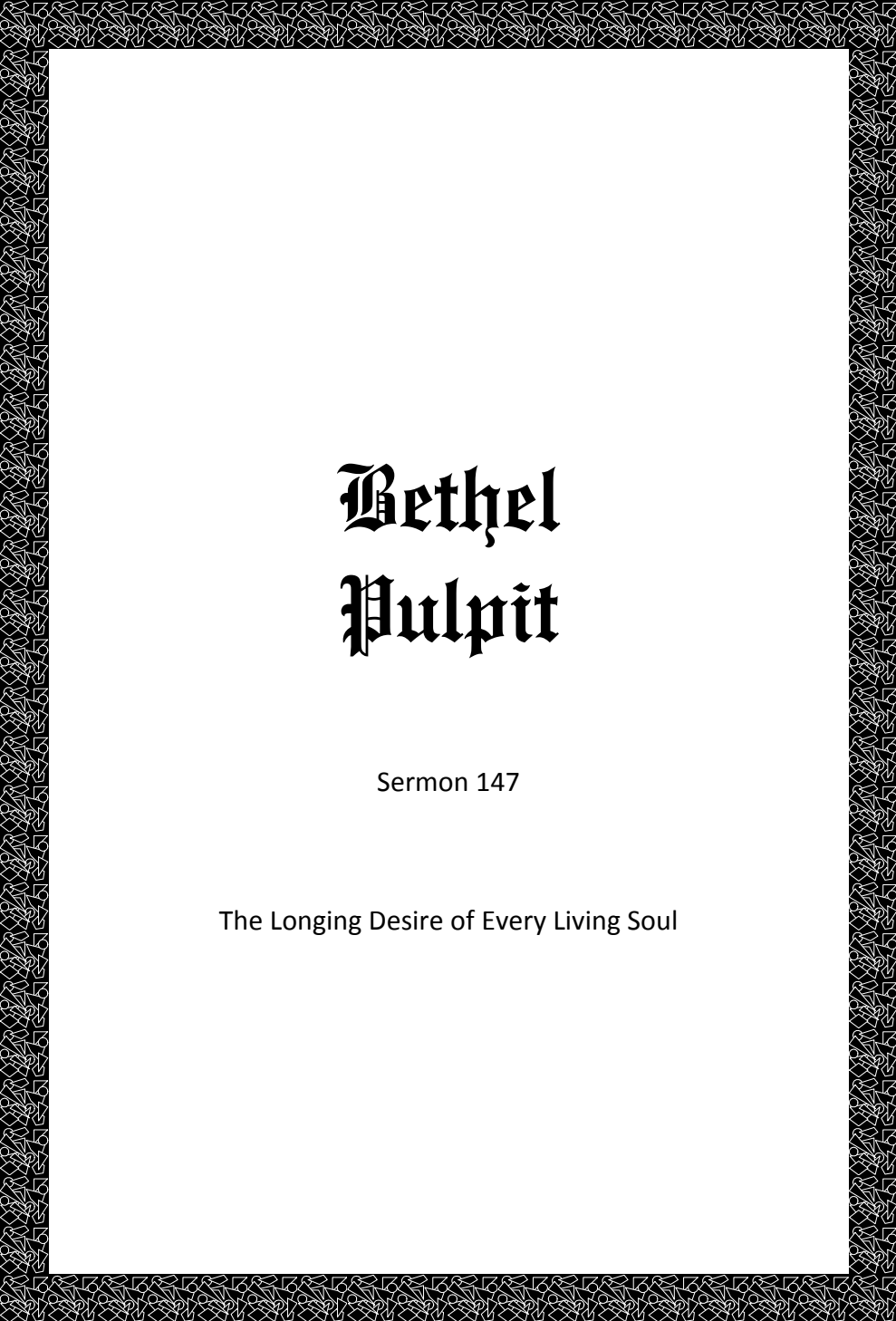




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 147

The Longing Desire of Every Living Soul

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 4th September, 1997**

Text: “*And be found in Him*” (Philippians 3. 9).

This word was laid somewhat powerfully on my spirit during the prayer meeting on Monday evening. It seemed to be the theme of the prayers. This actual scripture was referred to. The hymn was sung (which I have since heard sung again):

“When I shall launch in worlds unseen,
O may I then be found in Him,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.”

I suppose because of the solemn, national tragedy last Sunday morning [the death of Princess Diana], our thoughts have been so much on the certainty of death. So it was at our prayer meeting, that prayerful desire, thinking of when *our* end shall come, when *we* shall meet our Maker, and when *we* shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

“When I shall launch in worlds unseen,
O may I *then* be found in Him,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.”

But if it is to be found in Christ *then*, we want the sweet assurance that we are found in Christ *now*. That word has come to me a few times as various things have been spoken concerning the believer’s hope and the believer’s death, the believer’s expectation:

“Dear Saviour, help us *now* to seek,
And grant Thy Spirit’s power,
That we may all this language speak,
Before our dying hour.”

