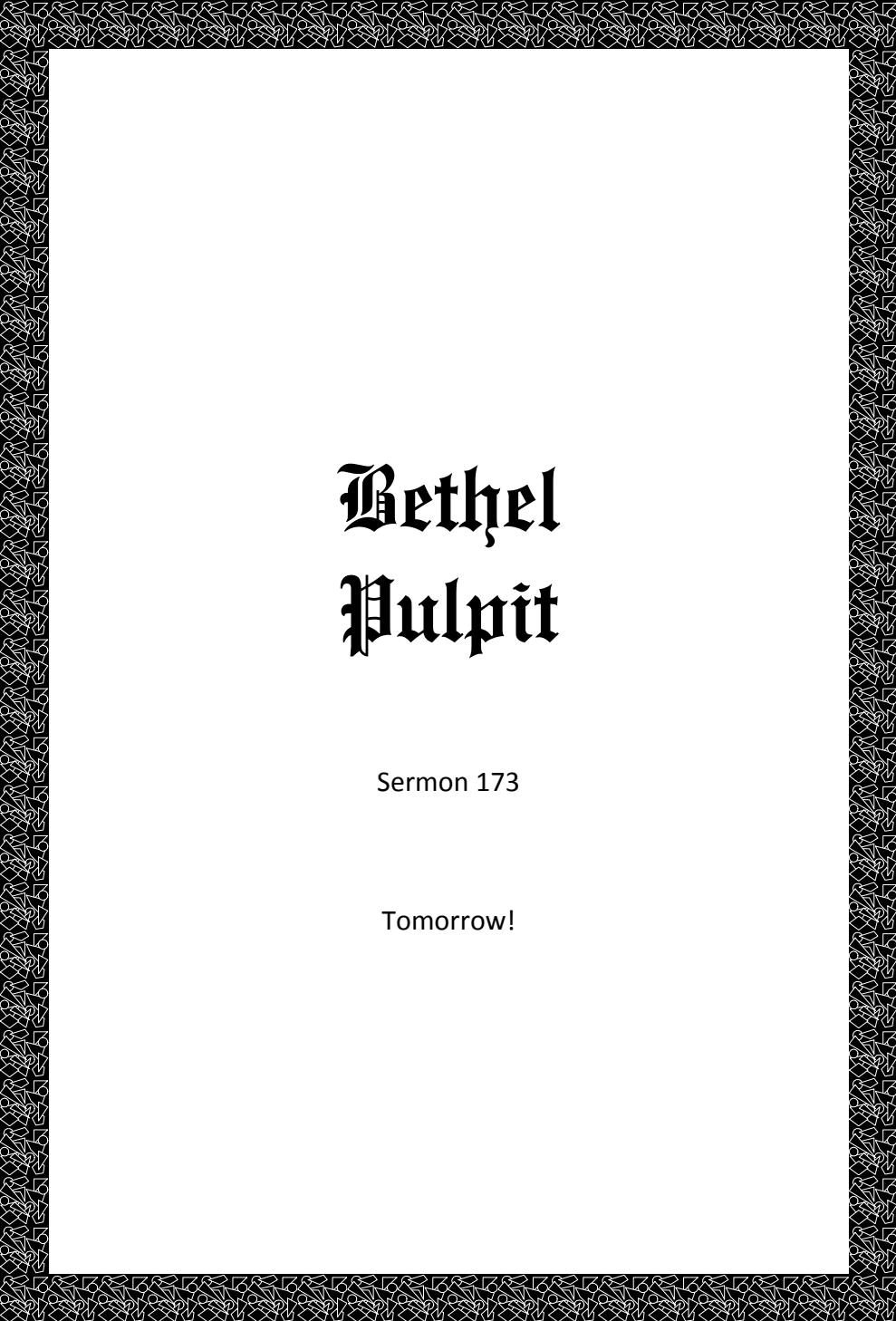




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 173

Tomorrow!

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 10th January, 1999**

Text: *“Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant” (Isaiah 56. 12).*

