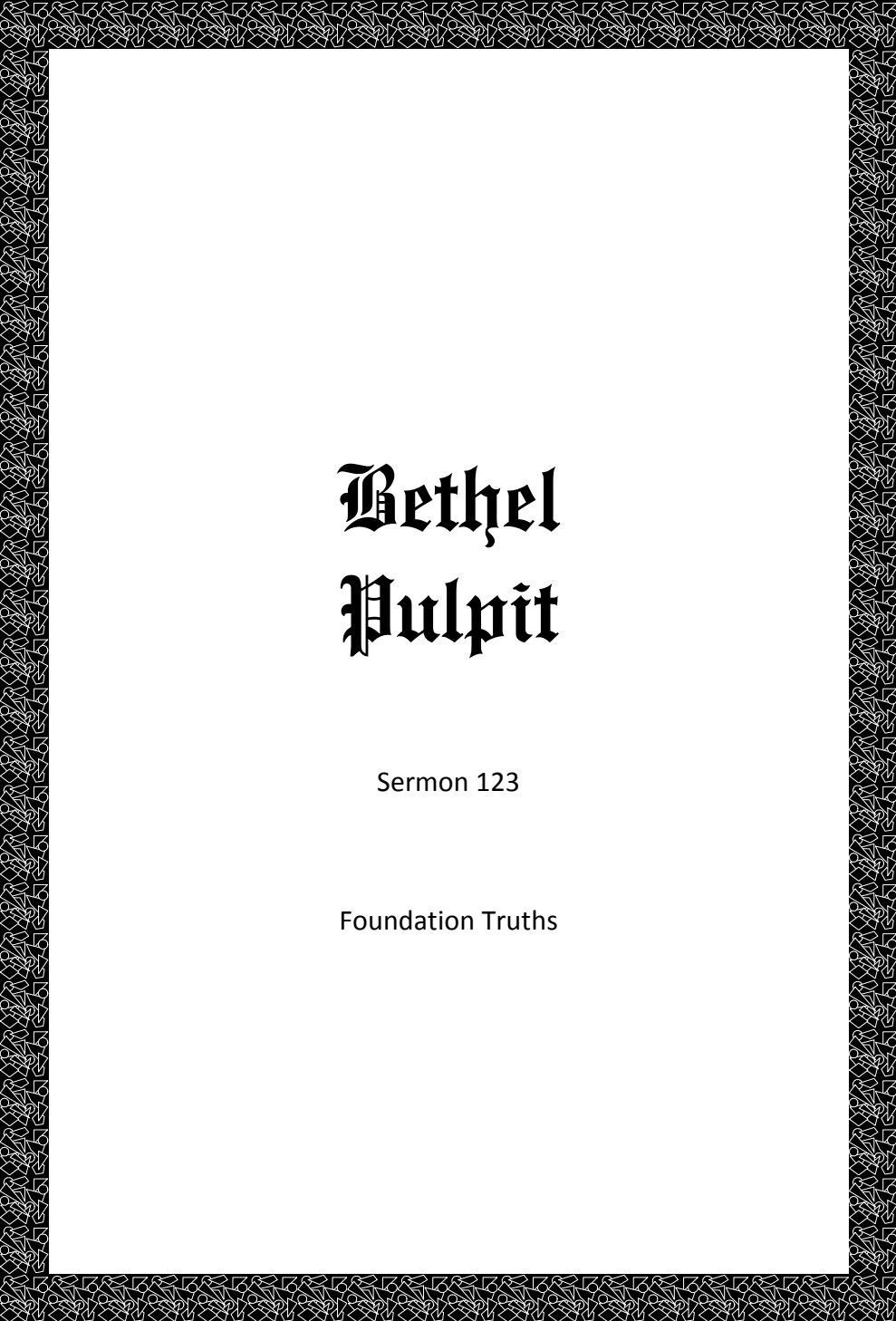




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 123

Foundation Truths

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 16th October, 1994**

Text: *“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3. 4-7).*

At present for our Lord's day services it seems as if the Lord is leading me right back to speak of the vital, foundation truths of our most holy faith. And we need to be reminded of them. Perhaps in the past we have taken too much for granted. We have spoken of this and that, and perhaps assumed these vitals truths which are the foundation of all real godliness. Here in these verses we have the whole framework of salvation from everlasting to everlasting, made known in Christ, applied by the Holy Ghost. Without this vital, solid, sure, everlasting framework, the whole of salvation would fall into nothing. These are solid, sure, substantial things that can never fail, that can never be abolished. What a wonderful mercy if you and I are bound up in them, bound in the bundle of life with the Lord our God! You have the whole work of the Trinity here: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, bringing sinners to glory. You have here the three R's of true religion. You older ones remember how in education people used to speak of the three R's – reading, writing and arithmetic. Well, you have the three R's here: ruin through sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Holy Ghost.

So first of all the apostle very, very clearly shows the need of this great salvation. “Here we would begin,” doctrinally and personally. “Thine's alas! a lost condition.” Through the Adam fall, by original sin, by practice, in deed, also in thought and word, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

“Thine's alas! a lost condition;
Works cannot work thee remission,
Nor thy goodness do thee good.”

May the Holy Spirit show it to us personally, show us this: “My best is stained and dyed with sin; my all is nothing worth.” May the Holy Spirit personally show us our need of salvation. For as good, quaint Daniel Herbert says,

“... here I would begin:
O do I feel a want of Christ
To save me from my sin?”

Because that is where all real godliness begins personally in our our lives, to feel our need of Christ to save our souls from sin. Some are shaken over hell and some are more gently led. The mystery of divine sovereignty in the call by grace is God’s own work. But with each one it is this: to feel my need of Christ to save my soul from sin. How many of you have taken that first step in real religion, to feel your need of Christ and Christ only, Christ alone, to save *your* soul from sin?

“For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (verse 3). “And such were some of you.” But it is to feel your need of Christ to save your soul from sin. “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. *But*” – and then you have the whole, glorious plan of salvation by grace sweetly opened up. “*But*” – O this wonderful *but* of free and sovereign grace, this wonderful *but* of the gospel! You cannot get beyond it, you cannot sink beneath it. “*But* after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared” – this lost, ruined, vile, sinful man.

