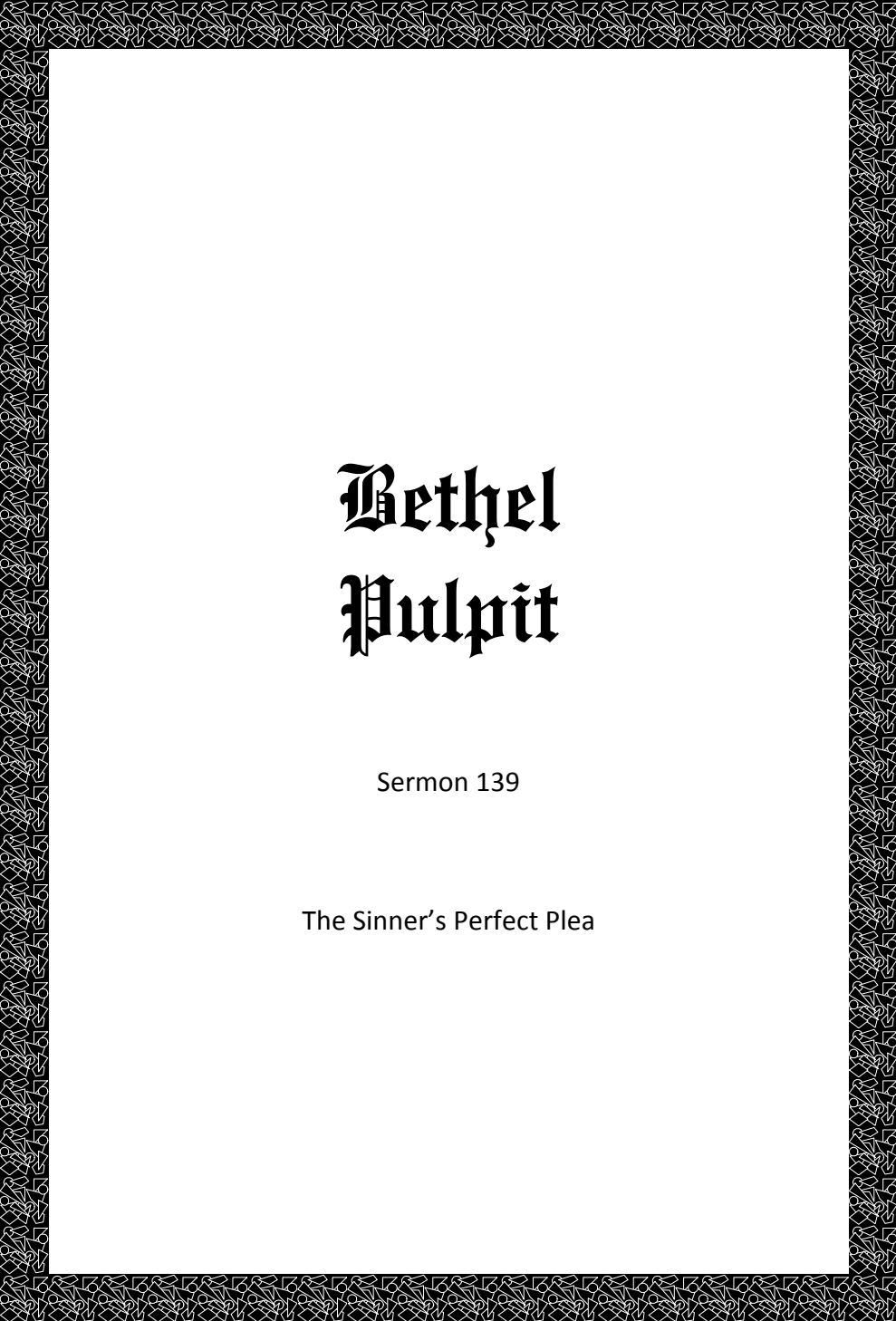




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 139

The Sinner's Perfect Plea

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 19th January, 1997**

Text: *“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” (Isaiah 53. 10).*

Beloved friends, here we are on holy ground, because we come to the cross of Christ. And here by faith we “behold that scene of matchless grace, ‘tis Jesus in the sinner’s place.” The Father bruising His own, eternally-loved Son that sinners might be eternally saved. O what a chapter is Isaiah 53! The place where I “found the ground wherein my anchor, hope, shall firm remain, the wounds of Jesus for my sin.”