Today, we have a solemn warning and rebuke. “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” What a picture we have here of the state of our country today! You see, here was ancient Israel. God had done great things for them. God was Israel’s covenant God. But now He was forgotten. The people were sinning against Him. He had been forsaken. His benefits were not remembered. In mercy He sent His prophets to warn them, to expose their sins, to call them to repentance, yet all these things were unheeded. They were completely swallowed up in pleasure, lust, materialism, idolatry, and we can hear them speaking. The prophet tells us the kind of things they were saying, and probably he means the kind of things they were saying in their hearts. Perhaps they were not actually saying them one to another, but this was the spirit of what they were thinking: “Come ye ... I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink.” They were just swallowed up with epicurism, swallowed up with drunkenness. And he takes one of those sins to include all. They were a pleasure-loving people. They were taking everything for granted. They were at ease. They were happy. They did not want religion. They did not want God. “To morrow shall be as this day, *and* much more abundant.” Of course, what happened some time after this was that Jerusalem was destroyed, burned with fire. The people were taken into captivity. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Now beloved friends, we do not need much imagination to see this as a picture of our country at present. The Word of God is always up-to-date. People might say, “But what have all these ancient prophets and ancient civilisations to do with our country today?” Well, God is always the same. Man is always the same in his rebellion against God, his wrong relationship with God. The Word of divine truth is eternally the same.

You think of these last few weeks, the Christmas period. Think of all the eating and all the drinking, all the materialism. God is not in all their thoughts. “To morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” Not only not satisfied with all the lust and the sin and the idolatry and the greed and the materialism of recent weeks, but talking of the end of the year and the coming of the millennium. And it is not that the millennium is a witness to the birth of Christ (no-one can escape that), the only Person in history who has set the date for the calendar – that is forgotten. The only point with most people with the millennium is this: “Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” That is England today. That is the language of the world, the spirit of the world. And let us be clear, that is your language and my language by nature. That is the language of our carnal hearts.

We have two special instances of this in Scripture. One: the days of Noah. What was happening in the days of Noah? He was a righteous man. He was a preacher of righteousness. He was warning them, telling them, and doing it in love. And openly, before their eyes, he was building an ark. What did they say? “‘To morrow shall be as this day.’ There is not going to be any flood. There is not going to be any divine wrath falling upon us.” That was the spirit in the days of Noah. But one man was right, and the rest were wrong. You girls and boys, hold this fast: that the majority is not always right. You may be the only one at school, the only one at work, the only one at college. You will be tempted at times: “they all think differently from me.” Well, they did with Noah, but the day came, and tomorrow was not as today. There was a flood. They perished in their sin. The Lord Jesus Himself took that up, not just concerning Noah’s day, not just concerning His own day, but concerning *our* day, the day in which you and I live. “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” They were eating and they were drinking. “Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink.” They were buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage. “Until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

Now God has given His warnings in His Word. He gave them in Noah’s day. The Lord Jesus gave them in His day. The Word of God is

ever up-to-date. The gospel ministry gives them today. And yet the world just goes on in its sin. “And to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” There have been changes in England. There have been things where tomorrow has not been as today: the Sabbath being desecrated, the awful laws concerning homosexuality, the awful things concerning abortion. In one sense in Britain, tomorrow has not been as today. It has been much more abundant in sin and iniquity and wickedness. This is a picture of England today, a picture of the ungodliness. This is a picture of you and me by nature. If you have never been convinced of sin and savingly converted, this is true of you. It embraces the whole of carnal pleasure and materialism. God is not in all their thoughts. No thought of repentance and faith; no thought of wrath; no thought of judgment; no thought that one day we must die; no thought that one day we must stand before the judgment seat of Christ; no thought that one day we must hear the eternal sentence. “Let us eat and drink, ‘and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.’”

The other case is Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot. We are told he was a righteous man, and he was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.” We are told that even his own family would not listen to him. When he spoke to his sons-in-law in love, reproving them, they mocked him. And the Lord Jesus used almost the identical language concerning the days of Lot as He did concerning the days of Noah. “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” This is a picture of each of us by nature in our unregenerate state. It is a picture of our country. The Word of God is always up-to-date.

“Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” There is no thought that God will have the last word. There is no thought that God lives in heaven, that God judges. There is no thought that if this call to repentance is unheeded, then it will be divine wrath. The Apostle Peter said that people say, “‘Where is the promise of His coming?’ You are preaching about a day of wrath. You are preaching that the Lord Jesus is going to return to this earth. You are preaching that one day He

will come a second time in great power and glory to judge this world in righteousness, this world which once rejected Him. But where is the sign? 'Where is the promise of His coming? ... all things continue as they were from the beginning,' and, 'to morrow shall be as this day.'" "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise." He is never in a hurry, but He is never late. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness." For, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." It seems a long time since the flood, a long time since Sodom and Gomorrah, a long time since the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven. But in the sight of God, a thousand years is but as a day.

