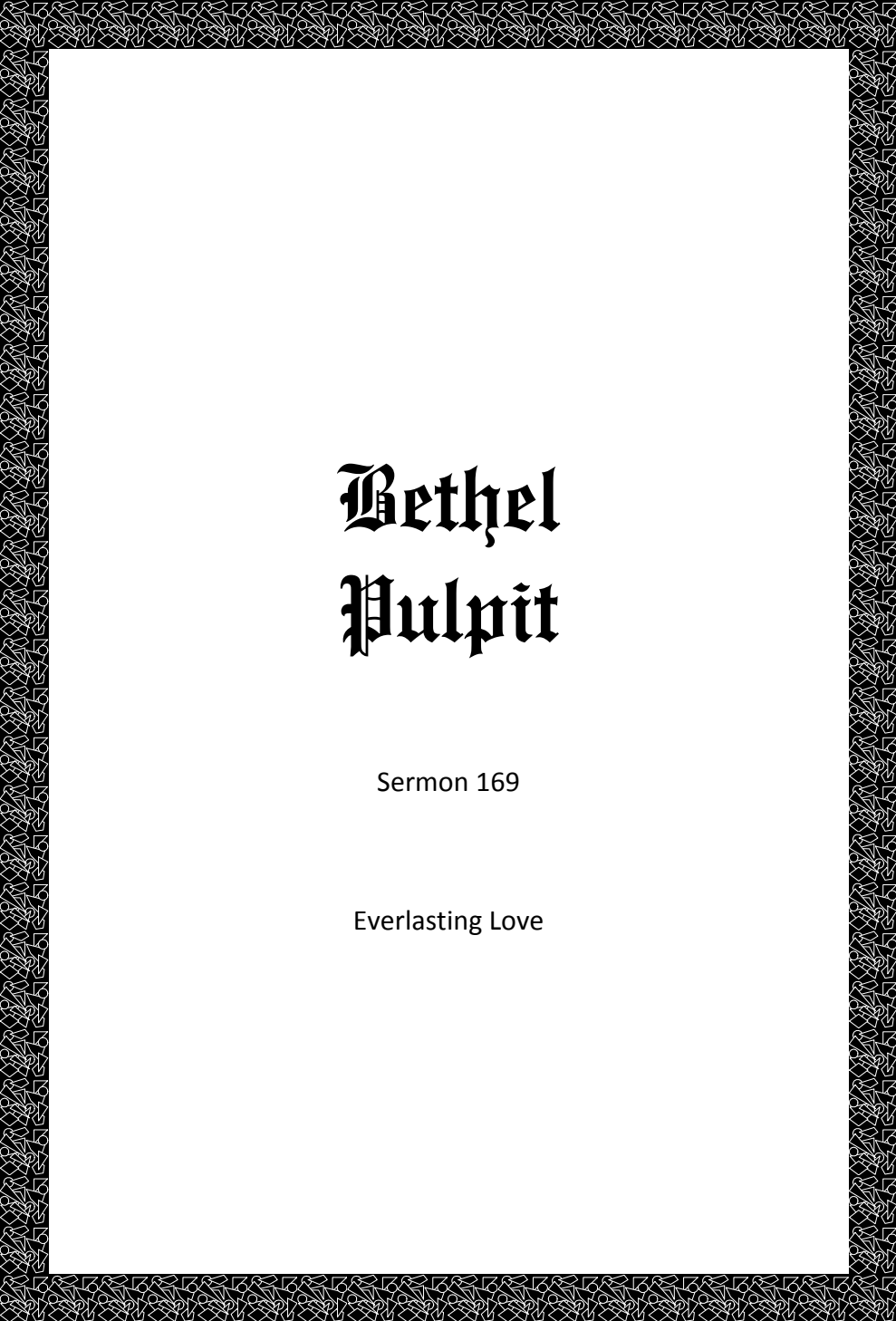




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 169

Everlasting Love

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 6th June, 1999**

Text: *"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" (Jeremiah 31. 3).*

The Word of God speaks about those who love the Lord's appearing – and that is all the people of God. They do love His appearing. And the way in which it is found in Scripture is very beautiful, because the Apostle Paul is speaking of heaven, and he says, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." And then he says this: "And not to me only, but unto all them also that *love His appearing*." O beloved friends, if through grace you are one who loves His appearing, there is promised for you a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Well then, what is it to love the Lord's appearing? Well, there are a few of the Lord's appearances spoken of in Scripture. One is this: "Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." And every sinner saved by grace will love that appearing, and love the One who appeared in His sin-atoning sufferings on the cross that He might for ever put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Now another appearing of the Lord that His people love is this: "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Now all the people of God love that appearing. "Ye children of Zion, now dry up your tears; for you the Redeemer in glory appears." What else? Well, we read the Lord appeared to His disciples. The Lord appeared to Peter. The Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene. The Lord appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus. Now all God's people love His appearing and they want Him to appear for them.