By faith we behold a Person, a glorious Person, the Lamb of God without blemish and without spot. And we view Him as the appointed sacrifice. We see His precious, sacred humanity, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” Yet we see Him bleeding and dying on the cross in the guilty sinner’s place, a substitutionary atonement; like the lamb slain in the place of Isaac, here we have the Lamb of God’s appointing. And this innocent Man is no less that true, almighty God, “Man to suffer, God to save.” Here we see the wonders of His love, that “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” For,

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly
But love to sinners fills His heart,
And makes Him choose to die.”

O what a scene of suffering love we have here, to be brought by faith to the cross of Christ! The emphasis in this solemn, sacred verse is that the death of Christ was an offering for sin. That is the reason, the purpose. He does not die just to set an example. He does not die just to seal His testimony with His blood. He does not die just at the hands of wicked men. He lays down His life an offering for sin. Really, that is your greatest need and mine, to find an offering for our sins, because God requires such an offering. But where can one be found? We have the

well-known words of Micah: “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?” Now what offering can I bring? God is holy; I am a sinner. God demands either perfect satisfaction from myself, which I cannot give, or an offering for my sin which will atone. Now where can I find it? Where can you find it? Has it ever been a concern? “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” Now where can a sinner find an offering for his sin? And here, as we behold the Lamb of God sacrificed at Calvary, we see the only sacrifice, the only offering. “Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” And the death of Christ must avail.

We do want to have clear views of the atonement. We are not Particular Baptists just because it is history, or Dr. Gill, or something like that. We want a salvation that will save. We want a redemption that will redeem, not this indefinite redemption that so many professed Calvinists seem to be teaching at present. I would not want to rest my soul on a doctrine like that, when the atonement itself is something indefinite and if you accept it, it will do, and if you do not, it will not. It is sufficient for one sin and sufficient for ten thousand worlds and it atones for Peter, but it will do just as well for Judas if he will have it. We have to die and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We want Christ to do everything, a work which is completely finished, a bridge which may be as narrow as the elect, but it goes the whole way across the river into heaven, not this bridge as wide as the world that goes three quarters of the way and leaves you to jump and swim the rest.

I realise I am speaking emphatically tonight. I believe the Lord burnt these truths into my heart when I was a teenager. We want a redemption that redeems; we want a salvation that saves; and we want an atonement which gives all the honour and glory to the Lord and that lays the sinner in the dust. You can come here as a sinner with all your emptiness and ruin and guilt, and you can rest secure on the atonement.

I wonder how many of you found your hearts touched by the hymn we were singing just now. I hope some of you did. I hope you are not all hard-hearted singers of our sacred hymns. What about this?

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

That is the religion which will take you to heaven. What about this?

“My soul looks back to see
The burdens Thou didst bear,
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there.

O to see the death of Christ as an offering for sin! It was an offering that availed for all for whom it was offered. The blood of Christ could never be shed in vain. Divine justice was satisfied. God was pleased. The work was completely finished. A new and living way was made to heaven. A precious fountain was opened in the blood of Christ for sin and for uncleanness, where the vilest of sinners can be made as pure as an angel of light. All this in Christ's offering for sin.

This word, of course, comes towards the end of this beautiful, sacred chapter on the death of Christ, and the emphasis is this: there is going to be a sure effect of His death. The actual death of Christ secured the everlasting salvation of all for whom He died. It ensured their new birth; it ensured their effectual calling; it ensured their repentance and faith; it ensured their perseverance; and it ensured their heaven. We make great claims for the death of Christ and we are not ashamed to make these great claims. We do not want this indefinite atonement which some hold, which is neither general nor particular. This indefinite atonement is a revival of the teaching of Andrew Fuller, against which Gadsby contended. We want a religion that will take us to heaven at last. We need the work of the Holy Spirit of God, teaching us our need of an interest in Christ's one offering for sin and bringing us to rest our souls secure on that one offering. Our souls are safe there and safe for ever.