And then the reason is given why the Lord tarries: until His purposes of love and mercy to His chosen are fulfilled and His people are gathered in, and then the great burning day, and then the call to judgment. As the world went on in the day of Noah, and Lot's day, and the day of the Lord Jesus, so the world goes on today. "Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink." Let us have a good time. Let us enjoy ourselves. There is plenty of time. "To morrow shall be as this day." We can think about religion when we are older. Until the flood came and carried them away. Until the fire came upon Sodom. "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

Beloved friends, where is the flaw with this? This is a falsehood: "To morrow shall be as this day." Their whole way of life, living for pleasure, it is based on a falsehood. That was the fault of the rich man that the Lord called a fool. He said, "I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." "To morrow shall be as this day." There is plenty of time. "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be?" This whole premise is based on a falsehood, because with every person who has ever lived there will come a day when there will not be a tomorrow. There will come a day when there will not be a tomorrow, and then, "Whose shall those things be?" With you and me there will come a day when there will not be a tomorrow. When it will be, we do not know. It may be a long time; it may be soon. Even this to some may be their last. There are many people alive today in England and probably they have no thought of God, their soul, sin and eternity, but they

have not got a tomorrow. Tomorrow they will be in eternity. But even so, apart from there not being a tomorrow, no-one can presume that tomorrow will be as today, not even the Queen on the throne, nor the Prime Minister. No one can presume that tomorrow will be as today. With the Jews, the day came when the Syrians invaded them and carried them away. The day came when the Babylonians came and burned the temple down and took them into captivity. Tomorrow was not as today. No one knows what their tomorrow might bring. Some sudden turn in providence, and tomorrow is not as today.

Most of you know of J. C. Ryle, the famous first Bishop of Liverpool, one of the best bishops our country has ever had. He belonged to a wealthy family. He was a young man, probably in his early twenties, and his family were rolling in wealth. He had all his plans what he was going to do (I think he was going to be a lawyer), and suddenly they lost everything in a few hours. That young man's life was completely shattered, turned upside down. We know not what a day will bring forth. And when we think of the new year, thinking of what we are going to do, we should say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that." There may be some sudden bereavement, some terrible affliction, some failure in health. Some of you beloved friends here have proved this in your own little lives, as you have gone along, that tomorrow has not been as the day before. None of us know the things that might come upon us during this year. It is, "Prepare us for Thy will, whatever may appear." O but the solemn warnings that Isaiah the prophet gave, and they were unheeded. And the solemn warnings that our country has received, and the solemn warnings there have been in the preaching of the gospel, to those who are still dead in sin, strangers to God and godliness, God not in all their thoughts. "To morrow shall be as this day." But God will have the last word. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked." There will come a time when you will not have a tomorrow, but even if you do have a tomorrow, you do not know what that tomorrow might bring. You do not know what it might be the messenger of. You cannot rely upon it. You cannot presume upon it. We should say, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

So beloved friends, we find that the Word of God is always up-to-date. You could not have a clearer picture of the state of our country, the state of our nation, than this: people loving pleasure and self and idolatry,

rejecting God, the God of their fathers, rejecting His holy Sabbath, rejecting His holy Word. And the professing church of God is going along with the world. “We will fill ourselves with strong drink,” fill ourselves with pleasure, intoxicate ourselves with living to ourselves. This materialism, this intoxication. “To morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.”

“Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” Now with the Lord’s help, I want to bring this closer, as it concerns the church of God, as it concerns the Lord’s own people, because the spirit of the world has infected the church of God, and there is much of this spirit prevalent on every hand throughout our churches, that “to morrow shall be as this day.” Everything just going on the same as it has always gone on. Little burden, few burdens about the state of the country, concerning the state of our churches, concerning the state of those around us, concerning our own state, this drifting along, this emptiness, this formality, as if everything that was yesterday will be today, and everything today will be tomorrow. We come to the Lord’s house on the Sabbath and in the week, on the Sabbath again, and the pattern carries on. What about the gracious exercise? What about the longing that the Lord will appear? What about the spirit of prayer?

The prophet complains that there are none, none that stir up themselves to lay hold of God. What we need is this stirring up, and sometimes the Lord does it in solemn judgments in His churches, and sometimes the Lord does it very lovingly and tenderly and graciously when He breaks through, and, “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness” shines in His people’s hearts, “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Are we satisfied with our religion? Are we satisfied with our spiritual standing? Are we satisfied with our spiritual attainment? Is there not yet very much land still to be possessed? Is it not true that the house of Jacob has not yet possessed its possessions? But O this spirit of carelessness and indifference and formality and comfort!

