meeting for worship after the resurrection, it is on the first day of the week, not the seventh. And here the Holy Ghost gives it this beautiful title which is so dear, so precious to us: "the Lord's day."

I do feel that our spiritual state can be gauged by our attitude to the Lord's day. We look back to the days of our unregeneracy, and we were sad when we woke up and it was the Lord's day. We had to be in chapel all day. There were so many things we could not do. We found it tedious and irksome. Didn't we look forward to Monday morning coming again, when we could go back to our pleasures? But there came a time in our lives when it was different, when the Lord's day began to mean something to us, when it became precious to us, when we began to love it, when we began to look forward to it. We go back to those days when we wished God had appointed two Sabbaths in the week instead of one. Sometimes when the Lord's day evening came and we had to go home from chapel, we could hardly bear it. There was that intense longing for when the Lord's day morning would come again. I believe you can try your spiritual state by this: how do you stand concerning the Lord's day? How many of you can trace that gracious change which has taken place in your heart, perhaps suddenly, or perhaps more gradually, more imperceptibly? But it is a bad mark against you spiritually if you do not love the Lord's day. All through our lives, I think we can try our spiritual state by this. When our souls are healthy, there is such a holy anticipation of the Lord's day. When our souls are not so healthy, we become dry, and dead, and formal, and to us it just becomes a round of service. There are balances here in which we can try our spiritual state, our spiritual health.

One other thing concerning the Lord's day: I do not think generally, among those who attend our chapels today, the Lord's day is kept as carefully as our godly forefathers kept it. We have become slack, we have become easy. There are many unnecessary things. There is unnecessary travelling, and there is a grieving of the Spirit in it. These times come when legislation is going through Parliament, and in our chapels there is so much concern, and there are the letters to the Members

of Parliament, and there are petitions drawn up. Yet there is a secret, silent voice which is not often listened to: "I have a few things against thee." If the Lord were to take away our Sabbath privileges, we should not have any cause for complaint. We have become careless. We have not valued our blessings, and if the Lord were to take them from us, we could have no cause for complaint.

Well then, this was the Lord's day with John, and what a blessed Lord's day it was! He tells us, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." The dealings of the Lord with His beloved disciple John were very strange and very mysterious. It is usually accounted that John was the youngest of all the disciples, and perhaps he was much younger than we think when the Lord Jesus was crucified. But here, he writes as an old man. It must have been well over sixty years since those favoured days when he used to lean on Jesus' breast. All the other disciples were now dead. There is just John who remains, an aged man. Through all those years of trial, temptation, persecution, he has remained faithful. But what about the Lord's mysterious dealings? This dear aged apostle, the apostle of love who has walked so tenderly in the fear of God, who has been so faithful, where is he? He is snatched away from his beloved congregation, he is sent into exile, he is there all alone on the rocky island of Patmos. He is separated from all his friends. There are no gospel privileges, no gospel ordinances. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" "Is His mercy clean gone for ever?" No doubt the devil was not far away. No doubt the devil was on the island called Patmos: "John, didn't you write and put it in chapter 13, that Jesus, having loved His own, will love them even to the end? And what about you? Has He forgotten to love you?" Yet dear John never had a better day in all his life than this day when he was found in the Spirit on the Lord's day. He never had a better day than this, even when he walked with the Lord Jesus on earth.

None of us knows what lies before us, where we might be if spared to old age, what trials and afflictions, what persecution and pain, what loneliness and separation from God's people we might know. Our future is wisely hidden from us. But of one thing we are clear – hold it fast! – "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

"E'en down to old age, all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;

And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.”

The Lord had not forgotten John. The Lord still loved him; and what a blessed favoured day this was when he was found “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”! Perhaps some of you look back to former days, more blessed days, the days of your spiritual youth. “How sweet the memory still!” Perhaps you say, “O that I were as in months past.” Perhaps you wonder whether you will ever know those former blessings again. John, the beloved disciple, did. Perhaps some of you will know better days, days of greater blessing than you have ever known before. “Times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” When people talk and pray concerning prosperity in the church of God, they tend to think just of people being born again, or quickened into life, or blessed with deliverance. But also there should be the burden, the exercise concerning those who have long professed the Lord’s name, that there might be a returning to the days of their spiritual youth. Well, John never had a better day. He never had a more blessed day this side of heaven.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” What is it to be in the Spirit on the Lord’s day? How many of you this morning are in the Spirit on the Lord’s day? Don’t we very solemnly have to confess that often the Lord’s day comes and we are *not* in the Spirit on the Lord’s day?

“When I turn my eyes within,
All is dark, and vain, and wild;
Filled with unbelief and sin,
Can I deem myself a child?”

Now we are not always in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, are we? But I believe there are some of you here, and you long for this. You have known what it is, and you earnestly covet it as one of the Lord’s best gifts, to be found “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.”

