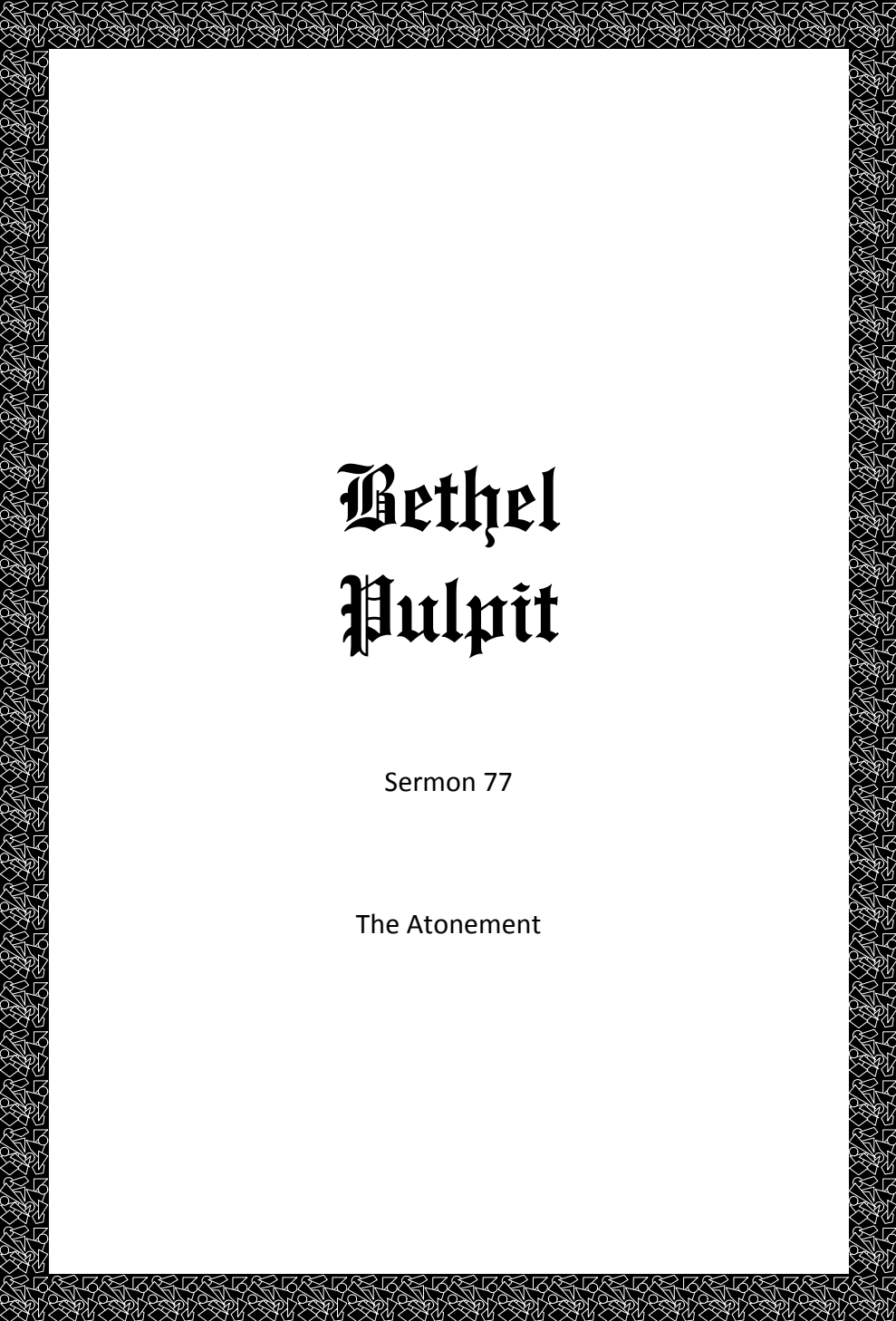




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 77

The Atonement

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 9th July, 1970**

Text: *“For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord” (Leviticus 16. 30).*

This is the great day of atonement. Of all the days under the old dispensation, the tenth day of the seventh month, the day of atonement, was the most sacred, the most solemn. On that day atonement was made for the sins of the whole Israel of God. In this chapter we have the many details of it, and all these things were shadows of good things to come. Those verses I read, the 9th chapter of Hebrews and the opening part of the 10th, set forth the day of atonement fulfilled in Christ. When you read the 16th chapter of Leviticus, you are to look beyond all these types and shadows to the blessed Substance, to Christ Himself.