“After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.” So it all begins with God. Let us be clear, the apostle here is speaking of God the eternal Father, and He calls Him *our Saviour*. Of course, usually when we read or speak of the Saviour we think of the Lord Jesus Christ, but here this is God the eternal Father and He is called *God our Saviour*. Why is the eternal Father called God our Saviour? You say, I can see it with the dear Lord Jesus. He is the Saviour. He went to Calvary; He died; He shed His precious blood. Why is the eternal Father called God our Saviour? Why? Because He formed the plan of salvation. Because He entered into covenant with His beloved Son and with all His

people in Him. Because He appointed the Lord Jesus to come on salvation's work. Because in the fulness of the time He sent Him, and He upheld Him, and He delighted in His work, and He received His sacrifice, and He raised Him up and exalted Him in heaven, and He is well-pleased with the finished work of His beloved Son. "God our Saviour." May you see this morning the foundation of salvation in eternity past in the Father, God our Saviour.

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared." I find this a most attractive expression, a most beautiful expression, "the kindness and love of God our Saviour." When you think of what we deserve: a lost eternity; when you think of what we deserve: the wrath of God. And here we read of kindness and love towards lost, ruined, fallen man, and we read that it *appeared*. "The kindness and love of God ... *appeared*." So our minds straightaway go to that beautiful word: "The Lord hath *appeared* of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." And that everlasting love and the cords of God's everlasting love are secured in eternity at both ends, as old John Warburton used to say, from everlasting to everlasting, and they come right down in time and embrace a poor, lost sinner and save him and keep him and take him to heaven at last.

"After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared." It appeared in eternity past in the covenant of grace. It appeared when the Lord Jesus died. For "once in the end of the world hath He" – the Lord Jesus – "appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Then He appears personally in salvation. I remember at one of our funerals in the late 1960's at the Rothesay Road cemetery reading the burial service where it speaks of those who look for His appearing, those who love His appearing. Most of our congregation were there. I had that sweet, solemn, sacred sense that there were many standing around that open grave who looked for the Lord's appearing, who loved the Lord's appearing. And I am persuaded of it here this morning, despite all our faults, sins and failures, that there are many of you here this morning who look for the appearing of the Lord Jesus and who love the appearing of the Lord Jesus.

