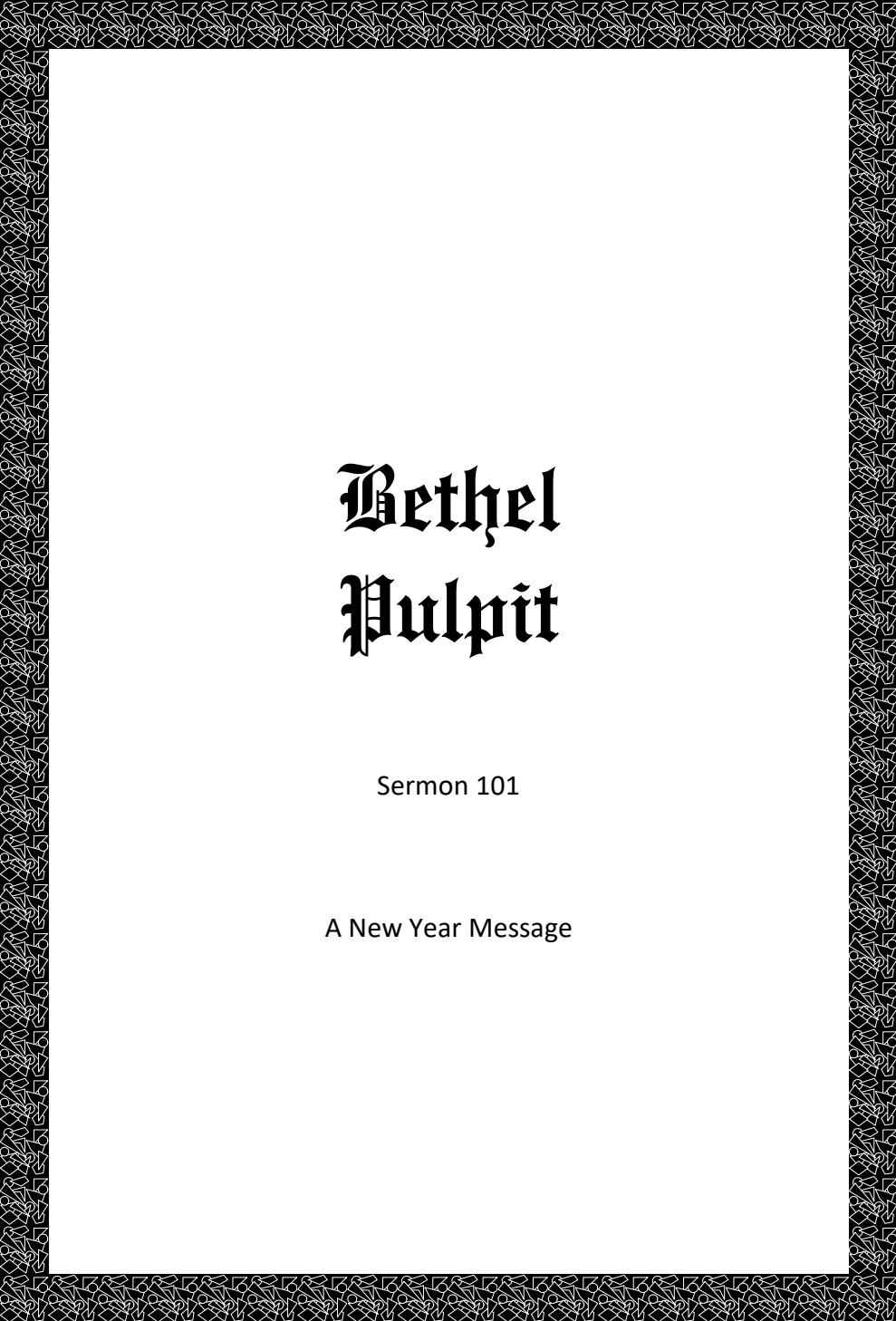




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 101

A New Year Message

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 3rd January, 1993**

Text: *"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" (Lamentations 1. 12.)*