I want to say a few things to you tonight concerning the day of atonement, all fulfilled in the day when Christ suffered, laid down His life, the one sacrifice, and then when He entered into glory. But you know, truths like these divide, divide congregations, divide gospel hearers. You will find that some will go with you in providence, go with you concerning prayer, go with you with some outward things in the Lord’s dealings, but when it comes to a precious Jesus and the atonement He made for sin, then this does not move them. Now this will test your religion. What is it that makes the difference? Where there is a sinner under a sense of guilt, knowing something of his soul’s need and eternity, then it is the atonement that he wants to hear of and it is the atonement he wants to receive. There is no other way to heaven, no other way of forgiveness, no other way in which sin may be put away but by the atonement. It is only an interest here that will stand in the day of judgment. Do these things mean anything to you: the Lord Jesus making an atonement for sin?

In my early days spiritually those two words *the atonement* were constantly with me, especially as opened up in Isaiah 53 and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Now that is where Christ was made precious, in His sin-atoning blood. It was this experience in measure:

“Mystery of redemption this:
All my sins on Christ were laid;
My offence was reckoned His;
He the great atonement made!”

Some may ask: what need is there now for the people of God to go back to Exodus and Leviticus when these things are done away in Christ? There are one or two things I would say here. One is this. These portions are part of the inspired Word of God and they are profitable, and it has pleased the Holy Ghost to devote so much time and so much space to the details of these things in Exodus and Leviticus. But especially I would say this: you see, in all these things which were enacted, a faithful Israelite under the ceremonial law looked forward to Christ and saw Him and believed on Him and was favoured by Him. So we can learn from these things, learn in this sense – a child of God knows that salvation is by the death of Christ, knows that salvation is by the atonement, but he wants to know more than this, he wants sweetly to be led into it. I do not know whether you have ever considered this point, but God’s ancient people were so established in the ceremonies of the law and of good things to come, that when the New Testament began to speak of atonement and reconciliation and the shedding of blood, it was not a strange language to them. God’s ancient people were well established in it. As you come to Leviticus chapter 16 you have a sweet opening up of a few aspects of it, and the Lord Jesus on the atoning day.

Let me speak of a few things. First of all Aaron appears in a gorgeous robe, but it is laid aside. He appears in a linen coat, linen breeches, a linen girdle and a linen mitre; these are holy garments, and constantly he has to wash his flesh in water. Now all these things speak of things needful for sinlessness, for perfection – and this is it, as you consider the atonement and view the Lord Jesus. O the glories of His sacred humanity, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heaven”! There can be no atonement apart from this. We see Him, the Son of God, in His sacred humanity veiling His glory, being made obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Now this solemn day of atonement. There are two goats taken, two goats brought before the high priest, and lots are cast, and by the casting of the lot one goat is appointed for the Lord and the other goat

appointed for the people. Now the great point which is to be set forth here is the putting away of sin, and this point in all its fulness is seen in Christ and Him crucified. Both of these goats speak of the Lord Jesus. Now one goat belongs to the Lord and that goat is slain, and then after it is slain, its body is taken and there it is burnt without the camp as an accursed thing. Now there is the sin-offering. On the great day of the atonement, the Lord Jesus was slain at Calvary, He died. There could be no atonement without this. He shed His precious blood; and there was the sin-offering. “The bodies of those beasts, whose blood was brought into the sanctuary for sin, were burnt without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” This is the one goat that was slain.