One thing is very clear: that we cannot put ourselves in the Spirit, can we? If we are ever to be found in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, then God Himself must put us in the Spirit. Well, may there be much gracious exercise, much prayer for it, that when the Lord’s day arrives, you and I might be in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.

What is it to be in the Spirit? Well, perhaps it is better experienced than explained. Do you ever wake up on the Lord's day: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord"? Do you ever sing hymn 362 ("How pleased and blessed was I") when you wake up, or you do you ever read Psalm 92, and the little heading says it is appointed for the Sabbath Day? Do you ever wake up, and when you wake up, you are in the Spirit on the Lord's day? Does your heart ever leap with joy to think, this is the Lord's day, and the King Himself draws near, and He has made His precious promise: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." And your heart is in the house of God before your feet are there. Do you ever wake up, and feel it is the day of the resurrection, and "the Lord is risen indeed," and O "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection"? "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." At the end of the Lord's day, do you ever go home and say, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth"?

"Jesus, how heavenly is the place,
Where Thy dear people wait for Thee!
Where the rich fountain of Thy grace
Stands ever open, full, and free."

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." But what is it to be in the Spirit? It is to have our hearts graciously prepared. Only God can do it. We read of being prepared with the preparation of the sanctuary (2 Chronicles 30. 19). We need to seek it, and we long to know it, to be prepared that we might be in the Spirit. It is for our hearts to be prepared as good ground, to receive the Word. That is to be in the Spirit. It was the same sower, it was the same seed. But some of the ground was rocky, it was stony, and some of it had no depth of earth. Some of it was only the pathway, the wayside. On some of it there were thorns and briars and brambles. But there was some other – "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" – good ground prepared by the Spirit of God, hearts made soft, made tender, made receptive to the Word of God, where the Word of God enters and takes deep root and there is a springing up and a bringing forth of fruit to eternal life. That is to be found in the Spirit.

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." What is it to be in the Spirit? It is to be blessed with a spirit of true worship, to "worship the

Lord in the beauty of holiness.” It will not be a clear blessing every Lord’s day. It will not be a clear word from heaven. O but count the season dear if you have a little spirit of worship, a little touch, your heart made soft, a sense of the Lord’s gracious presence, the realisation that “this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” Now count those seasons dear.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” To have a spirit of true worship is like “the holy ointment after the art of the apothecary,” so many precious spices, precious ingredients, but they had to be skilfully compounded together (Exodus 30. 22-25). What is there in true worship? A tender spirit, real reverence, much humility, a little glimpse of the Lord Jesus, a little softening of heart, a little love. And it flows. This holy unction, this anointing oil, it freely flows and there is a flowing together to the goodness of the Lord.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” What is it to be in the Spirit? It is to have a humble spirit, to be willing to be nothing, to be abased, that Christ might be all in all. What is it to be in the Spirit? It is to be delivered from that “evil heart of unbelief.” It is for faith to be strengthened, faith to reach out after the Lord Jesus, to long to see Him, to have a little glimpse of Him. What is it to be in the Spirit? Why, it is to find the dear Lord Jesus coming leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills, “shewing Himself through the lattice.”

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” It is to have our hearts touched, to have them softened, for there to be a little real repentance, for there to be a little real love, to have your hope strengthened and confirmed. Tell me, were you ever in the Spirit on the Lord’s day? Or is there that holy longing in your heart that you might be in the Spirit on the Lord’s day? This is God’s work. It is not something we are going to work up; it is something which must come down from heaven. May we know something of it, a real Lord’s day, a day of the Son of man, when we are favoured to be found in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.

Well then, what did it mean for dear John when he was found in the Spirit on the Lord’s day? Two things, really. First of all, he heard the Lord’s voice. Is that what you desire as you long to be found in the Spirit on the Lord’s day? He heard the Lord’s voice. He proved this, that the voice of the Lord was “as the sound of many waters.” You have been by

the seaside, haven't you? Perhaps you have sat on the top of a cliff and you have heard the sea below, though you could not even see it. O but the majesty of it and the weight of it, the forcefulness of it as it beats and dashes upon the rocks! "The sound of many waters." Here was John on that rocky island of Patmos, and perhaps as he wrote this, he could hear the sea beating against the rocks. He uses this as a beautifully apt description of the voice of the Lord. Tell me, did you ever hear the voice of the Lord and it was as the sound of many waters? Perhaps it was the voice of the Lord in conviction. But as the Lord's day approaches and you long to be found in the Spirit on the Lord's day, you long to hear His voice with power, His voice as the sound of many waters.