This word was spoken by one who bears the name *the weeping prophet*. Jeremiah was a man who had to endure more sorrow, more trouble than most. In the mysterious appointment of God, there are some who especially have to bear deep trouble, who specially have to go through deep waters. Look at Jeremiah. He was a most godly man, a most gracious man, a most faithful man, a man most obedient to his God, and yet God in His mysterious sovereignty appointed that this man's life should be a life of sorrow. And there were times when poor Jeremiah felt he could hardly bear it, and here he cries out, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" In other words, do none of you really sympathise with me? Do none of you really know the depth of my trouble? Is there not one person who realises just how great my sorrow is? Sometimes God's people get there. They feel none know such troubles as they do, that none are so tried and tempted, so troubled, so perplexed, and this is their cry: does no-one understand? Is there no-one who sympathises?

Now may I say this: always seek to sympathise with those in trouble. Seek a kind, tender, sympathising heart, the heart of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself gives this clear commandment: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Never minimise the troubles of someone else. "The heart knoweth his own bitterness." But beloved friends, if no-one else understands your case, the Lord does. If no-one else sympathises, the Lord sympathises. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble" – whatever that trouble might be, body, soul, spirit, however great – "Call upon *Me* in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

Well then, these are the words of the weeping prophet, Jeremiah, in the midst of all his troubles. But beloved friends, there is a second view here. Jeremiah was a prophet. This is the Word of God. This is a prophecy. So although immediately this is Jeremiah himself, this is the

prophet himself, really he looks right down the ages to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, He who was “a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” And he sees a greater than himself, even the Lord Jesus speaking these words: “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Especially the awful sufferings of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary, when He agonised there, the crown of thorns upon His brow, the cruel nails in His hands and feet, the spear that pierced His side. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” O how many there were that mocked Him, that reviled Him. And the Lord Jesus not only speaks these words to those surrounding His cross, but speaking from the cross at Calvary where He agonised and bled and died, He speaks them to people in all ages of this world’s history. To thousands and ten thousands of people it matters nothing that the Lord Jesus lived and died. There are thousands this morning who have no concern. It does not matter to them at all whether the Lord Jesus did live or whether He did not live, whether He died or whether He did not die, whether He suffered or whether He did not suffer.

But the Lord Jesus says, “Is it nothing *to you*, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger.” It was not just wicked men who afflicted the Lord Jesus, not just Caiaphas, not just Pontius Pilate, not just the Roman soldiers. His Father in heaven afflicted Him. O, you say, the mystery of it! How can this be, that God in heaven should so afflict His beloved Son? Well you know the answer, don’t you, some of you? Here were the people of God, ruined, guilty, defiled, undone, deserving eternal punishment. The dear Lord Jesus in love and mercy takes their place as their Substitute. He bears their punishment for them, He instead of them, the Just for the unjust, the Lamb in the place of the sinner, that that awful punishment might never fall upon them eternally.

“’Tis love the cause unfolds,
The deep mysterious cause,
Why He who all the world upholds,
Hangs upon yonder cross.”

O the love of the Lord Jesus to be so willing to bear all this agony, even unto death, in the place of His people, that heaven might be theirs! For sure it is, if you and I are ever going to get to heaven, it must be through

Calvary, through the cross of Christ, through the precious blood He shed, as He suffered, “the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” In a word it is this:

“He took the dying traitor’s place,
And suffered in his stead;
For man (O miracle of grace!)
For man the Saviour bled.”

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Hear this voice from Calvary, from the cross of Christ. Hear it speak to you personally this morning. “Is it nothing *to you*, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger.” And let me say this. Sometimes the Lord will bring you into sorrow that you might remember the Lord Jesus in His sorrow. Sometimes He will bring you into trouble that you might consider the trouble of the Lord Jesus. Sometimes you will have a broken heart that you might remember that the heart of the Lord Jesus was broken. Let broken-hearted sinners look to a broken-hearted Saviour.

