

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 112

Accepted in the Beloved

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 18th September, 1994**

Text: *"To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved"* (Ephesians 1. 6).

This is the great, the vital question: how can sinful man find acceptance with God? It is the great question, the vital question. And if your religion is real, it will be the great question which will concern your soul: how can I find acceptance with God? God has created man; He has given man a life to live; I must have dealings with Him; one day I must meet Him, I must stand before His face. What hope have I that He will accept me? And what ground can I have that He should accept me? In other words, how can a God who is holy and pure and righteous accept into His favour, into His immediate presence, into heaven at last, a sinner who is lost and ruined and guilty and defiled? Now that is the great question, because if we are not accepted, if we fail to find acceptance, then (and O what a solemn thought!) then we must be rejected. How dreadful to be rejected by God! Yet you see, people take it for granted that God will accept them.

Let me give you an example. The first account we have of worship in the Bible: Cain and Abel, and Cain just took it for granted that he would be accepted, that his worship would be accepted, that his person would be accepted. Yet the Lord most solemnly showed that Cain's offering was refused, and that his person was rejected, and Cain proved what his character was when he murdered his brother, Abel. Now Abel, because God taught him the ground of a sinner's acceptance, by faith brought to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, and there he found acceptance, and though soon after he met with a cruel death, he was the first one to be landed safe in heaven.

"Accepted in the Beloved." There, beloved friends, we have the answer to the great, the vital question: how can a guilty sinner be accepted by God? How can I personally be accepted with God? Now this is the answer which the gospel reveals: "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." O what a precious, sacred truth this! Someone recently said to me, "Every time you pray, you quote this text, but you never preach from

it.” Well, what a beautiful word this: “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” What this word implies very simply and very clearly and very definitely is that there can be no acceptance in any other place, no acceptance out of Christ. Adam unfallen could go in his sinless innocence and hold communion with his God and he could find acceptance. But when Adam fell, “sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” Then Adam fled from the presence of God. He knew that he was no longer welcome. He knew there was no way of approach, until the Lord in the riches of His grace revealed to fallen Adam that there was a way by which a guilty sinner could be accepted with God. Really this is the foundation of the gospel, a sinner’s acceptance in Christ. “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” What it really means is that no sinner ever has any ground of acceptance in himself; that no sinner has any plea in himself; that God cannot accept a venturing sinner for anything that is in the sinner. But our hymnwriter puts it very simply and very beautifully, very clearly:

“These He accepts for Jesus’ sake,
And views them righteous in His Son.”

It is to find acceptance in Jesus and to find acceptance there and there alone. “Accepted in the Beloved.” So if you and I are brought into real concern about our acceptance with God, this must be the ground on which we find acceptance: in Christ, everything in Christ, nothing in self. “Accepted in the Beloved” – for Jesus’ sake, on the grounds of His worthy name, through His merit, through His finished work, clothed in His righteousness, washed in His precious blood. That is the only ground of a sinner’s acceptance with God. This is the gospel. What a wonderful way is opened up, “to the praise of the glory of His grace,” a way in which the vilest sinner out of hell, brought to feel his need, can find acceptance with a holy God. That is God’s favour, that is heaven at last, in Christ.

“To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” It must be for Jesus’ sake, and it must be for Jesus’ sake alone. Let me try to illustrate. You remember when old Jacob and all his house at the invitation of Joseph left Canaan and came down to the land of Egypt. There were seventy souls in all. Now really to Pharaoh the king of Egypt they meant nothing. They had no claim upon him, no claim upon his favour. But Pharaoh dearly loved Joseph. He most highly honoured Joseph. These seventy who came down from the land of

Canaan were all intimately related to Joseph. They belonged to him. They were his father, his brethren. So Pharaoh most lovingly and kindly accepted them. He could not do enough for them. He gave them the land of Goshen. But he did not do it for their sake. They had no claim to his favour. He did it completely, entirely for Joseph's sake, because of the love he had to Joseph. That is just a faint illustration.*

“He hath made us accepted in the Beloved,” in Christ. You notice the name which is here given to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: the Beloved. It does not say, accepted in Christ, though that would be true, or accepted in Jesus, or accepted in the Saviour, accepted in the great Shepherd of the sheep, accepted in the Redeemer. “Accepted in the Beloved.” I think this is the only place where the Lord Jesus is just spoken of so simply as *the Beloved*. The point here is this: how dearly the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is beloved of His Father. And it is because He is so dearly beloved of His Father that unworthy sinners who stand in relationship to Him are accepted. That is the point. He so dearly loves His Son, His best Beloved, and because He so dearly loves His Son, He accepts in Him, the Beloved, all those who are brought into loving union with Him, all those who are brought to put their trust in Him. “Accepted in the Beloved.” Mind you, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is dearly loved of all His people, every one of them. For “unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” O He is made to be the Beloved to every sinner saved by grace. But that is not the point here. It is the Beloved of His Father. That is the ground of the sinner's acceptance. Accepted in Him whom His Father so dearly loves, whom His Father has loved from all eternity, because of His favour to His own dear Son.