That is it, to be brought to speak these things *before* our dying hour. Sadly, solemnly, there does not yet seem to be much sanctification of what has taken place. O to find souls realising the awfulness of death, the solemnity of it, the certainty of it, the need to be prepared for it, and that

real repentance and real faith and real prayer! This must come from God, but where the Lord works, and where these things are sanctified, and where there is any real concern about our end, it will be this: that I may be found in Christ. The only hope for heaven, a sinner found in Christ, “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

So let us first of all try to say what it is for a sinner to be in Christ, to be found in Him. It is an expression we often find in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul perhaps uses the expression more than anything else: *in Christ*. He speaks of it continually, of the blessings of the gospel *in Christ*, the believer himself *in Christ*. It is the great theme, union with the Saviour. I think you will find the Word of God uses this expression, being found in Christ, in two different ways, and yet ways that are connected. The first way is by eternal union in the purposes of God in the covenant of grace. There in the Lord’s eternal purposes before the world had any being, all His chosen stood in eternal union with Jesus. And that eternal union can never be broken. They were as safe then as they shall be when at last they are in heaven.

But then secondly, the Word of God so often speaks of it personally and experimentally, how one by one in this life the Lord’s chosen and redeemed people are brought into a living union with Jesus. That is, as they are brought to feel their need of Him and confess their sins to Him, flee to Him for refuge, enter into Him as their only refuge, their only hiding place, just as Noah and his house entered into the ark. The only evidence of standing in eternal union with Jesus is entering into that union by faith. So it is in this latter sense, when Paul is writing to the Romans, he refers to some “who also were in Christ before me.” Well, concerning everlasting union, all the Lord’s people were there eternally in Jesus. But personally, being brought into the experience of it, Paul could refer to some and say, “They were in Christ before me.” We can look round this congregation this evening and there is one here who was in Christ before another one was in Christ.

But this is the great point, to be found in Him, standing complete in Christ, having nothing in self, nothing but sin and ruin and shame, but having everything in the Saviour; entering in by faith, sheltering in His wounded side, hiding in the Rock of Ages. O it is that entering in by faith, by believing upon the Son of God. And this is what the Apostle Paul

longed for more than anything else for himself. He was an eminent believer, but this was the point he wanted: O that my soul may be found in Christ. Our hymnwriter puts it like this:

“Yes, and I must and will esteem
All things but loss for Jesus’ sake;
O may my soul be found *in Him*,
And of His righteousness partake.”

“That I may ... be found in Him.” The living, longing desire of every living soul, of every sinner saved by grace, whatever stage of experience you are. Is it your longing desire, your burden, that you might be found in Christ now and to all eternity?

Let me just open it up for a moment or two. Paul here tells us something of his own soul’s experience, what he was by nature, his self-righteousness, his confidence in the flesh, his satisfaction with his own religion, what happened when the Lord began to lead him and teach him. What will happen to you when the Lord begins to lead and teach you? Well, you will find all these attainments you have spiritually, you will be brought to see that they are completely worthless in the sight of a holy God. So Paul tells us the Lord brought him to this: “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” So he goes on: “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” He realised it was not what he had done or could do or may do. He saw everything he had or ever could have, the best of earthly things, must be counted all loss. He saw something better: “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” He wanted to know Him personally, whom to know is eternal life. “For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him.” That is the great point, the vital point.

Now he explains it. What is it to be found in Christ? “Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” What does Paul mean? Let me put it as simply as I can. He had learned that God is holy and righteous and true, and He demands that righteousness and holiness and truth from all His creatures here on earth. Paul had come to the conclusion that he could not provide what God asked for. He came so far short. He himself was not holy and righteous and true. What could be

done? There is the condemnation. His own righteousness which is of the law, obedience to the law, that would not do. It was faulty. It was in vain. But then he saw another righteousness, that is the righteousness of Christ, that perfect, holy, spotless, righteous life that He lived from Bethlehem to Calvary. He saw that in the gospel, in the plan of salvation, God reckons that perfect, holy righteousness of Jesus to His people's account as if it was theirs, as if they had lived that holy life themselves. He takes their sins and lays them on Christ to atone for them. Paul sees it. May I be found in Christ, not to have my own righteousness – that will not do – but to be found in Christ, to be completely clothed, completely covered with another righteousness, a better righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, which is of God, not through anything I have done or can do, but to receive it with faith's open, empty arms. That is the desire, the longing, of every living soul, and in the spirit of it, if your religion is real, the Lord will bring you there. I wonder how many of you have been brought there, and how many are there tonight: desiring to be found in Him, in Christ, by eternal union, and by gracious experience, by believing on His name.