Now the other goat was brought before Aaron and there he confessed the sins of all the Israel of God over the head of that goat. It was the scapegoat. Then a fit man was appointed, and he led that goat into the wilderness, a land of forgetfulness, and there that goat was to be forgotten, and the sins that were laid on it. Now these two goats set forth sin being put away by the death of Christ. This is what the atonement is – sin put away by the death of Christ. Jesus died, but as He died He fulfilled the type of the other goat. The Father laid the sins of all His dear people upon His sacred head, and then as divine wrath fell upon Him, He for ever carried, those sins away into a land of forgetfulness, to be remembered no more for ever.

If there is one thing that stands out in the atonement it is this: the complete putting away of the sins of the people of God. If there is one point that Scripture emphasises more than any other, it is this. If there is one thing upon which the Holy Ghost insists, one thing in which the Holy Ghost adds figure to figure, it is this: the completeness of sin being put away in the atonement. O it is a sweet truth to a law-convicted, sin-burdened soul! To view that, in the atonement, sin is for ever put away. Listen how the Holy Ghost speaks of it. “In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.” Listen again: “And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” And again: “Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.” And again: “And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” And again: “As far as the east

is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.” Friends, I do not know of any other point in Scripture upon which the Holy Ghost so insists as this complete removing of sin in the atonement. O the blessings that flow from the death of Christ!

But by divine teaching the Holy Spirit makes this personal – I mean *you* are the sinner that has sinned, and *you* are the sinner that is guilty, and *you* feel the defilement of it. Then where do you have to come? You have to come and lay your hand there, and you have to confess your sin. You know, in one of the daily offerings, we read that the Israelite laid his hand on the head of the sacrifice and it was accepted for him to make an atonement for his soul. This is how you are brought into it. You see this precious Jesus laying down His life a sacrifice as set forth by the one goat, and you see Him for ever taking away the sins of His dear people as set forth by the other goat, and you come by precious faith to Calvary, viewing a sweet attraction in it, and you confess your sin there. This is the place of forgetfulness, this is the place of atonement. “And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him, to make an atonement for him.” Friends, how many of you feelingly can sing:

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin”?

“For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.”

One thing emphasised on the day of atonement is the shedding of blood, and all to this great end, “to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.” Before man you may be all right, but it is *before the Lord*; and if you are taught that your religion is before the Lord, and that He is holy and just and righteous, then as you see your sin, your defilement, how can you stand before Him, how can you ever enter heaven? But what an attraction in His precious blood shed in the atonement!

“The precious cleansing blood of Christ
Is a delightful theme;

When faith is lifted up the highest,
She sings of none but Him.”

Then this is the foundation of your hope, this is your plea, this is where you look, this is where you rest: “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” O you want to feel it, the value of it, the preciousness of it, to know it in your conscience! I feel the sweetest commentary in a gospel sense on the day of atonement is in those words I read: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” There are two things there set forth in all their clearness. One is this (O the weight of it!): “By His own blood”; not the blood of bulls and goats, but *His own blood*. The hymnwriter says:

“He bought our souls from death and hell,
The price, His own heart’s blood.”

I would lay this point before you. May we ever be kept from just considering the atonement as some doctrine or some legal transaction. It *is* a precious doctrine and it *is* a legal transaction, but may we ever remember the cost:

“He bought our souls from death and hell,
The price, His own heart’s blood.”

“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; *how much more* shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” One thing, *His own blood*. The other thing is this: once He entered in, *once*. Year by year on the day of atonement the blood was shed, but Christ suffered once, once only, once for all. It is a finished work. It is a complete sacrifice. There is value in it. There is efficacy in it. “For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” What think ye of Christ in the atonement? Do these things mean anything to you? Do they draw you? Do they attract you? Are they the ground of your hope, your only plea? There is the atonement here, the complete removing, the complete putting away of sin on the atoning day. “For on

that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.”