Well, beloved friends, the way this word rests on my spirit today at the beginning of this new year is not to attempt to preach a sermon this morning on the atonement or the work of redemption. In the past I have tried to speak to you from this word in this sense. Now the way it rests upon me this morning is as a most solemn call, a most solemn word to each of us at the beginning of a new year. What do the things of God really mean to us? What does eternity mean to us? What do our never-dying souls mean to us? What does the Lord Jesus Christ mean to us? What about all these things, all ye that pass by? Is it nothing to you? Are these things nothing to you?

I always feel that the new year is a specially solemn time. It does seem in the wise purpose of God that there should come these milestones in our lives. Of course, with God there are no years; with God it is one eternal now. But wisely our little lives are divided up into years of time, and one year ends, and another year begins. And this is a special time when the Lord bids us stop, and to pause, and to think, and to consider. This world at present seems to be in a mad hurry, a mad haste, no time to stop, no time to think, everyone too busy, everything hastening along. The

Lord continually in His holy Word bids us stop and pause and consider and think. Let me give you an example. The second epistle to Timothy chapter 2, Paul is writing some important things, some solemn things, some vital things, and suddenly he stops, and he says, “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.” We need to stop. We need to pause. We need to think, What is the purpose of our lives? Why is it we were ever created? Why is it we were ever placed on this earth? How have we been spending our lives? What have we been doing? Have we been remembering God? Have we been seeking to live to the honour and glory of His name? What are our plans for this year? What are our intentions? What do we hope there might be? What would give us true happiness? We need, at the beginning of a new year especially, to be brought up with a start, and to stop, and to pause, and to think.

One thing I am sure of, if the Holy Spirit is dealing with us, working in our hearts and lives, there will be those times when we *are* brought up with a start, when He *will* bring us to a sudden stop. Now there are many people here this morning. You can look back over your lives, how you were going on headlong towards eternity, with no thought of God, no thought of your eternal destination, no thought of heaven, no thought of hell, enjoying this world, its pleasures. Suddenly the Lord stopped you – different ways with different ones. Perhaps it was the death of someone you loved. Perhaps it was the Word of God powerfully coming into your heart. But God stopped you. He made you think, and your life has never been the same from that day to this. We do need the Lord in His love and mercy and sovereignty, in His almighty power, to arrest us and make us stand still, and stop, and pause, and consider, and think.

So it is in this sense I want to bring this word before you this morning. What do the things of God mean to you? Is it nothing to you? “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Now think of all those many sermons you heard during the last year. Are they nothing to you, all ye that pass by? How many of them can you remember? How many of them had an effect in your life? How many of them have an abiding place? The Lord says, “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning.” How much has abode in your heart? How much is fastened as a nail in a sure place? Have these things been nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Was your heart never touched during the past year? Do you never feel your sin? Do you never realise you have a soul? Do you never

tremble concerning eternity? Do you never see any beauty in Christ that you should desire Him? Are these things nothing to you, all ye that pass by? The beginning of a new year – is it nothing to you? Is it nothing to you that your life is hastening on? As Rutherford said, there is less sand in your glass now than yesternight.

When Christianity first came to this country, there were many debates about it, and there was a large gathering of the the old Anglo-Saxon noblemen in one of their great halls to decide what they thought about the new religion. At length an old thane stood up to speak. He said, “It seems to me our lives are something like this. Sometimes on a winter day we see a little bird fly in from outside from the cold. For a few moments it hovers round in the warmth, and then flies out again. Our lives are something like that. If these men can tell us what happens to our lives when, like the little bird, we fly out the other side, let us heed them.”