Well to come to points, wouldn't it make your heart glad, wouldn't it delight your spirit, if the Lord in love and kindness were to appear to you, even you, this morning? The Apostle Paul speaks of wonderful blessings, eternal blessings, and he says, "Not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." Blessed souls here this morning who look for His appearing, who love His appearing!

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared." It is very attractive, kindness and love. Even naturally these are beautiful things, aren't they? Everyone appreciates them, kindness and love. I remember a few years ago sending a Christmas card. I think it said on it, printed on it, "With kind thoughts." I sent it to someone who had been in prison, with whom I had been brought in contact. He 'phoned me up and said, "That is the first time in my life anyone has ever said anything kind to me." You think of that. He said, "It is the first time in my life anyone has said anything kind." The world is crying out for kindness, and still today there are people even naturally who have never known any kindness. This man said he never knew his parents. He was born in the slums of Liverpool. He said his whole life was orphanage, approved school and prison. So even naturally, kindness and love, what attractive things they are! But then you come to the great God and Saviour, His kindness, His love, towards those who were rebels against Him.

"Kindness and love." So you have that expression which has become part of our gospel vocabulary: *lovingkindness*. It is kindness and love. It is the Lord being kind to His people because He loves them. It is like David with poor, lame Mephibosheth. "Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake." May God the eternal Father, God our Saviour, say that to some of you here this morning as you are here with your lame feet like poor Mephibosheth and you feel yourself an enemy like him. "Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness" *for Jesus' sake*, "and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at My table continually," eternally.

"The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man." I wonder if you have ever walked with the psalmist when suddenly he exclaimed, "How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God!" Or how many of you have walked with the prophet when he said, "I will mention the

lovingkindnesses of the Lord”? It is the most we can do, you know. We can only *mention* them. “Living tongues are dumb at best; we must die to speak of Christ.” But, “I will mention them,” says the prophet, in prayer and in testimony. “I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord.” Perhaps some of you this morning have to say this:

“When trouble, like a gloomy cloud,
Has gathered thick and thundered loud,
He near my soul has always stood;
His lovingkindness, O how good!”

“Kindness and love,” and it is for ever. “They who once His kindness prove, find it everlasting love.” May you be able to hold this fast: it is for ever. Why, “the mountains shall depart” – the most lasting, the most immovable of earthly things. “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.” Here then is the divine origin of salvation in the eternal being of God Himself, in His kindness and in His love, entirely of grace from first to last. So we are not surprised with what follows immediately afterwards. The apostle wants to clear the ground completely. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” The best that man can do comes short here. Our very best is stained and dyed with sin, our very all is nothing worth. Now how many of you realise this and feel it? Our very righteousness is as filthy rags. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” These works – and by this expression *works* in Scriptures is meant what we do, the good things we do, good deeds, good actions, deeds of kindness, help – these works have nothing whatsoever to do with salvation as a procuring cause, nothing whatsoever to do with our justification, nothing whatsoever to do with our acceptance with God. It is “not by works of righteousness which we have done.” On an old gravestone not far from here, these words are written:

“‘Tis not by works of righteousness
Which our own hands have done
But we are saved by sovereign grace
Abounding in the Son.”

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” Those of you who like to read about Sukey Harley, the Gilpins and James Bourne may remember that Bernard Gilpin, when dealing with an anxious soul, would bring him to this vital foundation: “Sick sinner, expect no balm but Christ’s blood; thy own works reject, the bad and the good.”

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” But did you notice at the end of this glorious passage concerning salvation Paul says, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works”? Good works are important, but not as the ground of salvation. There was a famous preacher of free grace and a woman angrily accosted him. She said, “Do you not believe in good works?” Quaintly he said, “Do you believe in chimneys?” She said, “Don’t insult me. What are you talking about?” He said, “Well, my house has to have chimneys; they are very important. But they are not the foundation on which my house is built.” There is the root of the tree: salvation by grace. There is the beautiful fruit upon the branches: the good works of God’s people, an evidence of their faith, an evidence of their salvation. Do not let people accuse Paul of Antinomianism. How often people have said that if it is all of grace you can do what you want. Paul says, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” But immediately afterwards he says, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed” – that is those whose only hope is in salvation by grace; that is those who have renounced their own works as the ground of their hope – “that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.”