But the death of Christ ensures all these other things. It ensures that all those for whom Jesus died will one by one be born again, that they

will be called by grace, that they will be blessed with repentance and faith, that they will be brought as sinners to Jesus, that they will be given grace to persevere and then enter heaven at last.

“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.” Some people foolishly say the resurrection of Jesus is not taught in the Old Testament. What could be clearer than this on the resurrection? Here is a Person who is dying on the cross, but He shall prolong His days, and He shall see His seed. This word looks beyond the burial of the Lord Jesus to His glorious resurrection and His ascension into heaven where He maintains His everlasting priesthood. “Not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.” I like that expression, that unusual expression of the apostle: “After the power of an endless life.”

“He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” By the pleasure of the Lord here we understand the eternal will of the Father in the covenant of grace concerning the salvation of His people. That was the Father’s good pleasure from all eternity, that there should be a multitude that no man can number who one day would be with Him in heaven. That was the pleasure of the Lord, and it shall prosper in His hand; that is, in the Saviour’s hand, because His eternal Father put it into His hand from everlasting. All His good pleasure, all His good will in the salvation of sinners, He put into the hands of Christ. He knew it would prosper in His hand. He knew it was safe in His hand. It would not have been safe in the hand of any angel, but it was safe in the hands of Christ. “And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” It is a wonderful thing if your soul and my soul were in the hand of Jesus from all eternity. Dr. Watts says, “If I am found in Jesus’ hands, my soul can ne’er be lost.”

I would just say this. If your soul was in the hands of Jesus from all eternity, if it was there in covenant bonds as the gift of the Father, then the time will come when you personally, feeling your soul’s need, will commit the wellbeing and safekeeping of your never-dying soul into the hands of Jesus, where in God’s purpose it has been from all eternity. That is living faith. “My soul into Thy arms I cast; I trust I shall be saved at last.”

“The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” So all the work of salvation, the work of redemption, was put into the Saviour’s hand as our Surety. I like to speak about the Surety. He is one who makes himself utterly, completely responsible for someone else. That is a wonderful thing if that someone else cannot manage his own case, like you and me. O but to see this great Surety in the covenant. “I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, ... then let me bear the blame for ever.” Why, the people of God were as safe in the hands of Christ before the world had any being as they will be at last when they are landed safe in heaven! O but this Surety! He undertakes to do everything for them, to obey the law for them, to satisfy divine justice for them, to die for them, to rise again for them. He undertakes to do everything for them.

“And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” We have that wonderful word in Isaiah 42: “He shall not fail.” With you and me there is nothing but failure, but with the incarnate Son of God, “He shall not fail.” And when He was born at Bethlehem, when He came into this world of sin and sorrow, this word foretold the whole of His life: “He shall not fail.” “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” He did not fail to stand against the assaults of Satan. He did not fail in His love to sinners. He did not fail in obeying the law, magnifying the law, making it honourable. He did not fail to bear the curse of a broken law, to bear the sins of all His people and to bear them for ever away. “He shall not fail.”

“The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand,” which it did when He cried, “It is finished,” and He saw all His people saved with an everlasting salvation. I believe just before the dear Redeemer bowed His head and died, He saw every single one for whom He was suffering as they would be at last in heaven – you and me if we are amongst them. And He saw of the travail of His soul and He was satisfied: satisfied that not one was lost; satisfied that they all would be in heaven at last.

“The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” And so, “He shall see His seed.” “A seed shall serve Him, a generation shall call Him blessed. They shall come and shall declare His righteousness to a people that shall be born, that He hath done this.” “He shall see His seed.” “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” In this we see the Lord’s harvest. Calvary was the place where He sowed in tears. “He

that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing His sheaves with Him.” “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.”