Now there is another sacred truth here set forth concerning the day of atonement. That is, that the atonement not only puts away sin, but it is the ground of the sinner’s access. The high priest takes the blood of the goat that was slain, and with that blood – and it is precious blood – he enters into the holy place, the holy of holies. It speaks of the immediate presence of God, His holiness. No one else is allowed to enter; and Aaron only entered once a year. The priest enters with this blood and there he sprinkles it on the mercy seat, and he is accepted and the whole Israel of God through that sprinkled blood. O this is a sweet subject, a sacred subject, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat! The Lord Jesus died, then He rose, ascended, is exalted and He entered into glory. He sprinkled the mercy seat with blood; that is, in heaven He presented all the merits of His death, all the merits of that great atonement He made. It is a sweet point, this, to a guilty sinner. This was the foundation of all God’s dealings with Israel, why He dwelt among them. Do you ever get a glimpse of that mercy seat sprinkled with blood?

“That rich atoning blood
Which, sprinkled round, I see,
Provides for those who come to God
An all-prevailing plea.”

If your poor prayers are ever answered, it is because the mercy seat is sprinkled with blood and the infinite merits of the Lord Jesus avail on your behalf. Then you can go on praying. Then you can come with all the poverty of your prayers. Then you can come in all your weakness and all your need, and you can still pray because the mercy seat is sprinkled with blood and your prayer is answered from the mercy seat. This is why our unworthy persons are accepted, because the mercy seat is sprinkled with blood.

If you read Hebrews 12, the apostle there lists a few places where the coming sinner does not come: if you are a coming sinner you will not come to Sinai, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels . . . and to the spirits of just men made

perfect,” “Well,” says the coming sinner, “I want more than angels and spirits of just men made perfect,” – “And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” Now this is where the coming sinner ventures, to the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, “to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.” And that blood sprinkled there speaks, *speaks*, and it speaks for the sinner. As you come on mercy’s ground, pleading this precious blood, with all your need and all your guilt, this blood speaks for you. It cries aloud for your pardon. It cries aloud for your acceptance. It cries for your forgiveness, and that precious blood must avail. It is a voice which must be heard, that cannot be silenced. If this precious blood speaks on your behalf, then you must find acceptance in the Beloved. Now this is the ground on which every sinner is accepted. The blood of Christ, sprinkled on the mercy seat, speaks on his behalf, cries aloud that he must be accepted. Why must he be accepted? Because sin has been dealt with in the atonement, and Jehovah is satisfied, and a holy God smiles, smiles on this venturing sinner from the mercy seat. O friends, I would you might have a little view of it!

The mercy seat in the tabernacle was made of pure gold, but O this mercy seat in heaven! To view the preciousness of it! To see a holy God, and yet not be afraid! To see a loving welcome here! If you view this, then your liberty will be complete. This is the place where faith looks; not within, not around, but

“To see, while prostrate at His feet,
Jehovah on the mercy seat;
And Jesus, at the Lord’s right hand,
With His divine atonement stand!”

Then you will find acceptance here. Then you will find something of this cleansing: “That ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.” There is something unspeakably precious in the mercy seat. “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat.” This is the ground upon which you can enter into union and communion. Here you can draw nigh. This is the reason unholy sinners can enter that holy place where sin no more defiles; “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the vail.”

Israel of old could not see the high priest within the vail. There was that which hid him from their sight; they could not see him. They had never been within the vail, but they knew that the high priest entered on this great day of atonement, and they knew what he was doing, presenting the merits of that blood, and they knew this was the ground of their salvation. Now, we have not entered that holy place within the vail. Our mortal eyes have not seen it. We are still in the flesh. We are still at a distance. We are still without. But faith looks within the vail, “whither the Forerunner is for us entered,” and faith knows what He is doing, presenting the merits of His blood at the mercy seat, and faith views the preciousness of it. Here faith rests:

“Our great High Priest, before the throne,
Presents the merits of His blood;
For our acceptance pleads His own,
And proves our cause completely good.”

O the blessing of the blood-sprinkled mercy seat!

Now there is something else. That is, the sweet incense which ascended heavenwards. “And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail; and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not.” He takes this censer into the most holy place, and he puts it before the mercy seat, and then this sweet incense beaten small is sprinkled on the burning coals, and the whole of that most holy place is filled with a thick cloud, and there is this sweet perfume of the sweet-smelling incense. It speaks of that sweet savour of the atonement. You know, when the Lord Jesus died, there was such a sweet savour in His death in heaven, and as the Lord Jesus appears before the mercy seat and presents the merits of His blood, His death, O there is such a sweet savour in it to the Father!

