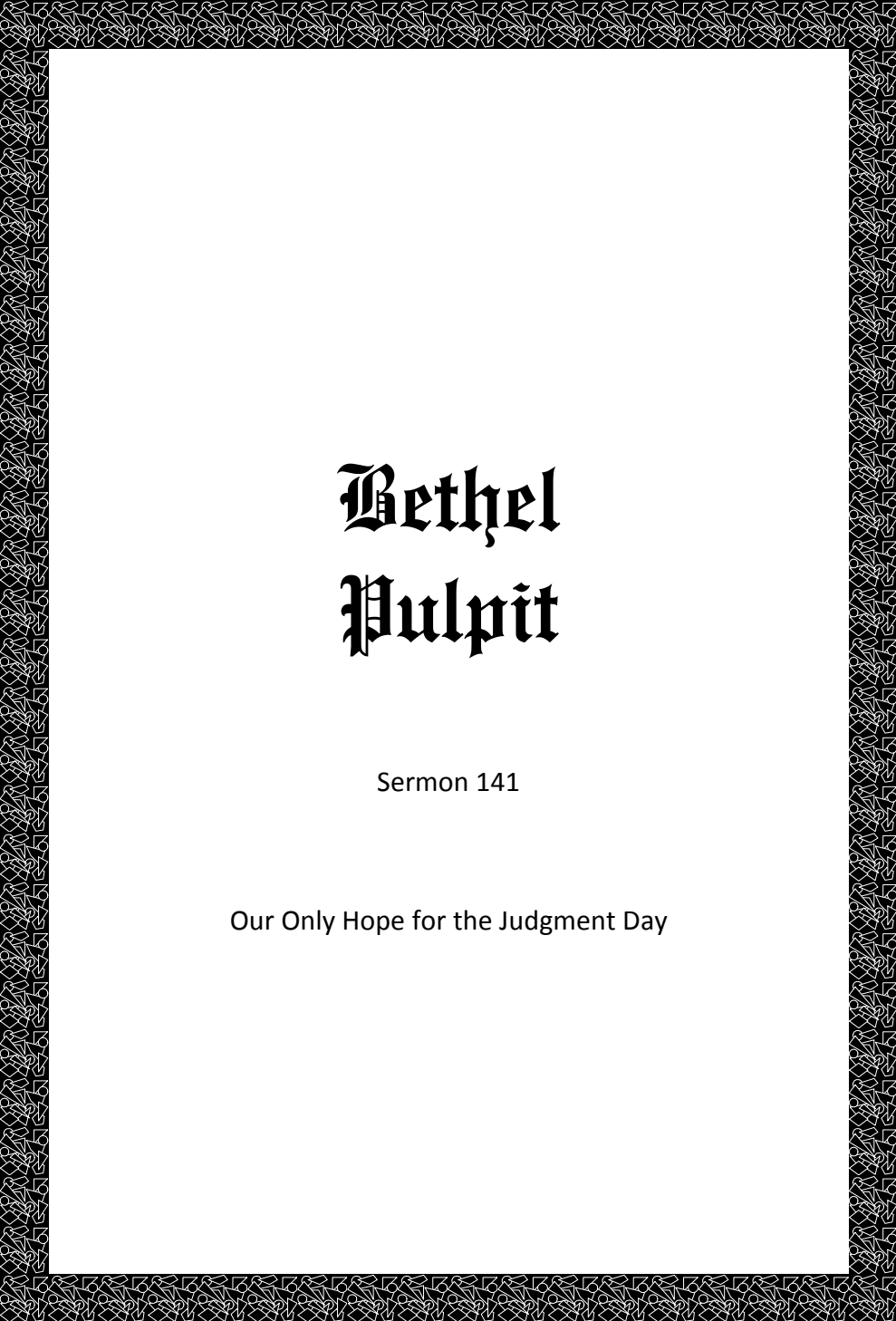




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 141

Our Only Hope for the Judgment Day

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 16th March, 1997**

Text: “*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation*” (Hebrews 9. 27, 28).

