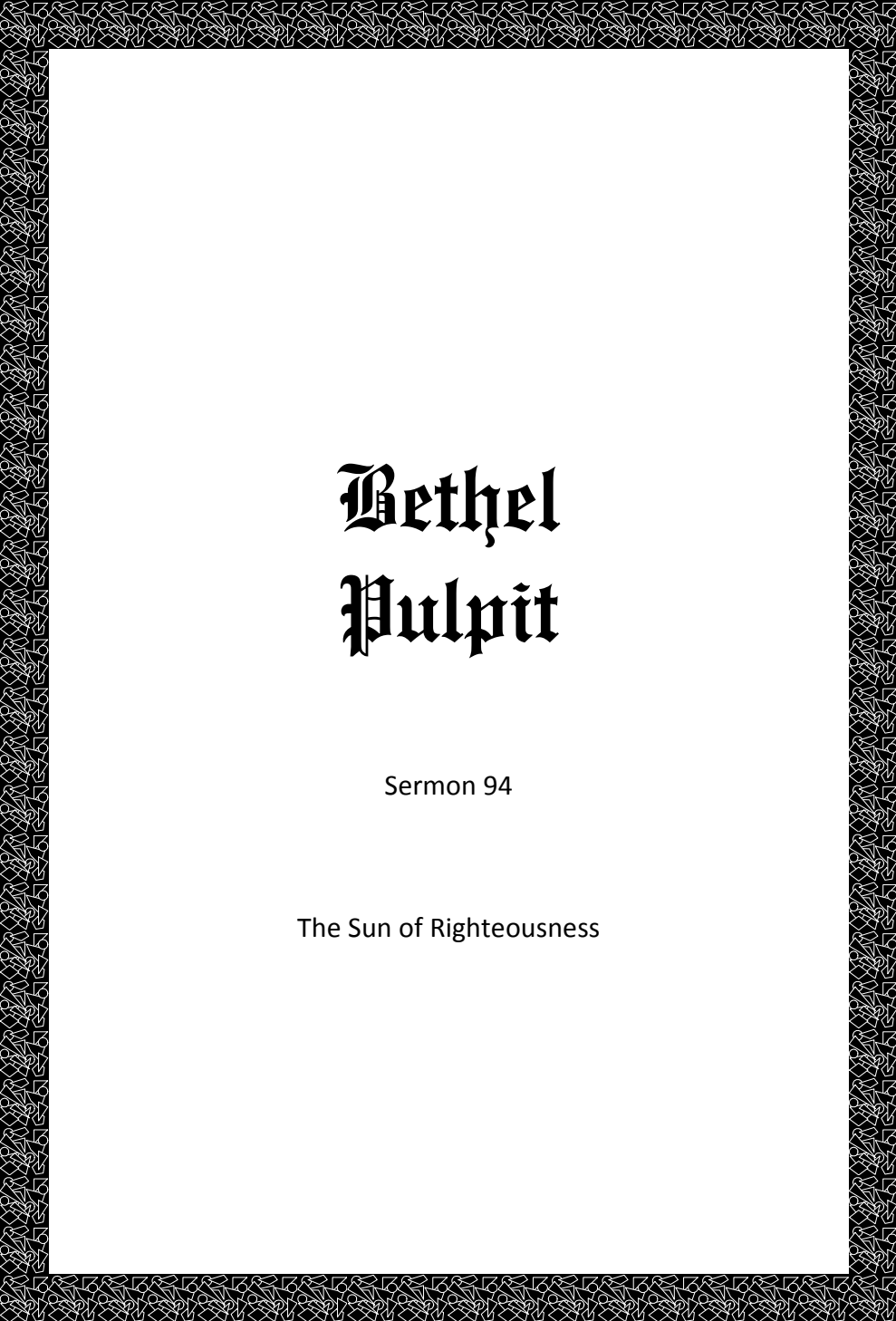




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 94

The Sun of Righteousness

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 4th April, 1993**

Text: *"But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4. 2).*

These were very dark days, very gloomy days in which Malachi prophesied. Religion seemed almost dead in Israel. Most of it was empty formality. The canon of sacred Scripture, of Old Testament Scripture, was about to be closed. And if the Old Testament Scriptures begin with the Garden of Eden, they end with the threat of a curse. For four hundred years God was going to be silent. So you have this gloom, you have this darkness. I wonder if you feel it – I do. Whenever you read through Malachi, there seems to be a thick, heavy cloud which hangs over everything. Yet just before the Old Testament canon is concluded and before God is silent, we have this sweet, sacred little promise to God's favoured remnant, because even in that dark and cloudy day, He still had His own remnant who feared His name.

In these closing chapters in Malachi we have three references to them, three beautiful references. The first: "I am the Lord, I change not." In other words, all this gloom and darkness does not make any difference to Me, My love, My mercy, My faithfulness, My salvation. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." You deserve to be consumed. Perhaps you fear you will be consumed. "Not consumed." That is the first.

Now the second: "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another" – the little remnant – "and the Lord hearkened, and heard it." He knew all about them. He was not listening to all those sounds of sin and worldliness. He was not listening to those sounds of formal worship. But He tells us what He was listening to. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name." How many of God's little ones have crept in under that description of God's people – "them ... that thought upon His name"! Do you ever think upon the name of the Lord

Jesus? Mind you, beloved friends, do not presume upon it. You know what the great “Rabbi” Duncan used to say – “a *perhaps* of salvation: let no man despise it; let no man rest upon it.” But may it be a help to some of you. You may feel you have not got much religion, but the name of Jesus is sweet to you and His precious blood is attractive to you and His great salvation is all you want. You can say, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds!” “Them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.” And what about this? “They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels.” Now that is the second one.