We cannot realise how dearly the Father loves His Son – His own Son, not His Son by office; His own dear Son, His beloved Son. O the Father most dearly loves His Son! Now can you contemplate the loving welcome the Father gave to His Son when He ascended to glory, having laid down His life a sacrifice? You consider some loving, earthly father, and his son goes away to the war fighting in a just cause, and in that war he

is grievously wounded, but then the time comes when he returns to his father's home, and the loving welcome that awaits him as he returns. Well, that is just a faint picture, but never forget it is the Father's own beloved Son, and O that precious welcome that awaited Him when He returned from Calvary and ascended into glory! And there, as He presents the merits of His precious blood and intercedes for guilty sinners, O there is such a sweet savour in that intercession and the Father delights to receive Christ's intercession! "This Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." So if you are one of these described here, a sinner who comes to God by Christ, then as the Father shows holy delight in His beloved Son, it is the same delight He shows in you.

This is the ground of a sinner's acceptance. "Sweet incense, beaten small." O there is such a sweet fragrance from the infinite merits of Christ to His Father! When you pray, perhaps you feel your prayers are poor; they do not deserve to be answered, but

"His all-prevailing sacrifice
Perfumes, and makes it welcome there."

Do you ever get a glimpse of it? Prayers, in all their poverty, go up to the Father acceptably, the Father well-pleased with them as they are sweetly perfumed with the merits of Christ. Well, if there is a sweet fragrance in the merits of the Redeemer's blood to the Father, then is there not a sweet fragrance in them to a sinner upon earth? Do you not see the sweet savour in the precious perfume of these merits of the dear Son of God, the precious blood He shed, His intercession as He appears in glory? Do you not see a sweet attraction in it? "Because of the savour of thy good ointment thy name is as ointment poured forth."

Do these things mean anything to you? The ground of a sinner's acceptance in glory through this great High Priest, not entered into the holy place made with hands, but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us. Friends, this is the day of atonement. "For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before, the Lord."

I have one other thing to say and then I have done. You know every fiftieth year there were amazing happenings in Israel. Those who were in prison were set free, every captive released, everyone in debt forgiven. It was a year of liberty. It was a year of joy. It was a year of forgiveness. And we are told that it was when the great day of the atonement came that the jubilee trumpet had to be blown, and as it was blown, it spoke of liberty to the captives, forgiveness to those who were in debt. There was the setting free of every slave from his servitude; there was joy and gladness and liberty. Now the jubilee trumpet prefigured the gospel:

“What a divine harmonious sound
The gospel-trumpet gives!”

And in a spiritual sense the gospel trumpet is blown on the day of atonement, and on no other day. I mean this, every blessing the gospel speaks of flows from the day of atonement.

“It speaks of pardon, full and free,
Through Christ, the Lamb once slain.”

The gospel is sweetly bound up with the day of atonement for there would be no gospel without it. The great theme of the gospel is the atonement and all the blessings of the gospel flow from the atonement.

Well, friends, here you are, some of your feeling your sin, others feeling not prepared for heaven, some labouring in bondage. You have your own infirmities, your own weaknesses, whatever stage of spiritual experience you are in. Then the gospel trumpet directs you to the atonement, to what Jesus did in laying down His life a sacrifice, to what Jesus, a loving Saviour, is doing in glory, presenting the merits of the atonement there. As you are brought by precious faith to look to the dear, once-crucified, now exalted Christ, that is where you will find your liberty and your forgiveness, your freedom from bondage, your setting free from your debts. There is liberty. “And in that day,” the atoning day, “the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall return who were ready to perish, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt.” They shall return.

“The year of jubilee is come;
Return, ye ransomed sinners, home.”

There is a word which says this: “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.” Well, you hear the sound. Do you *know* it? Is it a joyful sound to you as the gospel trumpet is blown, and as it speaks of an atonement made by precious blood?