I want to linger on this. Paul does not just say, that he might be in Christ, but that he might be *found* in Christ. “O may my soul be *found* in Him, and of His righteousness partake!” “When I shall launch in worlds unseen, O may I then be *found* in Him.” Let me say first of all, this expression *being found* sometimes just means *it is*. For instance, we read the Lord Jesus was found in fashion as a man, which simply means He *was* in fashion as a man. In another place we read that we are found sinners, in other words, that we *are* sinners. But there is a sense in which there is an importance in this, to be *found* in Him, to be *found* in Christ.

To be *found by Satan in Christ*, because beloved friends, Satan will find you. He will. You cannot escape him. He will find you. He will be after you. He will want you. But how blessed if it is this, when Satan finds you, that he finds you in Christ, and so he cannot touch you nor destroy you! “Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Satan cannot touch that secret, hidden life, that life which is hid with Christ in God. O that I might be found in Him when Satan comes with his temptations and allurements.

To be *found in Him by the people of God*. What a delight it is to them! They watch over you and pray for you, and then they *find* that you

are in Christ. They see the marks, the evidences of it: that separation, that holy sobriety, that walking in God's fear, above all that sense of love to God's people and His ways.

“Love is the golden chain that binds
The happy souls above;
And he's an heir of heaven that finds
His bosom glow with love.”

That the Lord's people might find you in Christ.

And then the world, that *the world might find you in union with Jesus*. When *troubles* come, that these might *find you in union with Jesus*. The wonderful thing is that all that the people of God are ever called to pass through, all the troubles and problems and difficulties and even death itself, can never separate them from this lasting, living union with Jesus. O what a wonderful truth this is, that if you are in Christ, you can never be separated from Him! Sin, Satan and the world can never separate you from Christ. It is a wonderful thing.

“This sacred bond shall never break,
Though earth should to her centre shake;
Rest, doubting saint, assured of this,
For God has pledged His holiness.”

I felt that once, the blessedness of it: “God has pledged His holiness.” That means that before the union between the believer and Christ can be broken, God must cease to be holy.

“That I may ... be found in Him” – found in Christ. Of course, the great point is this: that *Almighty God might find me in His beloved Son*, in union with Him. We read in several places of a sinner being found by God, found out by God. It is a solemn thing if, when God finds us, He finds us wanting, eternally wanting. Like King Belshazzar and a thousand of his lords, “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” God found him that night, for in that same night Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede reigned in his stead. God found him and God will find you. God will always have the last word.

Perhaps some of you know those rather mystical, mysterious poems by the famous poet, Francis Thompson, who died at the beginning of the century. His most famous poem is called, *The Hound of Heaven*, how he

spent his life trying to escape from God, but however he tried to escape, God always caught up with him and found him. Now God will always have the last word, whoever you are, whoever I am. What a solemn thing if when God finds you, when weighed in the balances you are found wanting, especially if it is eternally wanting, whatever you are, whatever you have been! O how terrible if that is God's opinion, God's sentence on us when He finds us: "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art *found* wanting!"

I also think of the barren fig tree. It was the time when figs should have been on the tree and the Saviour came there seeking fruit, and He found none, but leaves only. It is a terrible thing if the Lord finds us like that. Leaves are necessary to the tree. It could not do without the leaves. But if there is nothing but leaves, if there is no fruit, then how useless. The Lord cursed the barren fig tree. That was one of the only two miracles which were miracles of judgment rather than mercy, the other being the Gadarene swine. How sad if the Lord finds us and He looks for fruit and He finds none, but all He finds are leaves, the leaves of our profession, but the leaves of a barren profession!

The Lord will find us sooner or later. He will find us at the end. He will find us when we stand before the judgment seat. But O that I might be found in Him, found in Christ, having a hiding place, a sinner completely covered in the righteousness of Jesus, a sinner sheltering beneath His precious, sin-atonement blood – that I, such a sinner as I, that I, one so helpless, weak and unworthy as I, that I may be found in Him. Have you a sweet hope that at last you will be found in Him? We do not want to be found wanting. We do not want to be found nothing but leaves. We want to be found completely covered and clothed with Christ's righteousness. It is the only thing which will do.

So we think of the man without a wedding garment. He was found. It took a long time to find him, and it was only the king who found him. The king held a feast for his son, and when he came to the feast and went to view the guests, there was one man who had come in not having on a wedding garment. The king said to him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness." Do not misunderstand the parable, and

as in every parable, do not try to make every detail fit. There is a clear lesson the Lord and Saviour is teaching. In ancient times, with the invitation to the wedding there was provided a wedding garment to be worn. Do not think of this as a poor man who was ignorant or did not have enough money to buy one. He despised the royal provision. He thought his own perfectly good enough. "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment?" He was *found*. I know you cannot press every point in a parable, but he had gone a long way before he was found, and it seems that none of the guests found him out. They could not see anything wrong. But it was when the king came in. It is what the Lord thinks about our religion. It is His all-seeing eye. "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." But to be found in the wedding garment, that beautiful, pure, white robe of Christ's righteousness which He provides for all His people. You are not satisfied with your own, are you? You do not despise that beautiful, spotless, white robe of Christ's righteousness, do you? This was what Paul wanted. He saw the importance of it, and saw this beautiful, spotless, pure white robe. But he wanted to be covered in it, to be found in it.