“And to morrow shall be as this day.” You know, there are some people who would not really like it at their chapel if tomorrow was not as this day, and people out of the world began to flood in under the influence

and teaching of God. People say, “We like a little, quiet chapel without any disturbance.” And some do not even like the Lord’s people who have moved in providence coming in because they do not want anyone in the church interfering with the things they have done for so many years. If something is wrong, it must not be put right because tomorrow must be as today! If something is for the Lord’s honour and glory, it must not be done because tomorrow must be as today! May the Lord in love and mercy deliver us from it, because “Judgment must begin at the house of God.” O this spirit of the world: tomorrow shall be as today!

Quite a different line on this. The materialism. “I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink.” The things of the world being so much with us, uppermost in our thoughts. O may we be delivered from the spirit of this word, the spirit of ancient Israel, the spirit of our nation today, the spirit of the professing church of God: “Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.” Now if the Lord in love and mercy comes into our churches, tomorrow will *not* be as today. There will be much bitter sorrow of heart. There will be much repentance. There will be much mourning over sin. There will be much more zeal. But O this *tomorrow shall be as today* religion! How much prayer? How much gracious exercise? How much burden? How much love to the Word of God? How much love to the people of God? How much communion among the people of God? Tomorrow shall be as today. Now I believe there is not anything that more defines the state of our churches today. It is not so much that things are wrong, or bad, or evil. It is this drifting along, this unexercised condition, this lifeless condition, this God-dishonouring condition, just drifting along, being carried along as dead fish by the stream. We need the Lord to appear and have mercy upon Zion. We need the Lord to appear in His glory and build up Zion.

O to be delivered from this spirit: “To morrow shall be as this day.” Really, it is a spirit of fatalism: what has to be will be. As I spoke at length to our young people recently, there is as much difference between the doctrine of divine decrees, of predestination, on the one hand and fatalism on the other hand as there is between life and death. Fatalism is the religion of the devil. Fatalism dishonours the Lord. Fatalism would pull the crown off His head. Fatalism does not have the Lord in it. Yet there is this dark, evil cloud of fatalism which hovers over the church and

hovers over us. Satan says, if all things are decreed, then if they are to be saved, they will be saved. If things are going to happen, why pray? That is the religion of the devil. The Lord has His divine decrees, and what a comfort it is for the people of God that things are not happening by accident or by chance, that Almighty God is on the throne, that everything is in the hands of a God who is almighty, but also all-wise and all-gracious, that everything is working together for His people's real good and His honour and glory. Even the things that take place in your life that grieve you, that prostrate you, that fill your hearts with sorrow, they never came by accident or chance, but fell out for your real good and His everlasting honour and glory. "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" He binds the floods from overflowing. He says, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." "The wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." These are great and precious and glorious truths: divine predestination, the fore-ordination of all things, the mystery of divine providence, that God orders all things, in the world, in the church, in our lives, without in any way being the author of sin.

But beloved friends, this is not the *only* truth that is revealed in Scripture, and this precious truth is not revealed nakedly, and the Lord never revealed this precious truth that men and women and girls and boys might wrest it to their own destruction. The same God who has revealed His sovereign counsels in predestination has also ordained that men shall pray and not faint. He has ordained that in answer to His people's prayers, He will fulfil these gracious purposes, that through the preaching of the everlasting gospel, He will gather in His chosen, and build up and establish and feed His people. The Lord never revealed these precious, sacred truths of divine sovereignty, divine fore-ordination, that His people should sleep in slothfulness, in a God-dishonouring fatalism which would pull God from the throne. Fatalism has no love, no mercy, no anything in it. It dishonours the Lord. May we be saved from it. This is the spirit here: "To morrow shall be as this day." If it has to be, it will be, and if it has not, it will not. May the Lord deliver us from the spirit of the world and the spirit of a God-dishonouring fatalism, and may He keep our hearts exercised in prayer and burdened concerning the state of the church of God and our own souls. May there be that stirring up of His Spirit and may there be a

living more to the honour and glory of His name; and may it more and yet more be engraven on our hearts that one thing is needful, and that is Christ and a vital, personal, saving knowledge of Him. O to be delivered from a *take-it-for-granted* religion, to be delivered from a *plenty-of-time* religion, to be delivered from an *other-people-think-well-of-me* religion. There is only one thing will ever do, and that is for you and me to be blessed with real repentance and real faith and to have our hope built upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus.