“He hath made us” – unworthy sinners, *us*, the vilest of the vile – “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” Now let us linger here for a few moments: this beautiful, blessed, glorious title of God's dear Son, *the Beloved*. Who can comprehend the everlasting union between the Father and the Son as the Son eternally lay in His Father's bosom, loved with that ineffable love which had no beginning, which never can end! The love of the Father to His Son. We go to the River Jordan. O that has been a sacred spot to me, the River Jordan, where John the Baptist baptized his Lord and Master, Jesus. You see Jesus coming to be baptized by John, and John said, “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?” “Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.

Then he suffered Him.” And when the incarnate Son of God came up out of the water, the holy Dove, the Holy Ghost, descended on His head. “And lo a voice from heaven,” the voice of the eternal Father; “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” There is the one way a guilty sinner finds acceptance: “Accepted in the Beloved.” “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And so He is well pleased with all His people in Christ.

“He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” Then go to the Mount of Transfiguration. You see the Lord Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah, witnessed by Peter, James and John, and then a cloud hid them all from their sight. And lo a voice from the excellent glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.” Now this is the glorious Person where a sinner finds acceptance.

“Accepted in the Beloved.” Then go again to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. See the lifeless body of your incarnate God laid there by loving hands, the work of redemption complete, the sacrifice offered, the work finished. And then see the glories of the resurrection morning. “Declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead.” It was not now an audible voice from heaven as at Jordan or as on the Mount of Transfiguration. But this was the Father’s proof that this was His beloved Son in whom He was eternally well pleased in that He raised Him from the dead. “Him hath God exalted with His right hand,” because this is His dear Son in whom He delighted from all eternity. Now here and here alone is the ground of a sinner’s acceptance.

“He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” So if you are born of the Spirit, if you are awakened, your blind eyes opened, this will be your great concern, this point of acceptance. As you venture before a holy God – and you have to venture; you have a soul to be saved, sins to be forgiven, an eternity to be prepared for, needs to be supplied; you have to go; you have to have dealings with God – what hope, what ground have you of being accepted? And Satan will tell you that there is no hope in self. Quite a few of our hymnwriters take this point up. Two of them come to my mind.

“In vain we seek for peace with God,
By methods of our own;

Jesus, there's nothing but Thy blood
Can bring us near the throne."

And then again,

"'Tis true, in self you have no ground for joy,
Nor can you hope the law to satisfy;
But Jesus' blood has full atonement made,
And faith therein will make the conscience glad."

"He hath made us accepted in the Beloved," His beloved Son from all eternity in whom He is well pleased, your only hope, your only plea. But also His beloved Son incarnate who has fulfilled the law in His people's place, magnified the law, made it honourable, gone to the end of the law for righteousness, brought in a glorious righteousness which is unto all and upon all them that believe, satisfied justice, made a way to heaven, shed His precious blood that the vilest of sins might be washed away. Now it is accepted in Him, God's dear Son from all eternity, the Beloved of the Father, but not just that. This beloved Son has finished the work of redemption, has brought in that righteousness which is such a perfect covering for these poor, venturing sinners, that precious blood to cleanse them from all their sin. So, "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." The Father looks on a sinner in Christ, accepts him, views him righteous in His Son. "Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee."

"He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." It is more than that. He hath made us *acceptable* in the Beloved. A sinner clothed in the filthy rags of his own righteousness, a sinner in his guilt, is not acceptable to the Father, to a holy God. But a sinner with all his sins washed away in the Redeemer's blood, a sinner clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus, is not only *accepted*, but he is *acceptable*. But it is all in Christ, nothing in self. "He hath made us accepted" – He hath made us acceptable – "in the Beloved." This is the gospel as I understand it. And I am more and more persuaded of this: that if the gospel does not do any good to the souls of the hearers, nothing else will. How many of you have been brought to say, "The gospel – I love it: 'tis perfectly free!"? How many of you sing, "To the praise of the glory of His grace," here? The glory of His grace in devising salvation's plan, the glory of His grace in being willing to accept of a substitute; the glory of His grace in accepting these sinners in Christ. O but the glory of His grace, not only accepting them, receiving them, but

receiving them as His dear sons and daughters in Christ, giving them an undeserved heaven in Christ! May you sing tonight, “To the praise of the glory of *His* grace, wherein *He* hath made us acceptable in the Beloved.” *He* has done it. *He* hath made us acceptable. We could never have made ourselves acceptable, but He hath made us acceptable, and, “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” This is the only ground on which a guilty sinner can be received by a holy God, the only way in which you can find peace and pardon and forgiveness and assurance. It is the only way; there is no other way. But beloved friends, you do not need any other way (do you?) because the way is so sure. And the Father gives the sweet assurance that all those who venture on this ground will find acceptance in Jesus.