This is the third: “But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise.” It begins with one of these wonderful *buts*, these small, great *buts*. “*But* unto you that fear My name.” All this darkness and all this gloom and all these clouds do not make the slightest difference to the Lord’s favour to His people. And then the contrast between this and the first verse when the Lord tells us what is going to happen to the wicked: “Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble.” You have seen it round here, haven’t you, especially a few years ago? A cornfield, the good corn all gathered in; there was just the stubble left in the fields and then it was set on fire and it burnt. “Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble. ... *But* unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.” There is the clear line of demarcation here between the righteous and the wicked, those who fear God and those who fear Him not. It cuts right through this congregation; it divides it in two. Only the Lord knows where the line of demarcation is; I do not. But each one of us is either on the one side or the other side: those who fear the Lord or those who do not fear the Lord.

Tell me, was there ever a time, as you look back, when you believe the Lord in His love and mercy put His fear in your heart? That does not mean to make you afraid of Him, terrified of Him, although perhaps at first you were, but that tender reverence and awe that rested upon your spirit. I want to speak graciously. We do not see many people today with that chastened spirit, that humble spirit, as the fear of the Lord is in gracious exercise in their hearts, and you can discern it in the humble, solemn, sacred, self-abasing way in which they walk. There is an awe upon their spirit before God. We knew some of them years ago; we loved them; we

miss them now. You watched them walking into chapel. O the prayers, the concerns that were burdening their heart! They were coming into the presence of the most high God. There was no lightness on their spirit, no unbecoming levity. There was that sacred awe and reverence. Why? Because they were going to hear for eternity and they realised that time is short, and they wanted some profit for their never-dying souls. Sometimes it is like this: if it be so, tell me, and if it be not so, tell me (Genesis 24. 49).