But then there is this appearing that we have in the verse I have just read to you: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." And that is an appearing that all God's people love, that wonderful appearing of the Lord in His everlasting

love to His people. You will love all the Lord's appearances, but none of the Lord's appearances will you love more than this: "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."

This is one of the best-known verses in Scripture, isn't it? I cannot remember whether I have ever spoken to you from this wonderful verse before. Anyway, trying to bring it before you, I would like to speak first of all of the love of God to sinners. And then second, that this wonderful love of God to sinners is everlasting. And then finally, the gracious effects of it, because there will always be the effects of it, and that is the gracious drawings of His lovingkindness. If you are loved with this everlasting love, you will not be a stranger to these drawings of God's lovingkindness.

1. The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Now what a wonderful subject the love of God to sinners is! O that we knew more of it! How little we really know! And O that we felt more, that we were more often like Mary at the Saviour's feet, experiencing this love. O but the love of God to sinners, the wonder of it, that this great, almighty God should ever love sinners, should love those who had rebelled against Him, those who by nature and practice were sinners guilty in His sight. Not one of them ever deserved this love. Not one of them could ever merit an interest in it. And then when you think of the sovereignty of this love, it is wonderful but it makes you tremble. He passed by angels and He passed by many of the human race and He set His love upon His people in Christ. An old, godly woman once said to John Newton, "I cannot understand people quibbling about the eternal choice of God of His people before the world ever had any being, because," she said, "if the Lord had not loved me before I was born, I am sure He would never have loved me afterwards." It is undeserved love. We never merit it. Sadly, we become hardened to these things. We have heard them so often. But the wonder of it, that the God of heaven should ever love a lost, ruined, guilty sinner. The wonder of it.

George Whitefield used to talk about a Red Indian who was speaking of the love of Christ, and someone almost sarcastically said, "What do you know of the love of Christ?" The Red Indian took a worm and put it among a few burning sticks, and as the flames grew nearer, he reached right down into those flames and he picked up that worm and hugged it to

his breast. He said, "That is what I know of the love of Christ." That is just it. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" The burning anger, the fire of God's wrath against sin. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" So we meditate on the wonderful love of God to sinners, the love of the Father from all eternity in the covenant of grace, appointing His dear Son to be the sinner's Saviour, and then at last in the fulness of time sending Him. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son." O the wonderful love of God the Father to lost, ruined, guilty sinners!

And what of the love of Christ, the love of God the Son? What did we read just now (John 15. 1-13)? "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." O to see the love of Christ to sinners, that wonderful love you have just been singing about (hymn 633), that love which brought Him from heaven to earth, that love that took Him to Calvary to suffer, bleed and die. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." O the love of Christ to sinners! "The love of Christ is rich and free." And, "Many waters cannot quench love." Those deep, dark waters through which the Saviour passed, but none of them could quench His love, and,

"None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were those waters crossed,
How dark was the night the Lord passed through
Ere He found the sheep that was lost."

And His willingness to die. "No man taketh [My life] from Me, ... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

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

The wonderful love of God the Son to poor, lost, ruined, guilty sinners.

And then the love of God the Holy Ghost. We must not leave this out. We must not forget it. His love in quickening a sinner into newness of life, teaching him to pray, leading him to Jesus, being that divine Comforter, carrying on the good work of grace, completing it, blessing him

with more grace. The love of the Father, the love of the Son, the love of the Holy Ghost – one God.

2. Now this is the love with which God has loved His people. The wonderful thing about it is that this love is everlasting. It had no beginning; it can never end. It is from eternity to eternity. It is like the Lord Himself, unchanging, unchangeable. “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” It is not just love for a time. It is not just love, and then when the sinner sins and backslides and turns away, that love is there no longer. “He hateth putting away.” Really, that wonderful little Book of Hosea is all about this point: God’s love to Israel, to Israel as a wicked, sinful people, compared to a wife who leaves her husband, and goes off into all manner of immorality and wickedness, but there is still that love, unchanging, unchangeable, and that love prevails in the end, and that love triumphs and brings her back. “They who once His kindness prove, find it everlasting love.” “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” Old John Warburton said the cords of God’s everlasting love are secured in eternity at both ends. They come right down into time and bind up the guilty sinner and take him to heaven. “I drew them with cords of a Man, with bands of love.”