What a contrast there is in another of the prophets! “And I will pour upon the ... inhabitants of Jerusalem” – these same inhabitants of Jerusalem of Isaiah 56, I will pour upon them “the spirit of grace and of supplications.” It comes down from heaven. What are they doing now? Are they saying, “To morrow shall be as this day”? Tomorrow is certainly not as today or as yesterday. “They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him.” There have been days of spiritual prosperity when this word was literally fulfilled, even in Britain: “They shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.” Every family mourning apart, and their wives apart, and their children apart. They say that around Gairloch in the Highlands of Scotland in the last century there were not enough little, secret places for the multitudes to hide themselves away on their way home from the church, because there were so many in bitter tears of repentance, who wanted to get somewhere where they would not be seen. There were days where in a house, in a village, even a town, this weeping and mourning for a crucified Saviour could be known, and not only known, but also heard. When true revival comes, tomorrow is not as today, and today is not as yesterday. Huntington was rebuked on this. He was so sad and sorrowful and grieved, thinking about something – and it was right, it was lawful – and the Lord said, “Have you ever grieved as much concerning a suffering Saviour at Calvary as you grieve about your own personal sorrows?” I know this is solemn ground, close ground. We need to take our shoes from off our feet, but we need to be delivered from this drifting along, tomorrow shall be as today.

There were two Scriptures rested on my spirit and I read them to you in the chapters this morning. The first was Amos 6: “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!” Now these were the godly. This is not the world. This is

Zion. There are people who are at ease in Zion. And doesn't this describe the church of God today? Doesn't this describe our churches? Doesn't this describe us? "At ease in Zion." And God pronounces a solemn woe against those who are at ease in Zion. May the Lord in mercy deliver us.

And the second one was in the first chapter of Zephaniah. "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles." This is the Jerusalem of Isaiah 56. When the Lord said He will search Jerusalem with candles, the meaning I take is this: that He will search very carefully and minutely. As in Luke 15 the woman lit a candle because she wanted to search so carefully. "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles." Let us be clear, when the Lord searches Jerusalem with candles, His people will not be unpunished. When the Lord searches Jerusalem with candles, it is not because *He* does not know, because *He* wants to find it. It is to reveal to His people the state in which they are, the state in which they are sunk. "And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees." This is a term from making wine when it was left and it had to settle; it had to be left, nothing must disturb it. It had to become sugary. There was not to be any movement. "Settled on their lees." In Jeremiah 48 it is given as the mark of the wicked. Sometimes the Lord's people are settled on their lees. That hymn we sing:

"Tis if need be, He reproves us,
Lest we settle on our lees;
Yet He in the furnace loves us;
'Tis expressed in words like these:
 'I am with thee,
Israel passing through the fire.'"

It is a mercy if the Lord stirs us up when we settle on our lees. "That say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." They do not really say it aloud, and they do not really believe it, but they behave and act as if they did. Isn't this how the world acts? They say, "I believe there is a God, but He will not interfere with what we are doing. Let us get on with it." But this is Zion, the church of God. They do not actually say it openly, and the people of God do not really believe it, but the point is,

they act as if they do. “The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.”

“To morrow shall be as this day.” Well, beloved friends, I have tried to lay this before you as it concerns our country, as it concerns sinners by nature, as it concerns the church of God. We need the Lord in love and in mercy to appear. Sometimes He does it with judgments, and sometimes He does it just the opposite: He does it by coming and shedding abroad His love. But we do not want tomorrow to be as today. We want to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. We do not want tomorrow to be as today. We want more blessing. We want more of His presence. We want more of His love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. We want to know more of Himself. We want more of that closer walk with God. We do not want always to live at this poor, dying rate, in the church of God, or in our own hearts. May the Lord in love and mercy stir us up – we hope not in solemn judgement – we hope it might be in love.

But if the Lord has dealt solemnly with you and your tomorrow is not as today, seek that the Lord might sanctify it to you. Our great need is this: to have some sense of the reality of vital things, to “believe what we do believe,” to believe that God is almighty, to believe that God is sovereign, to believe that God is holy, to feel the reality of it, to believe that Jesus is God’s dear, eternal Son, that He did condescend to suffer, bleed and die. And if revealed that it was for us, to live as if we do believe what we do believe. If we really do, if we have a sense of it, that the precious Jesus, the eternal Son of God, agonised and bled and died at Calvary for such wretches as you and me, we would not be saying, “Tomorrow will be as today.” “O may my single aim be now to live on Him that died.”

The Lord bless us with more reality. The Lord bless us with more earnestness in the things of God. The Lord make us real Christians. The Lord bless us with more and more of His love. The Lord make His beloved Son exceeding precious, more precious to our souls. O that we might be delivered from the spirit of the world and the dark cloud of apathy that is over the professing church; that it might be, “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

O beloved friends, may we have a blessed tomorrow this year, such a blessed tomorrow as we have never known before, a blessed tomorrow personally in our souls, a blessed tomorrow in our homes and lives and families, a blessed tomorrow in the church of God, and be delivered from this: “To morrow shall be as this day.”