This is the one appointment that must be kept. It is the one appointment that cannot be broken. “It is appointed.” God Himself has appointed it, and that appointment must be kept. “It is appointed unto men once to die.” We have appointments sometimes and they are cancelled. Perhaps it is an appointment and when it is cancelled, our hearts are glad, and sometimes it is an appointment which, when it is cancelled, it makes our hearts sad; we were looking forward to it. Sometimes appointments are broken because people forget. Sometimes appointments are broken because people change their mind. But not this.

“It is appointed.” The reason that God made this divine appointment was because of sin. Had we never sinned, then we must never die. But, “Sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” “It is appointed unto men once to die.” What a strange thing it is: it is the one great certainty, but the great majority of the human race go on and on as if it is never going to take place. They forget all about it, push it away from their thoughts. Tell me, beloved friends, have you ever had to face up to this point: “It is appointed unto men once to die” – not just in general, but *you*? There was an old saying that the young may die, but the old must. But sometimes short's the warning.

This is the solemn point: “*But after this.*” Death is not the end. Death is final, concerning this life. As the tree falls, so it shall also lie. But death is not the end. “*After this.*” O there is something after. Even one of our secular poets realised this in one of the most famous pieces of English literature, Hamlet's *Soliloquy*, when he is wondering whether to take his own life or not – it is what is *afterward*.

“But after this the judgment.” Some of us go back to our early days when these things were made so real to us, when death and the judgment and eternity were with us all the time and it cast a kind of cloud, a gloom over everything. I could go back to one Christmas in my life when I was young and I could not enjoy anything. There was a kind of gloom, this cloud over everything. I was a great football enthusiast. I remember the last time I ever went to a professional football match, and O the gloom, the cloud, how ridiculous earth’s pleasures seemed to be in the light of eternity! We do not seem to hear much about this kind of religion today. It is so easy, just a decision or just believing. Has the Lord ever made death and eternity solemn to you? “After this the judgment.” The point with us was this: we knew in our conscience we were not fit to die, we were not prepared to die, and we knew that if we *did* die, hell was our just, deserved portion. O to tremble concerning eternity! We do not hear much of this trembling concerning eternity, trembling concerning the wrath of God, today.

“But after this the judgment.” Is there one person here who has ever entered into this:

“When Thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come
To take Thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?”

“After this the judgment,” when the Lord will sit on the great, white throne and there will be the eternal separation. “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” or, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” “It is appointed.” “It is appointed unto men once to die” – the certainty of it – “but after this the judgment.” “We must needs die” – the certainty of it – “and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again” – the finality of it. “Neither doth God respect any persons” – the equality of it.

“It is appointed ... but after this the judgment.” Now if there is one thing I would like you to remember that I have ever said from this pulpit, it is this, and I say it with all my love and affection. I would like

you all to have a religion that will take you to heaven at last. O this easy religion of the present day, this take-it-for-granted religion, this easy believism, this easy profession of the Lord's name! I want a religion that will take me to heaven at last. Now do not take your religion for granted. Seek that you are not deceived. Thousands have been deceived. Seek a religion that will stand in the swellings of Jordan. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" The swelling of Jordan will sweep away everything of this life and sweep away everything of the flesh, sweep away all religion of the flesh. But, "How wilt thou do?" You remember Bunyan spoke of someone who came to the swelling of Jordan. He had not got a qualm. He got across so easily. He had a ferryman with a little boat to take him across. The ferryman's name was Vain Hope. When he got to the gates of heaven, they asked him for his certificate, and he did not have one. Have you got your certificate? Have you the sealing of the Holy Ghost in your heart that you are ready and prepared for heaven? They asked him for his certificate, and Bunyan said he fumbled about and could not find one. Bunyan's solemn conclusion was this: "I perceived there was a way to hell from the very gates of heaven."

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." There is a rather unusual word in one of Paul's epistles to Timothy and it is this: "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after." What does that mean? I take it to mean this: with every sinner saved by grace, their sins go before them to judgment. That is, in this life they are brought to the judgment seat of Christ. Their sins have already gone before them to judgment. They come in their feelings, in their spirit, to the judgment seat of Christ in this life. Their sins are judged and they feel the condemnation and they have to confess them and plead for mercy. "Some men they follow after." They have never been brought to judgment. They have never caused any trouble. They have never been confessed, never been forsaken, never been judged, never been washed

away in the blood of Christ. It is a solemn thing if your sins and mine have not gone before to judgment. There is only one hope and that is if our sins have gone before to judgment, if we have had to confess them, been blessed with repentance for them, had to forsake them and seen them washed away in the blood of Christ. It is a terrible thing if your sins and mine, when we come to die, follow after us to judgment.