“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” Well, Ahithophel loved David, so it appeared, but it did not last very long. Ananias and Sapphira seemed to love the people of God. That did not last very long. Demas appeared to love the Apostle Paul. That did not last very long. Perhaps you have found people and they seemed to be such good friends, but it did not last very long.

“Not as the world the Saviour loves;
He is no fickle friend;
Whom once He loves He never leaves,
But loves him to the end.”

It is the everlasting love of God to His people in Christ. There is something solid here, something secure. There is a rock foundation. “Who builds on God’s unchanging love, builds on a rock which cannot move.”

“Yea, I have loved thee,” but it is with an everlasting love. How many people have been disappointed? Someone has professed love and

then turned away. But, “*I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*” And of course, there are those two sides to it, those two great and blessed sides. One is, despite all the sin and the guilt and the backsliding and the hardness of heart and the rebellion of His own people, He loves them eternally the same, because His love is sovereign. They never deserved it at the beginning, so their sin can never forfeit it. Mind you, if you and I walk carelessly and sin against the Lord, He will chasten us. Prize His chastening; it is in love. “Nevertheless My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him.” It is everlasting love, despite all the sin and backsliding and wandering of the people of God.

Really, in type with ancient Israel you have it so wonderfully unfolded in the one-hundred-and-sixth Psalm. It starts off with the Lord blessing His people, but then they sin. “We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers understood not Thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of Thy mercies; but provoked Him at the sea, even at the Red sea.” What then, are they going to be cut off, cast away? “Nevertheless He saved them for His name’s sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known.” That is the everlasting love of God to His people. Almost the rest of the chapter, this long Psalm, is all about their sin, their guilt. There is an account of about a dozen things in the wilderness, and you think at the end, surely, surely, they must be cut off, cast away. “Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry: and He remembered for them His covenant, and repented according to the multitude of His mercies.” That is everlasting love despite all their sin and all their guilt. They suffered for it; they were chastised for it; they were reprovved for it; they were rebuked for it; but He still loved them eternally the same. Like a father who punishes his son for some dreadful behaviour, but he still loves him the same, and he is still the son. It is the love of a father to his son. It is everlasting love. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we” – such ruined, guilty sinners – “should be called the sons of God.” This is the point that John Wesley could never understand. In the Arminian controversy he said to Toplady, “Surely you do not believe that God loved David just the same when he committed that dreadful sin, do you?” Well, that is just the very point we do believe, and it is the very essence of the gospel. The Lord hated David’s sin and David

bitterly had to suffer for it, but the Lord loved him eternally just the same. “Yea, I have loved thee.” It is with an everlasting love.

And then of course, the other side to it. In the midst of sorrow and darkness and distress and disappointments and everything seeming to go wrong, “Yea, I have loved thee” – loved thee still – “loved thee with an everlasting love.” The unchanging love of God to His people in Christ. You see, the rainbow is still in the cloud. That is the token of His unchanging, everlasting love. And the darker the cloud, the brighter the bow. He says, “The bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember” My covenant. That is everlasting love. Dear child of God, whatever you are in tonight, if the world does not love you, and some of the people of God do not love you, and some of your family do not love you, and everything seems to be going wrong, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” “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.” Now that is everlasting love.

“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” He has *appeared of old*, from everlasting, from eternity in the covenant of grace. He has appeared of old to Israel in all their wanderings in the wilderness. He has appeared of old, in the beginning of a work of grace when Christ was first revealed, Christ first made precious. “The Lord hath appeared of old.” But though He has appeared of old, His love is as unchanged, unchanging, eternally the same, like Himself. “I am the Lord, I change not.” One great fault with us and one great weakness as sinners is how we change. Berridge puts it very quaintly. He says, “Hot and cold in half an hour.” But we are always changing. There is instability, like Reuben. So often we change for the worse. “I am the Lord, I change not.” He does not change in His purpose and His covenant. He does not change in His everlasting love. “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” That is everlasting love. The sons of Jacob are poor, unworthy sinners. They deserve to be consumed, but they are not consumed. Why? Because, “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore” – because I have loved thee with an everlasting love – “therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