“He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” When shall He see His seed? When one by one they are born of the Spirit. That is the pleasure of the Lord prospering in His hand. When they are brought to “leave the world’s deceitful shore, and leave it to return no more,” then He shall see His seed. “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” Why, it was for this joy that was set before Him – this joy of seeing them one by one gathered to His sacred feet – for this joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

“He shall see His seed.” When the poor publican says, “God be merciful to me,” He shall see His seed. When the poor, dying thief says, “Remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom,” He shall see His seed. When this poor soul under agony and guilt has to cry, “Thou, O Christ, art all I want,” when this one has to say, “Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on Thee,” then, “He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” He shall see His seed when this one comes with repentance, with tears of godly sorrow, with a soft heart, a heart made tender in the fear of God. And He shall see His seed when this one comes with precious faith, looking to Jesus and to Jesus alone, Jesus his only hope. “He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” There is no uncertainty about the work.

“When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed.” I want to bring this close home to your conscience and mine. When the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ died on the cross, He made His soul an offering for sin, and that offering availed. Nothing can ever be added to it; nothing can ever be taken from it. It is a finished work. But under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, as the pleasure of the Lord prospers in the Redeemer’s hand, each of these for whom He died will one by one be brought to the throne of grace, one by one brought as sinners to the blood-sprinkled mercyseat. And this is the way they shall come: they shall make His soul an offering for sin. In other words, Christ their only plea,

Christ their only hope, Christ all their salvation. And then, “He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.”

The great, the vital point under divine teaching, under the exercise of soul as a sinner, is to be brought to this point: to make Christ’s soul an offering for our sin by faith. So we are brought to feel our sin, our guilt, We are brought to view the solemnity of death and eternity. What offering can we bring? What hope can we have? What plea can there be? Where can we find an offering? O but to find it here! Oliver Cromwell, in one of his letters, said, “Under a sense of my daily infirmities I have to venture and offer to the eternal Father a perfect Christ.” O that is it. You and I daily in our sin and guilt, and God’s holy demands are there; but under a sense of our sin and infirmity we have to venture and offer a perfect Christ. He instead of me. Nothing in the sinner, everything in the Saviour. Myself nothing, Christ everything. Beloved friends, do any of you know anything of this, making His soul an offering for sin?

I think I am right in saying this is the only time in the chapter we have thou. The Father speaks of My righteous Servant, and He speaks of Me, and He speaks of He. But here, He says, thou. “Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin.” I do like to try to keep close to Scripture. “When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin.” So under divine teaching, led by the Spirit, drawn by the Spirit, nothing in your hand, nothing of your own to plead, you venture as a sinner, and there you present your offering, just like Abel presented his offering. Not Cain: Cain came with his own doings, his own works, the fruit of the earth, and it was rejected. But Abel brought his offering. He brought a lamb that was slain and he offered it to God for his acceptance, and it was accepted for him. So under divine teaching, you will come on the venture of faith, perhaps fearfully, perhaps tremblingly, but you will come just as much with a lamb in your arms as the faithful Israelite did (Leviticus 1. 1-4). In one sense you are empty-handed: you have nothing of your own but sin. But in another sense you come with Christ in your arms; you come with the lamb; you bring your offering; you come with the sinner’s perfect plea.

“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.” What does that mean? That you are found accepted

in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, accepted, not for your merits but for the merits of this slain Lamb. It means you are forgiven. It means you are “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” It means you are graciously received. It means the Father is pleased with you for Jesus’ sake. It means the Father looks not on you as a sinner, but on His beloved Son. “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” O the wonders of these transactions at Calvary, of these transactions made known personally, savingly!

“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.” So this one is received. And then this one is watched over, this one is divinely kept, this one is preserved in Jesus, this one is brought through every storm and trial, this one will stand at last. Why? Because of those last three words: “In His hand.” And, “If I am found in Jesus’ hands, my soul shall ne’er be lost.”

“The pleasure of the Lord” – in bringing this sinner to glory – “shall prosper in His hand.” “When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed.” And so it will be at last when you come to die, and so it will be at last when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ. You will have no other offering. You will have no other plea. But if Christ is your offering, if Christ is your plea, you need no other. It will then be to enter into those beautiful words of Count Zinzendorf (and O that we might enter into them by faith):

“When from the dust of death I rise,
To take my mansion in the skies,
E’en then shall this be all my plea:
‘Jesus has lived and died for me.’”

This is salvation. This is heaven. And to be brought into this:

“Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay,
While through Thy blood absolved I am,
From sin’s tremendous curse and shame?”

“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.”