“You that fear My name.” If God has put His holy fear in your heart, it will make a difference. It will separate you from the world; it will separate you from your past life; it will separate you from a false profession; it will separate you from taking things for granted; it will separate you from your self-righteousness. It will make your religion a daily religion. You will not leave it behind in chapel when you go home. It will make your religion a secret religion between you and God. It is “a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” It will constrain us to walk in the ways of righteousness. It will separate us from the ways our flesh loves. And the Lord says, those “that fear My name” – the name of the great Jehovah, the eternal I AM. Or to put it in a gospel sense, “that worthy name by the which ye are called.” Beloved friends, if your religion is real, you will love the name of the Lord Jesus. Tell me, how many of you do love the name of the Lord Jesus? And you will fear the name of the Lord Jesus, and it will act like this: you will not want to grieve Him. I like that little children’s hymn:

“May we ever look to Jesus,
And the place where He has gone;
And may nothing ever please us
He would grieve to look upon.”

“You that fear My name.” That holy reverence for the name of Jesus, that fear of dishonouring it, that dread of bringing a reproach upon it. And it will have a sobering effect upon your spirit, and it will make you walk very tenderly before Him. Your religion will be before God.

Now in all ages God has had those that fear His name. He had them in the days of Malachi. He has them today. He has them in this chapel. And what an unspeakable mercy if you and I are found amongst them, and how solemn if we are not! There are so many exhortations in

the Old Testament to fear the Lord's name. There are so many precious promises to those who are enabled to fear His name. It is God's work. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and when the new birth takes places, this is the sure mark, the sure effect of it: "you that fear My name." So He puts this glorious *but* at the beginning. There is a difference between the righteous and the wicked. There is a difference between those who fear His name and those who do not. In the day when the proud and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble, the righteous shall shine as the sun in the firmament.

"*But* unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings." Well then, this beautiful title of the Lord Jesus, the Sun of righteousness. I take it that this is the last prophecy of Messiah before His coming, and didn't the ancient church hang upon it, those who feared His name, that one day, even unto them, the Sun of righteousness would arise? Now it is a beautiful title, isn't it? It is so attractive, so simple, so clear in its meaning, its significance. "The Sun of righteousness." All that the sun is in the sky, all that the sun is in the firmament, the Lord Jesus is. You think of a beautiful summer day and the glorious midday sun. Now that is the emblem of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It speaks of His glory, the glory of His Person, the glory of His grace. It speaks also of His pre-eminence. "That in all things He might have the pre-eminence." Our hymnwriter says,

"The fairest of ten thousand fairs;
A Sun amongst ten thousand stars."

"The Sun of righteousness." And there are two things implied in this beautiful title, *the Sun of righteousness*, which are a great help to faith. Now the first thing is this: no-one is so foolish as to suppose, when they see the sun rising in the morning over a distant hill, that the sun had no existence before, that the sun was not there before. And those who are taught by the Lord know that when the dear Lord Jesus came to Bethlehem, when the Sun of righteousness there appeared in the manger, this was not the beginning of His existence. They know that from all eternity He was the Son of God, that His glory was eternally the same in heaven. "The Sun of righteousness."

The second thing: no-one is so foolish as to think that on a very cloudy day when you cannot see the sun, or when it is night-time and you

cannot see the sun, that the sun is no longer there, that the sun has ceased to exist. No-one is so foolish as to think that. And those who are taught by grace and established by grace are brought to learn this lesson well, that where there is the cloud between, or when it is night-time, or when all is dark in your soul, there is no change with the Sun of righteousness, His beams, His glory; He is still eternally the same. William Gadsby in that little hymn (very seldom sung) says,

“Nor death, nor sin, nor hell,
Shall make Him cease to shine;
And, though I cannot always feel
His beams, He’s ever mine.”

Now O for faith to see that and to “trust Him with the cloud between”!

“But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise.” These beams of grace and glory which shine forth from the Sun of righteousness! For let us be clear, when this word uses the expression *His wings*, it really means what we would call the *beams* of the sun, the *rays* of the sun. The Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in His *rays*, or in His *beams*, with healing in His *wings* – these beams of grace and glory.

