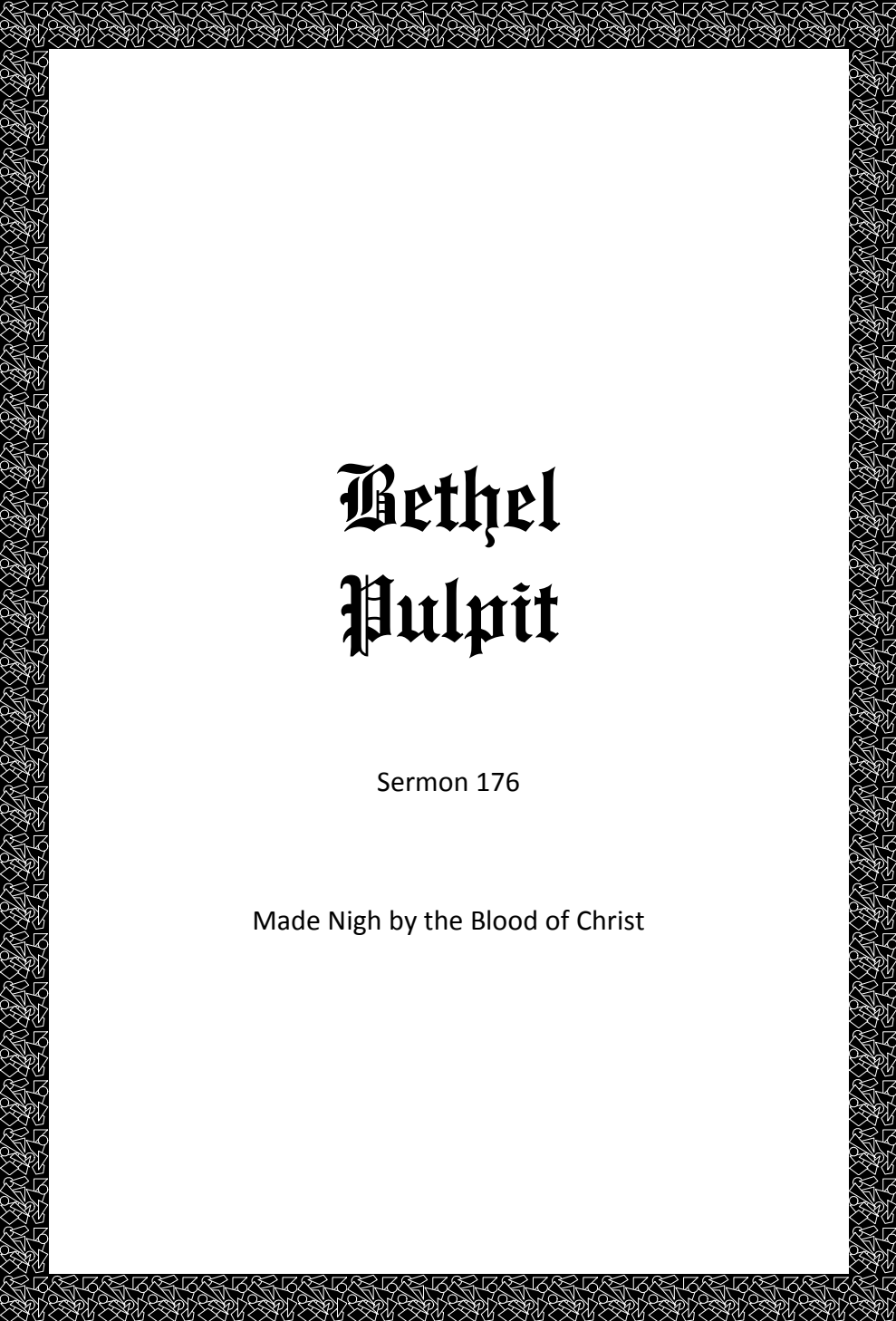




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 176

Made Nigh by the Blood of Christ

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 6th February, 2000**

Text: “*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ*” (Ephesians 2. 13).