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Whenever we hear of a death, especially when we hear of a death amongst us in our church, in our congregation, it should be a solemn reminder to us: “Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

Well, then, if this is so certain, if this is so solemn, what is the remedy, the answer? What a mercy that Hebrews 9 does not end at the end of verse 27! This beautiful twenty-eighth verse: “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” Now beloved friends, that is my only hope for the great judgment day, to rest by faith upon the work of Christ at Calvary when He bore the sins of many.

“Nor dare I promise future good to bring;
I know my heart deceitful is indeed;
Compelled I am on Christ alone to hang,
And plead that blood by which the church is freed.”

This is the only religion that will ever take a guilty sinner to heaven.

“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” “If sin be pardoned, I’m secure; death has no sting beside.” So it is a vital, personal interest in the work of Christ which makes a sinner ready for death and the judgment day. “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” This is the death of the dear Lord Jesus on the cross, and His death was an offering for sin. His death was a sacrifice. He offered Himself, and the purpose was to bear the sins of many – not all, many. That Arminian religion that speaks of Christ bearing Judas’ sins as much as Peter’s or Cain’s as much as Abel’s and all depending on a sinner’s acceptance of it – now that will not do for the judgment day. We want a redemption that truly redeems, a salvation that truly saves. “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many,” and He bore the sins

of many, and He bore them for ever away, and they can never be charged against them in the great day.

What a beautiful word that is which just precedes this verse: “Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” – the complete removing of the sins of God’s people in the death of Christ. I do not want to linger on this, but I just draw your attention to it, that we are told that Christ died *in the end of the world*. I just say that in passing. People talk about the last days and the last times, but as soon as the Lord Jesus came to this earth, Scripture often speaks about it as these last days, these last times, the end of the world. I will not enlarge on that, but I leave you to think about it, because it affects so many things.

“Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” The Lord Jesus, as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, bore the sins of many, and in bearing them, He for ever bore them away. And you see here all that was prefigured by the scapegoat on the great day of atonement, the complete removing of the sins of all God’s people. You remember on the day of atonement two goats were taken, and the lot was cast, one for the Lord and one for the people. One goat was slain and its blood was brought into the sanctuary and sprinkled there and its body was carried without the camp. The other goat was called the scapegoat and the sins of all Israel ceremonially were laid on the head of that innocent goat and then it was to be led away into the wilderness by a fit man and left there, ceremonially bearing the sins of all God’s Israel and it had never to be seen again by human eye. It symbolised the complete removing of sin in the day of atonement. “The Lord, in the day of His anger, did lay our sins on the Lamb, and He bore them away.”

“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” “Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Now this is the only preparation for heaven, the only preparation for the judgment day, to have a vital, personal, saving interest in the work of Jesus when He for ever put away His people’s sins in the atonement. O you say, but how must I be brought there?

Well, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit as a sinner, confessing your sin, coming to the Saviour. This is it:

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

It is a sinner hoping in the mercy of God through the atonement.

“So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” Perhaps you noticed as we read through this chapter that there is an emphasis in the closing verses: this little word *once* keeps coming in again and again. *Once*. It is the finality of it. It is the completeness of it. And, of course, to explain it he contrasts it with the law. The high priest year after year had to enter into the holy place with blood. Why was that? Because his work was never finished. One old preacher quaintly said that if you read the account of all the furnishings of the tabernacle, you will find there was not a single chair. The priest stood daily oftentimes offering the same sacrifices for sin. Why did he stand? Because there was not a chair for him to sit on. His work was never finished. It did not really avail for sin. “And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.” “For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” This is the only preparation for death and the judgment.

“So Christ was once offered.” A finished work, a complete work, nothing can ever be added to it; nothing can ever be taken away from it. Now do not misunderstand me here. How vital is the work of the Holy Ghost in the sinner’s heart, but the work of the Holy Ghost can never add anything to the finished work of Christ. There is your hope, your foundation, your plea. And it must be our only foundation, our only hope, our only plea, in that last great day. Count Zinzendorf says,

“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.'"