“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.” There is an interpretation of these words which I think many of the godly divines take; they take it like this. They say that the word *saying* in italics does not appear in the original, and they read it like this: “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me,” as if that is almost a complaint – that of Israel, of Jeremiah, of the church of God – almost a complaint: “Yes, I know it is true that years ago the Lord did appear to me. I was grateful for it. But that was a long time ago. He has not appeared to me recently, and whether He still loves me, I do not know. I wish He would appear to me again, but it is a long time since I had any blessing. ‘The Lord hath appeared of old unto me,’ but it was of old. It was a long time ago!” And the Lord says, “Yea, I have appeared to thee, and I love thee as much tonight as in thy first beginnings, and as I loved thee when I blessed thee.” “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me ... Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

Now this is very personal. “Yea, I have loved *thee*.” This is real religion. As Luther said, there is great divinity in the pronouns – *I* and *thee*. “*I* have loved *thee*.” A great, almighty God speaking to guilty sinners. “*I* have loved *thee*.” And He puts a *yea* on it, *yea*, as if this sinner, feeling so unworthy, so vile, humbled before Him, says, “Nay Lord, surely, surely Thou hast not loved me, such a sinner as me, one so unworthy, one so undeserving!” And the Lord says, “Yea, I have loved thee. I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” It would be a wonderful thing this evening if we felt something of the love of Christ to sinners in our hearts. The gospel of Christ is a gospel of love. Without the love of Christ, there would not be any gospel. Christ’s love is the foundation of the gospel. We believe it, but O how little we really know of it sweetly felt in our hearts.

Those two passages in the epistles I read, one spoke of the unchanging nature of God’s love to His people in Christ (Romans 8. 31-39). “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come” – none of them – “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That is the unchanging, everlasting love of God. And the other passage I read from the epistles (Ephesians 3. 14-21) speaks of the vastness of it, its height, its depth, its breadth, its length. But it is

this: to know the love of Christ and to have that wonderful love – I think this is a most delightful expression – to have that love “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.” O that we knew more and felt more and experienced more of the love of God to sinners, the love of God to us personally. Now that would make a difference. That would make everything right. That would make you run in the way of His commandments when He has enlarged your heart.

3. “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.” Now I know what some of you are saying and thinking this evening: I wish the Lord would speak to me personally and say to me personally, “Yea, I have loved *thee*. I have loved *thee* with an everlasting love.” Well, what shall we say to this? Sometimes the Lord does speak powerfully and graciously and He applies His Word. It comes with such authority and power, you are overwhelmed with it. It turns your sorrow into joy, your darkness into light, your bondage into liberty. Your affections are set on things above. Sometimes He speaks and drops that word into a sinner’s heart and powerfully applies it. But there is another way in which He assures His people He has loved them, and that is the way we have here: “Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” In other words, there are some people and God speaks powerfully to them and says, “I have loved thee.” There are others, and God does not speak that word powerfully to them, but He graciously draws them. He attracts them with His lovingkindness, and then His Word declares to them that every time you feel the drawings of God’s lovingkindness in your hearts pulling you away from earthly things to Himself, it is a clear mark and evidence that God has loved you personally with an everlasting love. God is sovereign in the way He works. He gives no account of His matters. He has not promised which of the two ways to work. From reading obituaries of godly people, and in His dealings today, it is more often this latter; not so much coming personally when you are in secret and saying, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” That is a wonderful favour, but it is an equal favour when He draws with the cords of His everlasting love, because He only does this to the ones He loves. It is as sure as the other.

“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” So if God has loved you with an everlasting love, you will know these gracious drawings, these secret

drawings. You will be drawn away from the world, from your old ways, from your old associations, your old pleasures, your old ambitions. You will be graciously but most powerfully drawn away from them. Do not think of the drawings of lovingkindness as being something a little weak. They are tender, but O the power of them! What was it that took the martyrs to the stake to be burnt to ashes, and sometimes in dreadful suffering, and they had the opportunity to go free? It was the drawings of the everlasting love of God. It had a greater power even than life itself, even than death itself. There is no greater power on earth than the drawings of God's everlasting kindness. So it is a very tender thing, but it is an almighty thing. It has the same power as when God in creation said, "Let there be light, and there was light." O these drawings of God's everlasting kindness in love to your soul! He draws you out of the pit of corruption. He draws you out of the fire as a brand from the burning. And He draws you out of the world. "*Therefore* with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." In other words, why have I done this? Because of My love to thee personally. "Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." His lovingkindness draws you, allures you, in the way of repentance, to feel your sin, to confess your sin, but not just in words: that separation from the world and that separation from your past life. O these drawings of lovingkindness as He draws you in the way of repentance and the way of faith and the way of humble confession! And He draws you in the way of prayer. He draws you to the mercyseat, and there you pray for forgiveness. You pray to be prepared for heaven. You pray you might be right. You pray you might be found amongst the people of God. You pray you might be washed in the Saviour's blood.

"Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." These two halves of the verse are inseparably bound together by this *therefore*. If I have loved thee, *therefore* with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. And if in your hearts you have experienced these drawings, it is because I have loved thee, and that with an everlasting love. This is not a carnal reasoning. The Lord would not have done these things for you if you were a stranger to His love. Like Manoah's wife: "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these."

“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” And especially, drawn thee as a sinner to the Saviour, drawn thee as a sinner to Christ. You see, attraction to Christ is one of the clearest evidences you can ever have that you are a child of God, that you are an object of the everlasting love of God to sinners in Christ. I have often said it, Satan can quote a scripture, Satan can give you an imaginary experience, but Satan never, never made Christ attractive to a sinner. Satan never allured a sinner, drew a sinner to Christ. This is the everlasting love of God and it is working through these cords of His lovingkindness which are pulling you, drawing you to Himself. So that prayer in the Song of Solomon: “Draw me, we will run after Thee.” The Lord draws a sinner and then he runs after Christ – not just goes after Him, but he runs after Christ when he is drawn. Let me give you an example of it. The woman with an issue of blood. She was loved with an everlasting love, but she did not know it. All she knew was she had an awful infirmity, an awful sickness, and that Jesus the Saviour was able to heal her. So she came as lovingkindness drew her. There was every obstacle you could think of. There was that great crowd and she was weak and helpless – she must have been with her affliction. “Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” And that lovingkindness pulled her right through the crowd and pulled her right to the Saviour’s feet and she got the blessing. This is the religion we want, sinners being sweetly attracted to Christ, sinners being sweetly drawn to Christ, sinners building their everlasting hope on Christ.

“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” Now the preaching of the gospel will draw you. If you are an object of God’s eternal love, then the preaching of the gospel will draw you. When the serpent of brass was lifted up on the pole, did it draw the afflicted unto it? And Jesus says, “And I, if I be lifted up” – that is, in the preaching of the gospel, lifted up on the gospel pole – “I, if I be lifted up ... will draw all men unto Me.” Value it, hold it fast, if you feel that drawing of Christ, if there is that sweet attraction in Christ as the Holy Spirit makes this glorious Man more precious to your soul than fine gold, and you feel you are being drawn towards Him.

You remember how Noah, as the flood abated, sent out the dove and that dove found no rest for the soul of its foot. All its old perches and resting places were covered by the flood. And if the Lord sends you forth

in a way of gracious exercise of soul, you will find no place where your foot can rest, neither will you until you begin to return to the ark, seeking rest there. And it seems as you read that beautiful account in the Book of Genesis, as that dove was coming back to the ark, she was so weary. Could she ever reach the ark? And we read Noah reached out his hand and pulled her in. Guilty sinners venturing on Christ, He “draws them to His tender breast; there they find the gospel rest.” “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love,” despite all your sin, infirmity and guilt. And the proof of it, the evidence of it: “therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.” And at last, He is going to draw you to heaven eternally. “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

Well, beloved friends, may some of you this evening be sweetly persuaded in your heart that God has loved you with an everlasting love despite all your unworthiness and sin, and if you feel *No*, may the Lord say, *Yea*. And may many of you be able to trace in your soul’s experience these gracious drawings, attraction to Christ, His name so precious, His love so attractive, His precious blood, His Person, all the offices He sustains, there is something attracts, something draws; and if you can trace this, God gives you the evidence that it is because He has loved you with an everlasting love.

Let me just remind you of that story I have often told you, but it bears repetition. At the communion season in Scotland when they were discussing the marks of everlasting love, an old soldier stood up and said, “You know I am an old soldier and every month my pension comes.” He said, “In London there is a big book, I believe, and my name is recorded there. I have never been to London in my life and never seen the big book, but because my pension never fails to come, I am certain my name must be written in that big book.” There is a book of life, and in the book of life are the names of all those who are loved with an everlasting love. We are not privileged to go to heaven and look in that book of everlasting love, but as often as the blessings of the gospel come down from heaven, and as often as our souls are sweetly drawn after Christ, we have the clear evidence that our names are in the book of life. In a word it is this:

“The streams of love I trace
Up to the fountain, God;
And in His wondrous mercy see,
Eternal thoughts of love to me.”

“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with
lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”