"That I may ... be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

"Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress."

And Count Zinzendorf says,

"Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head."

Now Zinzendorf was an amazing man. In the eighteenth century, before Germany was united, he was ruler over one of the states, the Count of Moravia. Wealth, honour, fame, learning, he had it all, and he just lived to the flesh, to himself. If I remember rightly, he went into a church on one occasion and there was a painting of the Saviour on the cross. We do not like paintings of the Saviour on the cross, but there was a painting of the Saviour on the cross. I rather think underneath it were written these words: "I did all this for thee. What hast thou done for Me?" It changed his life completely, in a moment. He renounced everything and became a

preacher of the gospel. He went through his own kingdom preaching the gospel of the grace of God. That is an aside; that is Count Zinzendorf.

“Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.”

It is to be found in Christ with that beautiful, pure, spotless robe of Christ's righteousness covering us, so that when God Himself finds us, He might not find a flaw or blemish because we stand complete in Jesus. Is this your longing, your desire, that through mercy, through grace you might be found in Christ?

Now I read to you the last chapter in Peter's second Epistle, which it is clear that Peter wrote not long before he died. Peter there speaks of the end of all things, of the end of the world. He is not afraid of what the critics say, the scoffers say. People were saying it then; they are saying it now. They do not believe in the end of the world and in judgment. And people were saying it then. “Where is the promise of His coming? for ... all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Now Peter has two answers to that. Why doesn't the Lord come? Why does the Lord delay? The first answer is this: God is never in a hurry. God does not count time as you and I count time. With God, a thousand years go as quickly as a day; a day is just the same as a thousand years. But then secondly, God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Do not misunderstand it. God has a people He chose eternally in Christ, His elect. They all have to be born, born again, called by grace, fitted and prepared for heaven. If the Lord had come again in Peter's day, there would have been thousands who had never had an existence who were loved with an everlasting love. The world cannot end until the last vessel of mercy has been born, and born again. That is the answer why the world has not come to an end. First of all, the Lord is never in a hurry; a thousand years are like a day, a day like a thousand years. But secondly, there are these chosen ones who stand in everlasting union with Christ, and He is not willing that any should perish.

But Peter says, “The day of the Lord will come.” And let us be clear, the day of a person's death is the end of the world to that person. We believe in the end of all things, the Lord coming down from heaven.

But when a person dies, righteous or wicked, that is the end of the world for them. “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?” May the Lord burn that in your heart and mine, that all these things shall be dissolved, all the greatness, the grandeur, the fame of this world, all the wealth, all the pleasure. “All these things shall be dissolved.” Come to the best of human relationships and friendships, even the chapel buildings where we worship. “All these things shall be dissolved.” Well, if we believe what we do believe, what manner of persons ought we to be? But what manner of persons *are* we? Do you believe it? Do you believe what you do believe, that all these things shall be dissolved? Blessed be God for that eternal union between Christ and His people which can never be dissolved.

“This sacred bond shall never break,
Though earth should to her centre shake;
Rest, doubting saint, assured of this,
For God has pledged His holiness.”

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness? ... Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things.” Now do you look for these things? Do you look for the day of your death? Do you look for the day of judgment? Do you look for the day of the Lord’s return? Do you look for the second coming? What about the thousands in London at present [awaiting the funeral of Princess Diana]? How many look for such things? If the Lord deals savingly with you and me, we shall be found looking for these things.

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things,” what should be your attitude of mind? This is where it links up with the text – O “that I may ... be found in Him,” to be found in Christ – “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him *in peace*.” The world is diligent. The world is diligent in so many ways, and the Lord tells us to be diligent: diligent that we might be found in Christ, diligent that we might be right at last. “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” Because one day all of us, every one of us, will be found *of* Him. O to be found of Him in peace!

And beloved friends, the only way in which you and I can be found *of* Him in peace is if through mercy we are found *in* Him. That is the preparation. O that I might be found in Him, and if through mercy I am found in Him, united to Him, then at last I shall be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless. That is, washed in the Saviour's blood. That is, clothed in His glorious righteousness. That is, accepted in the Beloved. That is, made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. That is, to be presented faultless before His throne with exceeding joy. That is, to have neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing. In Christ. O that I might be found in Him!

“When I shall launch in worlds unseen,
O may I then be found in Him,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.”

“That I may ... be found in Him.