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by” that another year of our short lives is gone? “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by” that it is another year nearer eternity? “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by” that one day you and I must die, and then eternity, and how shall we spend eternity? It may not be the oldest one who will die; it may be the youngest one. Is it nothing to you? “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Some of us can go back to when the new year came and eternity was a tremendous sound. We trembled concerning it. We trembled as to where we should spend eternity – with God, or for ever separated from Him; in heaven or in hell. Now, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by” that another year is gone, and perhaps many of you still have not the sweet assurance that it will be well with you when time shall be no more? Is it nothing to you that you have perhaps gone through another year unconcerned, that you have gone through another year seeking the Lord and you have not got what you want? Is it nothing to you?

So you see how this rests on my spirit, and beloved friends, I trust it is a message from the Lord to your souls; not so much a doctrinal dissertation, but rather a word with urgency in it, with reality in it, with life or death in it, a word with a sharp point to it, to wound, to prick, to awaken, or a word like a pair of scales, a pair of balances to weigh us in. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by” that we have an immortal soul, that we are sinners in the sight of a holy God, that we deserve eternal

punishment, that one day we must die, that then there will be the judgment day, and then eternity, to be with Christ or to be banished from Him?

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Take another look at it. What about God’s holy Word? Is that nothing to you? We believe that this is God’s holy, inspired, infallible Word. What does that mean to you? Is it the Word of God to your soul? Have you been brought to love it? Do you read it? Does it have any effect upon you? Do you heed its warnings? Do you see the dear Saviour there? What about this precious, holy Word of God?

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Take another thing: prayer, the throne of grace, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat, the wonderful provision that God in the riches of His mercy has made, that poor, lost, ruined sinners, creatures of a day, have the privilege of going before the great God of heaven to make their wants and wishes known. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Do you value the privilege of prayer? Is it neglected? Is it despised? Is it forgotten? What about that word (I remember preaching from it one new year’s day): “But thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel.” You imagine a person hearing this for the first time, that there is a great, almighty God in heaven who is very holy, and on earth there are people who are sinful, who have fought against Him, despised Him, hated Him. Yet on mercy’s ground, through the blood of Jesus, there is this way, this privilege of speaking to this great God in heaven, and He will listen, He will forgive, He will answer. O the wonder of it! We become hardened; we become gospel-hardened.

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Well then, what about the Sabbath day, the Lord’s day, Sunday, the day of rest, the day God has commanded, God has appointed? Is it nothing to you? Are you grateful to God for this precious gift of the Sabbath, or do you despise it, do you break it? When the Sabbath day comes, do you love it? Do you say, “Welcome, sweet day of rest”? Or are you only too glad when it has sped away and it is Monday again?

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” What about chapel? What about the house of God? What does it mean to you? Perhaps I can appeal to you on this, and perhaps it will be a help to some of you little ones in Zion who are tried and tempted about your religion. What does the

house of God mean to you? What part does the chapel and its services have in your life? Is it nothing to you, or is it something to you? Is it everything to you? Some of you can say, “Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth.” “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by” – chapel, the house of God?

“There have I been, and there would go,
'Tis like a little heaven below.”

How many of you can say that? How many of you can trace a change in your life? You were brought to chapel; you had to come to chapel; you did not like coming to chapel. And then a difference came: you could not wait to get there. Something had happened in your life. You had a soul to be saved, an eternity to be prepared for, sins to be forgiven. I go back to those days when I could hardly wait for Sunday to come, and I could almost have wept when Sunday evening came, and I had to go home again. Have you known that change in your life? Hold it fast. Do you really believe what you do believe, that the Lord has said, “There *am* I in the midst” – not just, there will I be? Is it nothing to you that the great almighty God condescends to be present? We cannot see Him, but that does not mean He is any less present. If we really believed what we do believe, then how differently we would enter through the doors, and how different would be our behaviour – the realisation that God is here, and His almighty, all-seeing eye upon us!