There is an emphasis right through this chapter, and the emphasis is this: what the people of God *once were* and what they *are now*, the difference that has been made. Of course, Paul is especially writing to these Gentiles sinners who by nature were strangers to the covenants of promise made to the Jews, but really all the things he says are true of all the people of God, this difference between what they once were and what they now are. He opens this vital point up in three ways. At the beginning he speaks of how they were once dead, spiritually dead, but now they have been made alive. He says, “Ye were dead in trespasses and sins.” He says, “Ye had your conversation ... in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” But there has been a difference. “But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us ... hath quickened us together with Christ.” And then at the end he puts it in a slightly different way: that once they were strangers, aliens, enemies; now they belong to the family of God. This vital difference there has been. He says, “Ye *were* strangers and foreigners.” Now, “Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” So at the beginning you have once they were dead, and now they are alive; and at the end, once they were strangers, now of the household of God; but here in the middle, once they were far off, at a distance, but now for ever they have been made nigh, made nigh by the blood of Christ. Once they were far off from God, far off from His people, far off from anything concerning the things of God. But there is this difference, this vital difference.

Of course, this word *sometimes* is used in its ancient sense. We would not say *sometimes*. We would say *at one time*, or *once*. “Ye who sometimes” – ye who formerly, at one time – “were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Now beloved friends, these things are vital. Has there been this gracious change that has taken place in your life and mine? Well, either it has or it has not, and if it has, you will know it. You might

be tried and you will be tried at times and tempted and perhaps you will wonder whether it is real or whether you have been deceived, but if the Lord has made a difference in your life then you will know it. You cannot have this difference and be completely ignorant of it. O this difference! We are told that it is in Christ. We are told that it is by grace. We are told that it is through the Holy Spirit. I would press you on this point, whether the Lord has ever made that difference in your life. The Word of God speaks of it in one word: repentance. Really to those who are out of Christ, those in nature's state of darkness and death, the Word of God has only one thing to say, and that is, repent. It is that complete change, that complete turning round, wrought in your heart by the Spirit of God, and either you have experienced it or not experienced it. Some people know it dramatically, in a moment. Some people know it gradually. God is completely sovereign in His work, but there will be a complete change in Christ, by grace through the Holy Spirit.

Well then, "Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes" – that is, at one time – "were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." As the vital emphasis here is on the blood of Christ as the ground and the foundation of the difference, as the ground and foundation on which a guilty sinner is made nigh to a holy God, let us seek grace just to linger for a few moments on this most important of all subjects, the blood of Christ. May we always speak reverently. We are told that the people of God are "redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ." We are told that "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." By this expression, "the blood of Christ," we are to understand His life poured out in death. His precious blood began to flow in the Garden of Gethsemane before any human hand had touched Him, when "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" in His agony. And that precious blood flowed in the judgment hall, the crown of thorns and the cruel scourging. But it must be blood poured out in death. It was necessary that the Lord Jesus should shed His precious blood that sinners might be saved, but it was necessary that His blood should be poured out in death, and so at Calvary the cruel nails and the spear, and His precious blood flowed till at last He cried, "It is finished," and He bowed His head and died. O this precious, sin-atoning blood! It was shed when the Saviour died. It was shed when divine wrath was poured out upon Him, all the wrath His people deserved. It was shed when He bore the sins of

His people. And that precious blood opened a way to heaven. It brought a way of forgiveness. It opened a fountain which cleanses from all sin. It satisfied the justice and holiness of God. It brought peace. It brought salvation. The precious blood of Christ. O but the vital point here is this, in the words of the old hymnwriter, “It makes a guilty sinner such as I nigh unto God.” It is in Christ and it is by His precious blood.

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” So this brings us to the point, the necessity of our being made nigh. Because by birth and by nature through original sin, through actual sin, we are not near to God. We do not live close to God. We do not walk in obedience to God. We are not in a state of friendship with God. We are far off by wicked works. We are at enmity with God. We are rebels. We cannot come near His holy presence. It is a solemn thing to be far off from God. Paul says, “Ye were without Christ.” This is what it is to be far off. “Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” Now that is your state and my state by nature. That is what it is to be far off from God. There is something in between a sinner and God; this passage speaks of it as “the enmity.” God has given a holy law, a good law, a just law, a right law. We have despised it. We have scorned it. We have broken it. There is that awful, enormous load, that mountain of sin and guilt, which comes between a holy God and a guilty sinner and keeps us at a distance.