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Now I know what some of you are thinking. You are thinking, "I agree with all that and I am concerned about the judgment day, but I want to know personally an interest in this great work of Christ when He was once offered to bear the sins of many, and I want the sweet assurance of it." William Gadsby was once walking to chapel to preach. He was so tried and tempted and he met an old, godly man going into the chapel, and he said, "John, what shall I preach from?" He said, "Mr. Gadsby, I don't mind what the text is so long as you can prove to me that I am a child of God." Have you a religion like that?

"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." So this word speaks of the second coming. "Shall He appear *the second time*." What is the connection between the second coming and the judgment day? Well, when the Lord comes the second time, it will be in great power and glory, "and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him." His coming is sure as the dawn and His coming shall usher in the end of all things here below and the great judgment day when He shall judge the world in righteousness. Now how does death fit in with this? Beloved friends, the day of your death will be the end of the world for you. That is the simplest way to look at these things. The day of your death will be the end of the world for you.

"Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." Just a word or two about the Lord Jesus appearing without sin. At first it sounds harshly on our spirits, that the Lord Jesus shall appear without sin. You say, "When He appeared the first time, He appeared without sin. He was 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.'" I take it to mean this: when the Lord Jesus appeared the first time, He came that He might bear sin and that He might bear it away, as we have in the first part of the verse. But when He comes the second time, it will be

without sin. He will not come to deal with sin. He will not come to die a second time. There will not be any need for another atonement. I take it this is the meaning here.

“Shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” Those who die out of Christ, they shall call on the mountains and rocks to hide them from the wrath of God. Yet it will be a blessed day to God’s people. “Unto salvation.” Those who love the Saviour’s name here on earth, those whose prayer was, “Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation,” those who love the gospel of salvation; those whose only hope of salvation was in Christ.

“Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” You notice how those who are ready, those who are prepared, are described here: “Them that look for Him.” I never forget taking a funeral in my early days at Bethel at the old Rothesay Road cemetery and reading these words as part of the burial service. When I came to this: “Unto them that look for Him,” I had such a sweet persuasion that there were many standing round that open grave who were numbered amongst this blessed people. “Them that look for Him.” Beloved friends, are you amongst them, those who look for Christ, who want Him, who long for Him, who must have Him? Are you found amongst those who look to Christ, your only hope, your only plea, your only foundation, who look to Him for help in time of need, support in time of sorrow? It is a wonderful thing if you and I are identified with this blessed people who look for Him, because there is a sure and certain promise here: “Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

So our minds are taken to those well-known, beautiful words of the Apostle Paul (I understand they are almost the last words he ever wrote): “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.” Now that is the day which is mentioned here, the judgment day. “A crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.” Now this is it: “And not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.” Now I wonder if that brings in any

of you here. The crown of righteousness is appointed, not just for the great Apostle Paul, but for “all them also that love His appearing.” Tell me, do you love the appearing of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? You say, “What is His appearing?” What about this appearing (I wonder if you love it): “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.” Do you love that appearing, when the Lord appears to a guilty, hell-deserving sinner and says, “Yea, I have loved thee, and it is with an everlasting love”? “Not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”

Now what about this appearing that we have in the verse before this: “Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Are there some of you here who love that appearing, when the Lord Jesus in love to His people went to Calvary, a Lamb without blemish and without spot, that there He might be slain in the guilty sinner’s place? Now do you love that appearing? Is it your only hope, your only plea? “Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

Now what about this appearing. I wonder if you love this. Samuel Medley says,

“It oft has afforded relief from my fear,
To find it recorded, The Lord will appear.”

Now do you love that appearing? You want the Lord to appear for you in the trial you are in, the deep sorrow, the disappointment. And you love that appearing, you long for it, that the Lord will appear. No-one else can, and perhaps no-one else will. But to find it recorded, “The Lord will appear.” Do you love that appearing, when He appears to help you and appears to bless you and when He appears to comfort your heart and when He appears to uphold you, and when He appears to make His grace all-sufficient for you, when He appears and says, “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you”?

“Not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.” It is a wonderful thing if you and I love His appearing. For, “Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto

salvation.” And then everlasting bliss and blessedness. “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.”

“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.”