“To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” So also it is with your prayers. This is the ground and foundation of prayer. How can my poor prayers be accepted? I do not deserve answers. Satan tells me that. My unbelieving heart tells me that. I do not deserve answers. I have sinned against God. I have brought these troubles upon myself. You and I as sinners go to a holy God. “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved” – not only our sinful persons, but our poor prayers.

“By Him my prayers acceptance gain,
Although with sin defiled;
Satan accuses me in vain,
And I am owned a child.”

(A verse from the well-known hymn, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds,” which is invariably left out, even when the extra verses are sung.)

O but the ground and foundation of prayer! Well perhaps tonight as you have come to chapel, you have your things, your hard things. Some of you are sad and lonely. Some of you have things in your family. Some of you are concerned about your health. Some of you are concerned about your loved ones. Some of you are concerned about your future, about the unknown way. Some of you are concerned about things in the church of God. There are so many people here who have so many burdens and cares and concerns, and the heart knows its own bitterness. These things lie heavy on you, they are burdens. You cannot manage them yourself; they are too hard for you. The Lord will not have you manage them yourself.

He will have you bring them to the throne of grace in prayer, to the mercy seat. So you have to pray. He says, "The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it." He says, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." He says, "Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass." So you feel you must pray. You know you must pray. But then you go and your prayers are so poor and you feel your heart is so hard and there is so much indifference, and you realise you do not deserve the Lord to hear and answer those prayers. Ah, this is the ground. Plead the name of Jesus. Plead His righteousness alone. Plead His precious blood. Plead it for your own acceptance. Plead it for the acceptance of your prayers. And you will be surprised what poor prayers receive such blessed answers for Jesus' sake.

"Accepted in the Beloved" – not just your person, your sinful person, but your prayers with all their defilement and infirmity. O those prayers accepted in heaven, accepted through Christ, accepted in Him, all the sin taken out of them, everything that is missing added to them, and then the Lord Jesus presenting them to the Father in heaven! That is why you receive these blessed answers of peace when your prayers are so poor and sinful and defiled. "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved" – your person as a venturing sinner, but also your prayers.

"To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." And then in the last great day. O you see this is it, isn't it? In the last great day there will be thousands who will not be accepted, who will be rejected for ever. "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." There is no acceptance there. Some have taken it for granted they will be accepted. Some have never really prayed to be accepted. Some have sought to be accepted on wrong grounds, through what they themselves can do. O beware of trusting in anything of your own. O beware of trusting in the good opinion other people have of you. When you and I stand before the judgment seat of Christ, there will be one ground and one ground alone of acceptance. It will be this: "Accepted in the Beloved." Why, "These are they which have ... washed their robes," those robes of their profession, not the robes of Christ's righteousness which do not need any washing. "These are they which have ... washed their robes, and made them white in

the blood of the Lamb. Therefore” – on no other ground, for no other reason, “accepted in the Beloved” – “therefore are they before the throne.... They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” This is the ground upon which every single sinner saved by grace will be found in heaven at last: “Accepted in the Beloved.” The Lord’s people in the last great day will hear His voice: “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” And the grounds, the only grounds upon which any sinner will hear that voice: “Accepted in the Beloved.”

Well, this is the gospel. This is the foundation of it. This is the answer to the great, the vital question: how can I, a guilty sinner, find acceptance with a holy God? How can I find it now as I have to come before Him seeking His help, seeking His salvation? How can I find it in my poor prayers? How can I find it at last when I come to die, when I come down into the swellings of Jordan, when I meet my Maker, when I stand before the judgment seat of Christ? And this is the answer, the wonderful answer: “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” No other way, no other ground of hope, no other salvation, only in Christ. “He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.” In union with Christ, in His merits, in Him by precious faith. “To the praise of the glory of His grace.” All of grace from first to last, man’s merit nothing here, “not of works, lest any man should boast.” “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”

What a beautiful word, “Accepted in the Beloved.” Recently, at a Thanksgiving Service, we closed with the hymn which ends like this, and it quite laid hold on me, the beauty of it, and it fits in with the text this evening:

“With Christ, our Lord, we share our part
In the affections of His heart;
Nor shall our souls be thence removed,
Till He forgets His first Beloved.”

“To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”