So by nature we are under the wrath of God, liable to the wrath of God. This is awfully solemn. I would that each of you realised the solemnity of being far off from God by wicked works. The old Puritan preachers used to say the two hardest things for a gospel minister were to make the wicked sad and to make the godly glad. O but this awful condition, far off from God. But the awful solemnity of it is: if you and I live and die far off from God, if you and I are never, never made nigh by the blood of Christ, then to all eternity we must be separated from God. We must be far off from God and hear that awful word, and it is final, “Depart from Me: I never knew you.” That is your state, that is my state by nature. O what a mercy if in Christ, through grace, by the Holy Spirit, there has been a difference and O that there might be even one soul this evening who painfully feeling your far-off condition, a rebel against God, you might pray to be made nigh.

“But now in Christ Jesus.” These are the people of God, these to whom the Lord has a favour, these who are savingly converted, these who are blessed with repentance, these whose lives are graciously changed. There is this difference. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off.” Once you were far off; you are no longer far off; you are made nigh. Ye “are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Because in trying to speak just one or two things on the preciousness of the blood of Christ I want to speak of a few of its accomplishments. That was an amazing word when on the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah spoke with the Lord Jesus concerning His death “which He should *accomplish* at Jerusalem.” You never say, when someone dies, that he has *accomplished* his death. But O the accomplishments, the wonderful accomplishments of the death of Christ, and this not least, to bring a guilty sinner nigh to God.

“Saints, raise your expectations high;
Hope all that heaven has good;
The blood of Christ has brought you nigh –
Invaluable blood!”

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Now first of all this being “made nigh by the blood of Christ” was on that actual day when He suffered, bled and died, when He shed His precious blood, when He finished the work of redemption and when with a loud voice He cried, “It is finished.” Then all His people in all ages, past, present and to come were made nigh by the blood of Christ. You know what happened at the very moment when the Lord Jesus bowed His head and died. You know what took place, don’t you? It would have been just the time of the evening sacrifice, and in the temple the priest would have been there ministering, and that very moment when the Lord Jesus bowed His head in death, the thick veil of the temple was rent in twain by an invisible hand from the top to the bottom. That was God’s commentary on Ephesians 2. 13, “made nigh by the blood of Christ.” That thick veil of the temple separated the most holy place, the holiest of all, from the rest of the sanctuary. No-one was allowed ever to enter that holy of holies apart from Israel’s high priest, and he only once a year on the great day of atonement and then not without blood, which he offered for himself and others. That thick veil spoke of distance. It spoke of no entry. It said, “Keep out!” It said, “Keep away!” It was an awful

symbol of this solemn truth we have here, man's distance from God, his alienation, his separation. That thick veil of the temple represented the separation of the Jews from the Gentiles and the separation of both of them from God. Now that awful, visible sign: distance, no access, no entry, separation. O but when the Lord Jesus shed His precious blood and died, then that veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. It was as if a voice from heaven declared in that solemn act that "now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." There is a way now whereby a guilty sinner might be made nigh to God. And so the apostle takes it up: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh ... let us draw near."

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Very beautifully does Paul comment on it. He says, "For He is our peace." There was no peace between the sinner and God before. There was no peace between the Jew and the Gentile. But now, "He is our peace, who hath made both one" – Jews and Gentiles one, guilty sinners and a holy God one – "and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." Why? So that a guilty sinner might draw nigh. "Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances." There was the holy law of God and that law condemned the sinner. That law said, "Draw not near." That law said, "Stay at a distance." That law given on Sinai made the people tremble. They dare not come near. But now the Lord Jesus shedding His precious blood at Calvary "abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man." There are two; and now they are made one. "To make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." The cause of enmity between a holy God and sinners, that is the sin and guilt of the people of God, is taken out of the way. "That He might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through Him" – Christ – "we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (verses 14-18).

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” And that took place at the cross. But then you see, beloved friends, there is an effect of the death of Christ on the cross and it is this: “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” There is a certain, definite effect of the death of Christ. His precious blood was not shed in vain. The effect of the death of Christ is this: that every single sinner for whom He died will be made nigh by His precious blood.

“Far off, depraved and wont to stray,
They shall to Jesus come;
For covenant love marks out the way,
And brings the outcast home.”