Now what did this voice, this majestic voice, this almighty voice, say to John when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day? It was a voice of love and mercy. He had heard it before. Many a time he had heard it before. It had been his delight as a young believer to lean on Jesus' breast. Now he is an aged man, but never did he hear the Lord's voice with such authority before. "Fear not; I am the First and the Last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." If you hear that voice this morning, then you will be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. Then you will "enjoy a gospel day, and heaven begun below" – the risen, almighty Saviour laying His right hand, the hand of His divine power, the hand of His love upon you, and saying, "'Fear not; I am the First and the Last.' I was always there, before creation, and when time shall be no more. 'I am the First and the Last,' the unchanging God, 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever,' the One who loved you, John, when I was here on earth, the One whose love is still the same. Fear not, John, 'I am the First and the Last,' the One who once began that good work in your heart, the One who will carry it on and complete it. Fear not, John, 'I am the First and the Last,' your faithful, unchanging Saviour, your Friend, your Lord, and your God. 'I am He that liveth, and was dead.' John, you were there at Calvary, you saw Me dead upon the cross, you saw Me buried, but on the resurrection day I appeared to you. Now I am this same Jesus. I died to atone for sin, to put it away by the sacrifice of Myself. But John, 'I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.' " Now I am glad about that, aren't you? It is not Satan who holds the keys of hell and death; the Lord Jesus

holds them. He holds the keys of hell, not Satan. Do you know what it means? It means that for all His beloved people, from the least to the greatest, He has locked the gates of hell, and Satan can never open them so that a believer might be snatched down into perdition. That is what it means. Then “Fear not ... I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and death.”

Now that was the first blessed experience of John when he was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day. He heard the voice of his Saviour and his God. May you and I so be favoured. Now the second way in which John was favoured when he was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day was this: he saw the King in His beauty. Mind you, let us be clear: with John here, it was not with his bodily eyes on the one hand, nor, on the other hand, was it a view by faith. It was a special vision that God gave to him for the good of the churches. Now in that sense we are not to seek a vision as John had. It was a special occasion and it was for a special purpose. But we are permitted to view this same blessed sight by faith. Faith can be very strong. Faith can bring distant things very close. Didn’t the Puritans speak of the “telescope of faith”? You know what a telescope is. You look at something and it is so distant you can hardly see it. But you look through a telescope, and it appears so near, you can see it clearly. We are not to pry into visionary things, but we may see by faith what the apostle did. “May faith be strong, and pierce the skies.”

What a view it was he had! “I saw . . . in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man.” He had known Him and loved Him on earth, but now he sees Him in all His eternal glory, “clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle,” appearing as a high priest. “His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.” When the church saw Him in the Song of Solomon, His head and His hair were “black as a raven.” There in the Song of Solomon, He revealed Himself in all the glory of His eternal youth. Here He reveals Himself as the Ancient of Days, the great I AM, from eternity to eternity. “His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire,” that is, all-seeing, penetrating eyes which look right into the recesses of your heart, and see every sin, every idol, yet also see those “feeble desires, those wishes so weak.” This is what John saw. “His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” And well they

might, because they did burn in the furnace of divine wrath against sin at Calvary, when He trod the winepress of God's wrath alone, and of the people, there was none with Him. "His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars:" – the pastors of the churches – "and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." O, did the Word of God ever cut you, reprove you, wound you, slay you? Now this glorious Christ, "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty." "And His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Now may you and I in our little measure from time to time be found in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and "may faith be strong, and pierce the skies," and may we view a once-crucified, now risen and exalted Saviour. "Thine eyes *shall* see the King in His beauty." May you feel His love towards you, and may you love Him in return. May you behold His glory, the "glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

"This is the Man, the exalted Man,
Whom we, unseen, adore."

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." But beloved friends, there was a reason for it, and the reason was this. John was going to have a sight of some solemn things, awful things. There was going to be a revelation to him of what was going to take place in the earth, many mysterious things, but some of them very plain – the awful power of Satan, the dreadful enmity of the wicked against the people of God, the persecution God's people would endure, the many trials through which they would have to pass. But never, never forget that this glorious scene at the beginning, when John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, is the key to the whole book. You say, What do you mean? Well, come what may, let these awful things take place, this foundation in the first chapter can never be shaken. This glorious Saviour and God who is almighty, who is eternal, who is on the throne, He is in control – not sin, not the wicked, not Satan. And if it was so then, it is so today. May you view it by faith. You have the things in your lives, the trials, the sorrows, the problems, the perplexities. May you be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. May you look up to heaven, and may you view this great and glorious Saviour, and may you see that He is in control, and,

“All must come, and last, and end,
As shall please my heavenly Friend.”

But you see, not only did John see Him exalted in glory, this glorious Saviour and God, but he saw Him walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, in the midst of the churches. May we prove it, the awfulness of it, the solemnity of it, and the love, the mercy, the blessedness of it, that this glorious Christ dwells in the midst of the church on earth, walks in the midst of the church on earth. And He holds the seven stars, the unworthy pastors of the seven churches, safe in His right hand.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” May you and I in our little measure be favoured to be found “in the Spirit.”