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” What about this, that here upon this earth there are two peoples: the righteous and the wicked, the saved and the lost. Is it nothing to you? Is it nothing to you that God has a people He has chosen eternally? Is it any concern whether you might be one of them? I understand that Calvin, when he was a young man training to be a priest, was studying comparative religions, and he found how many thousands of different religions there were in the world. One day he was speaking to a young Huguenot cousin, telling him about these things. The young cousin said, “John, there are only two really.” Calvin was a proud young priest. He thought there was something simple about his cousin. He said, “John, there are only two: those who are right and those who are wrong; the sheep and the goats, the righteous and the wicked.” Is it nothing to you that there are only two peoples? Is it nothing to you whether at last it will be on the right hand or the left hand? Is it

nothing to you? Heaven is entirely on the ground of free grace. We can never merit it, never earn it. We have to learn how undeserving we are. If ever we are to be saved, it must be not through our merit or worth, but entirely through matchless mercy and grace, the free merit of God. Are these things attractive, delightful? Or “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”

What about the precious, sin-atoning blood of the Lord Jesus?

“The Saviour died, and by His blood
Brought rebel sinners back to God.”

That precious, precious blood which saves the vilest of sinners, which cleanses away the deepest of sins, that precious blood, “a fountain opened ... for sin and for uncleanness.”

“The vilest sinner out of hell,
Who lives to feel his need,
Is welcome to a throne of grace,
The Saviour’s blood to plead.”

Is it nothing to you that the Saviour shed His precious blood? Is it nothing to you that the Saviour died that sinners might live, that that precious blood atones for sin, washes away sin? I believe there are some here this morning who can honestly answer this question, and you can say this: “Is it nothing to me? It is *everything* to me. It is the only thing which really matters.” O how precious the blood of Jesus has been made to some of us! It is the only thing which really matters.

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” What about the name of the Lord Jesus, that worthy name by which we are called? Now we sing, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds!” Can you say that? Or “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by” – that wonderful name, the name of Jesus? Some people only use it in scorn. Some people only use it as an oath. But is it nothing to you, that name above every name, that only name whereby we must be saved?

“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” There is a chapter in Matthew where the enemies of the Lord Jesus came and they asked Him all kinds of questions. They asked Him this question and He graciously answered it. They asked Him another question and He answered it; and they asked Him a third question and He answered that. When they had

finished all these questions, at the end of the chapter He put a question to them. He said, “What think ye of Christ?” They could not answer that. This is the great question: “What think ye of Christ?” It “is the test to try both your state and your scheme; you cannot be right in the rest, unless you think rightly of Him.” I go back to when I was a worldly teenager. I went to a football match miles away from home. I was amid the milling crowd, and outside that football ground there was a man with a placard: “What think ye of Christ?” It cut me through and through. I do not believe it was saving, that it had any lasting effect, but I knew he was right and the rest of us were wrong.

There are many questions which God asks and we need to answer. God never asks a question because He needs any information, because He needs to know the answer, but He asks a question to test you and me, that we too might ask that question and seek to know the answer.

Well beloved friends, as we start the new year we need to ask this question: “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” What do your never-dying souls mean to you? What does eternity mean to you? What does the judgment day mean to you? What does the day of your death mean to you? What do the house of God, the Lord’s day, mean to you? What does it mean to you that there are the two peoples? Above all, what does the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ mean to you?

“But, if still a total stranger
To His precious name and blood,
Thou art on the brink of danger;
Canst thou face a holy God?
Think and tremble,
Death is now upon the road.”

Now I could speak like this until midnight. It would not affect you at all; it would not touch one heart; you would go home as hard as ever, completely unchanged, no different at all – except for one thing, that your condemnation would be greater, because it is one more warning not heeded. But if the Holy Spirit just opens your heart, touches your heart, softens your heart, you will go home different. May the Holy Ghost enable each one to come face to face with this question, and especially concerning the Person of the Saviour, His precious name and blood: what does it

really mean to you? Can you really answer that question? Or, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?”