So one by one this is being fulfilled in those for whom Jesus died. Some of you here were once far off, but then the time came, the effect of the Saviour’s death, and now you are made nigh by the blood of Christ. How were you made nigh? Why, the Holy Spirit taught you your need, showed you your lost condition, how far you were from God, convinced you of your guilt. You felt how awful to live and die in this condition, a stranger to God, alienated from God, guilty, lost. So you had to draw nigh to God. You could not do anything else. You had sins to be forgiven. You had a soul to be saved, a hell to escape, a heaven to prepare for. So as the effect of the death of Christ and the Holy Spirit’s work in your heart, you had to venture before Him. You needed mercy. You needed forgiveness. You needed salvation. You needed cleansing in His precious blood.

But then this great question, how can such a sinner as I draw nigh to God? How can such a sinner as I have access to a holy God? I must draw nigh, but what hope have I? God is holy; I am guilty. How can I find acceptance? What if He rejects me, cuts me off, casts me away? And then you see it is in the gospel and it is made known to your poor heart by the Holy Spirit, that there is an all-prevailing plea for a guilty sinner, and that is the blood of Christ. You go and plead the blood of Christ and, sinner, there was no-one who ever pleaded the blood of Christ in vain. O as you feel your lost condition this evening, plead the blood of Christ as the ground of your acceptance with a holy God. Plead the blood of Christ that you might be accepted. And then that wonderful truth: “To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved,”

through His precious, sin-atonement blood. Now beloved friends, this is the gospel as I understand it and as I trust that I have learned it: access to a holy God through the blood of Christ, acceptance with a holy God through the blood of Christ. So a guilty sinner can draw near. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” That loving welcome, that gracious acceptance, that mercy sought, that mercy found. And it is all in Christ, and it is all through His precious blood.

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” I have always thought the case of David and Mephibosheth is a lovely illustration of a sinner being made nigh to God. You remember the circumstances well. David had once made a covenant with his beloved friend Jonathan that in the days to come he would show kindness to the house of Saul. They did not deserve it. They were the enemy house, the house that had warred against David, but for Jonathan’s sake he would seek out any of Jonathan’s descendants and he would show mercy and kindness to them. So there was a covenant. The time came when David was established on the throne and he remembered his covenant. He said, “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” And they said, “There is one, Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth. He is lame on both feet, and lo he dwelleth in Lo-debar.” There were three things there. He was far off, in a far country. He belonged to the house of the enemy; by his very birth and being he belonged to the house of Saul, the house of the enemy. But if he had wanted he was not able to come. He could not walk. He was lame on both feet. What a picture of you and me as guilty sinners when grace finds us! We are far off, in a far country, like that poor prodigal son. We are far away from the father’s house. We deserve not mercy but condemnation. And spiritually we are crippled. We are lame on both feet, neither can we come. We have no ability to come.

I do not know if any of you have read this month’s *Zion’s Witness*. There is a sermon by old Thomas Sinkinson of Bedworth. There is also a little account of him and it says when he first went to preach, he was preaching in the open-air and was calling on everybody to come and accept Christ, and a voice from the crowd in Preston called out, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.” O the effect that word had! But that is you and me; that is Mephibosheth, far off

by wicked works, unable to come, unwilling to come. But David has a purpose of love and mercy, just as the eternal Father has a purpose of love and mercy. He is going to have all these made nigh, all belonging to the family of God. They are all going to sit at the King's table. David said, "Send and fetch him." He could not come himself; he could not walk. That is what grace does, and that is what grace did for you and me.

As you read that account, it seems that when the royal messengers came, poor Mephibosheth was full of terror. Was this the death sentence? There he was brought into the royal presence of King David and was it going to be life or death? "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence." Poor Mephibosheth fell down to the ground. He could not get low enough. And David spoke one word to him: "Mephibosheth." There was everything in that. It was just like the resurrection day when the Lord Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene just one word: "Mary." She "enjoyed a gospel day, and heaven begun below." "Mary. 'Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.'" *Mary. Mephibosheth.* That meant everything to that poor, trembling man. He could not get low enough. Fear not, Mephibosheth. This is a sinner, sometimes far off, who is now "made nigh by the blood of Christ." O the wonders that grace has done! "Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake." In a gospel sense, for Jesus' sake, because He shed His precious blood and died. That is the ground of your being made nigh. That is the ground of mercy. I will surely show you kindness for Jesus' sake, through His precious blood. "I ... will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father." This is more for Mephibosheth than just mercy, just forgiveness. All the land of thy father Saul, I will restore it to thee. The lost inheritance. The people of God had an inheritance in Adam and they lost it. They have it restored in Christ, but they have a better inheritance restored in Christ than they lost in Adam. Our hymnwriter says, "He fixed my standing more secure than 'twas before I fell." "In Him the tribes of Adam boast more blessings than their father lost." "I ... will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." He is to be among the children, the family of God. "A foe received a favourite, a rebel made a child."