“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.” On what ground does the Lord deal with His people? If you are a child of God, the Lord will have dealings with you. On what ground does He deal with you? Well, says David, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” And what a wonderful things that is! If the Lord did deal with us according to our sins, if He did reward us according to our iniquities, then everyone in the chapel would be lost. But on what grounds does God deal with His people? “According to His mercy He saved us.”

Yet we pause here for this solemn thought: that although almighty God in His holiness and sovereignty and justice does not deal with His people according to their sins, at Calvary He dealt with His beloved Son according to His people's sins. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." The eternal Father in justice dealt with Christ at Calvary in wrath according to the sins of His people that He might deal with His people on the grounds of mercy. And that is what the beautiful couplet means which some of you love so much:

"Twas Jesus, my Friend, when He hung on the tree,
Who opened the channel of mercy for me."

This wonderful mercy which so freely flows to guilty sinners through the blood of Jesus.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." Mercy from everlasting in the covenant of grace, mercy in Jesus when He hung on the tree, and mercy made known to you personally when the Lord kindly begins to deal with you and to teach you your need. And that mercy is everlasting. "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him."

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." "Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." But then He comes to the application of it, how it is made known. "By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." In other words, who are the people who have an interest in these everlasting blessings? Who are these who are partakers? Well, he says, those who are born again and only those who are born again, because all whom the Father has loved and all whom the Son has redeemed shall be born again by the Holy Spirit. So to you and me personally it comes to this vital point: "Ye must be born again." There is no substitute for it, no salvation without it. So this is the great question: "Am I quickened by His Spirit?" Am I born again, or am I a stranger to it?

"Am I quickened by His Spirit;
Live a life of faith and prayer?"

Trusting wholly to His merit;
Casting on Him all my care?
Daily panting,
In His likeness to appear?"

"He saved us." He saved us by that wonderful kindness and love in eternity past. He saved us by that mercy in Jesus. But here, "He saved us, by the washing of regeneration." This does not mean water baptism as some have foolishly affirmed. "The washing of regeneration." Why does the apostle compare the new birth to washing? The margin puts it, *laver*. By the *laver* of regeneration. You remember two or three years ago I preached a sermon on the laver of brass (*Bethel Pulpit*, no. 70). It was so beautiful and shining that as the priest approached it he could see himself and he could see his infirmity, his uncleanness. In the shining laver which showed him what he was, there he washed and was clean, because the priest had to be washed as he went forth to serve the Lord. "By the washing" – by the laver – "of regeneration." Well it is. If you and I are born again of the Holy Spirit, it will always have a cleansing effect. I know that sinners in the sight of a holy God are cleansed by the blood of Christ and I know we want to feel the application of it in our conscience, but if you know anything of the experience of the new birth, it will have a cleansing effect; it will have a sanctifying effect. And if what you profess to be regeneration has never had that cleansing, sanctifying effect, separating you from the world, subduing your sin, making you die to your past life, making you die to the lusts of your flesh, then it is not the washing of regeneration.

"He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Why does he call it a *renewing*? Well, because if born again, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" – new thoughts, new fears, new concerns, new desires, a new appetite. "By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

Let me just say one last thing this morning, and I refer to that time when the Lord washed the disciples' feet, and Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Wrong, Peter. The Lord Jesus said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." How solemn! And then Peter said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." You can sympathise with Peter, but wrong again, Peter. The Lord Jesus said, "He

that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet.” What the Lord Jesus really meant was this: there is a washing of God’s people, all of them, in regeneration, when they are born again. They need the daily washing, the daily cleansing, the daily application, but that first washing of regeneration can never be repeated. There are the two faults. Here is a person fallen into sin. Well, he just shrugs it off. The Lord Jesus says, You need that daily cleansing. But here is another one fallen into sin and he thinks he has never been born again, or needs to be born again the second time. No, says the Lord, that washing of regeneration can never be repeated, but it will stand for ever.

“According to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

(If the Lord will, the evening sermon on the same text will be published next month.)