Well then, may we together this evening be sweetly enabled to contemplate the glorious shining forth of the Sun of righteousness. We think first of all of how from all eternity He shone forth in the covenant of grace, in all His everlasting love to His people, in all His covenant undertakings, to be their Surety, to be their Saviour, to be their Substitute, to be their everlasting All. Those beams of grace and glory that flow forth from all eternity before the world had any being.

“The Sun of righteousness.” And then we think of those beams of grace and glory which shine forth in the written Word of truth, as the Lord first gave it by the Old Testament prophets and through the Psalms, and then the final revelation in the New Testament. O the beams of grace and glory which shine forth in God’s holy Word: the revelation of divine holiness, the glory of His holiness, but the revelation of mercy through blood, the sweet revelation of the gospel!

“See where it shines in Jesus’ face,
The brightest image of His grace!”

Those beams of grace and glory from the Sun of righteousness that shine forth in the written Word, in the holy Scriptures, and that is why we should love them and why we should prize them.

“The Sun of righteousness.” But then especially, the arising of the Sun of righteousness and those beams of grace and glory when the Lord Jesus came into this world to save sinners, when the eternal Son of God took our nature without sin into union with His divine Person. Tell me, have you ever seen those beams of grace and glory shining forth from Bethlehem? John says, “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” O those beams of grace and glory in our incarnate God, our dear Immanuel! “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich” – *rich* – “yet for your sakes He became poor” – *poor* – “that ye through His poverty might be rich.” “The Sun of righteousness shall arise” – that arising of the Sun of righteousness in His mysterious incarnation. Also you see those beams of grace and glory in His teaching here on earth. You see the beams of grace and glory in those amazing miracles He performed.

Well, what shall we say of Gethsemane, and what shall we say of Calvary – the agonies and sufferings and blood-shedding and death of God’s dear, incarnate Son? Living tongues are dumb in speaking of this, but let me try to bring it before you in this way. You have seen the sun shining gloriously in the sky at midday on a beautiful summer day, haven’t you, all of you? What about a sunset? You know, some sunsets have a special glory of their own. Perhaps some of you, perhaps many of you can remember some special sunset you have witnessed. Perhaps you have stood on the cliffs at the seaside and watched the sun go down over the sea, and noticed the whole sky afterwards – that mysterious glory, there is a darkness about it, and yet it has almost a blood-red glory at times. Sometimes there is something awe-inspiring about a beautiful sunset. Well, what about when the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ cried with a loud voice, “It is finished,” and bowed His head and gave up the ghost? What do we sing? –

“Love’s redeeming work is done;
Fought the fight, the battle won.”

Now this is it:

“Lo! the Sun’s eclipse is o’er;
Lo! He sets in blood no more!”

O beloved friends, did you ever by precious faith see the Sun of righteousness setting in blood – the awfulness of it, the grandeur of it, the wonder of it?

“But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise.”

“Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell.”

He arose from the dead – “the Sun of righteousness shall arise.” And He did arise, triumphant, the third day, taking the sting from death, the victory from the grave. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

“The Sun of righteousness shall arise.” Then you see there comes that time when the Sun of righteousness arises in a sinner’s heart in the new birth as divine life is given. Sometimes the sunrise in the morning seems to be very gradual, doesn’t it? Sometimes it is a half-light at first. You cannot see very distinctly. Then it becomes clearer, and then it is so clear you can see to read, and then at last you really see the sun. Sometimes it is like that in the new birth, but not always. God is sovereign. “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning?” She cannot see everything as clearly as she would. There are still the morning mists and still many shadows. But, “who is she that looketh forth as the morning?” She is a new-born soul. This is a description of the beloved bride of Christ. And what has taken place? That dark night has passed, passed for ever. “Until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” Well, you cannot always see the sun at first, but there is the light little by little, and then at last you see the sun in its glory. Now if there is anyone here this evening and that describes you: “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning?” – you are looking forth through the mist, through the shadows – this is the promise to you: “Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise.” She cannot see very distinctly. She is only looking forth as the morning. What is she looking for? It is the Lord Jesus she wants to see. And “thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.”

“Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise.” And as there is that first gleaming of light, and as “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day,” so those in whose hearts the Sun of righteousness has shone will not die until Christ is revealed. In a word it is this: “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

“Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise.” Now I wonder how many of you want this this evening. Like Moses when he pleaded with God in Exodus 33; he said, “Shew me Thy glory.” How many of you want these beams of grace and glory from the dear Sun of righteousness to shine upon you? Luther said, “More light, Lord; more light.” That is what you want. You want the Sun of righteousness to shine on your pathway, to guide your feet into the way of peace. And you want the Sun of righteousness to shine on the holy Word; and you want the Sun of righteousness to shine on the gospel; and then you want the Sun of righteousness to shine into your heart.

“With healing in His wings.” These beams bring life as well as they bring light. They bring divine strength. They bring divine healing. Healing supposes some malady, something amiss. The malady, the malady of unbelief, the malady of a hard heart, the malady of backsliding, and all your other maladies. “*Healing in His wings.*” Wherever you are tonight, whatever you are tonight, should the dear Sun of righteousness arise – let Him shine into your heart, let there be those beams of grace and glory – and you will not be the same. It may be you feel to be walking in darkness. O but if the Sun of righteousness arises with divine light, shining upon your way, that is what we need, isn’t it? “A light to shine upon the road that leads me to the Lamb.” Sometimes a light to shine on our beginnings, for they are all obscure. Sometimes a light to shine on our evidences, for they are darkened.

“Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.” There will be a gracious effect, a powerful effect, a divine effect. “With healing in His wings.” You feel so cold. When the Sun of righteousness shines in your heart, then all that coldness will be gone. You feel so hard. When the Sun of righteousness shines in your heart, all that hardness will be gone. You see a piece of wax. It

seems so hard, and it is. But let the sun shine upon it, and it begins to melt. However hard your heart is tonight, if the Sun of righteousness shines, it will melt. That is the difference between a child of God in a backsliding condition or a dark condition or a hard condition, and a worldling. The sun shines. Here is a piece of clay. It is lovely; it is moist; it is damp. What happens when the sun shines on it? Well, it just hardens it. That is the worldling. Look at this piece of wax. You look at it: it is just as hard as the clay, even harder than the clay. But let the sun once shine upon it, and it is not like the clay any longer. It begins to melt.

“Dissolved by Thy goodness, I fall to the ground,
And weep to the praise of the mercy I found.”

Divine life upon your pathway, upon you, in the gospel, in your heart, the heavenly warmth, the heavenly heat, the melting – all this will give you joy instead of sorrow. This will give you liberty instead of bondage. This will give you life instead of death.

“Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise.” And beloved friends, it is a promise; it is the Lord’s own promise. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it?” It is made to those who fear His name; yes – but I believe it is especially made to those who are concerned about their darkness, who feel their darkness, and who cannot be satisfied with that darkness. Am I speaking to any case tonight? You feel the darkness of your soul, the darkness of your mind, perhaps the darkness of your pathway, but you cannot be satisfied with that darkness. It is only living souls who know the difference between light and darkness. It is only those whose eyes have been opened who know the difference between light and darkness. But that will not satisfy you. You will feel the darkness; you will grieve about that darkness. But you long to be delivered from it. Well, “to you is the word of this salvation sent,” you dear souls who are walking in darkness and distress and mourning under it.

“Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.” What a beautiful promise! I wonder if any of you here tonight can take it up and turn it into a prayer, make it into a prayer. “Lord Jesus, Thou dear Sun of righteousness, I mourn over my coldness, darkness and hardness. O but do in the riches of Thy love and mercy shine into my heart.” Now can you pray a prayer like that? Can you take a prayer like that home with you? Beloved friends, the Lord will

not be displeased. The Lord will fulfil His promise. He will hear and answer that prayer. For “unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.”