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." Now beloved friends, there is a standing here, a standing that can never change, that can never be broken: "made

nigh by the blood of Christ.” But you will not always feel it. Sometimes there will be the clouds between. In experience you will not always feel to be nigh, and yet in Christ you are made for ever nigh. But there are those times when you need to pray, you have to pray, and how can you draw near? O so unworthy, so guilty, so sinful, why should the Lord ever condescend to hear and answer my poor prayers? And then this all-prevailing plea, the blood of Christ, and you can draw nigh and find access and find acceptance on the ground of the atonement.

“Made nigh by the blood of Christ.” And then also this point of union and communion, felt nearness to the Lord. We do not always feel near, do we? Sometimes in our feelings we feel far off. Sometimes we feel like the prodigal who has gone off into a far country. O but to enter into this word in our soul’s feelings, “made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Beloved friends, for years I have looked at this word and I have often felt it is one of the most precious texts in the whole of Scripture, and I am sure there is no more blessed experience than this, for a guilty sinner to be “made nigh by the blood of Christ.” You see, doctrinally, experimentally and feelingly the only way a sinner can be made nigh is by the blood of Christ. And it is not just to *draw nigh*; it is not just to *come nigh*; it is to be “*made nigh* by the blood of Christ.” But what an inestimable blessing this is, for a sinner to be made nigh to God, for all the enmity to be removed, nothing but mercy, forgiveness, salvation, to be brought into the family of God. It is all in Christ and it is all of grace and it is all by the Spirit.

“Made nigh by the blood of Christ.” So in Scripture there are so many titles for the people of God, but one title is this: “a people near unto Him.” They have a place in His loving, tender heart. O that is how nigh the people of God are made. They are graven on the palms of His hands. They are graven upon His loving heart. The blessing of Benjamin is theirs. This is to be “made nigh by the blood of Christ.” “The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders.” That is to be “made nigh by the blood of Christ,” to dwell between His shoulders. That is to dwell in His loving heart. Israel’s high priest carried the names of the twelve tribes engraven upon his breastplate, a breastplate of precious stones. But our great High Priest bears the names of all His people eternally engraved upon His loving, tender heart. John Newton says, speaking in the name of Christ, “Do not think thou canst be lost, thou art graven on My heart.” So

that cry of the church in the Canticles is really for this blessing, to be “made nigh by the blood of Christ.” “Set me” – such a sinner as me – “set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm.” It is to be a “made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

“O let my name engraven stand
Both on Thy heart and on Thy hand;
Seal me upon Thy arm, and wear
That pledge of love for ever there.”

“Made nigh by the blood of Christ.” And then made nigh eternally, made nigh for ever and ever in heaven. You know, Joseph’s brethren treated him shamefully. They treated him sinfully, wickedly, cruelly, didn’t they? And when Joseph revealed himself to them, their hearts were full of terror. But here is the love and mercy: Be not afraid; “I am Joseph your brother.” “Come near to me, I pray you.” And that is what the Lord Jesus will say to every sinner saved by grace when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ. It will be a solemn day when we meet our Maker, stand before His judgment seat, have to give account of the deeds done in the body. O but to hear the Saviour, that great elder Brother of the church say, “Be not afraid; I am Joseph your brother. Come near to Me, I pray.” O it is that, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” That is to enter heaven. That is to be eternally made nigh, and it is by the blood of Christ. “These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes” – all of them – “and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne.”

Well beloved friends, this is the gospel as I understand it. I trust it has been burnt and sealed into my heart, that there is a way whereby the guiltiest of sinners can draw nigh into the immediate presence of God and come to heaven at last, and that is in Christ, through His precious, sin-atoning blood. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”