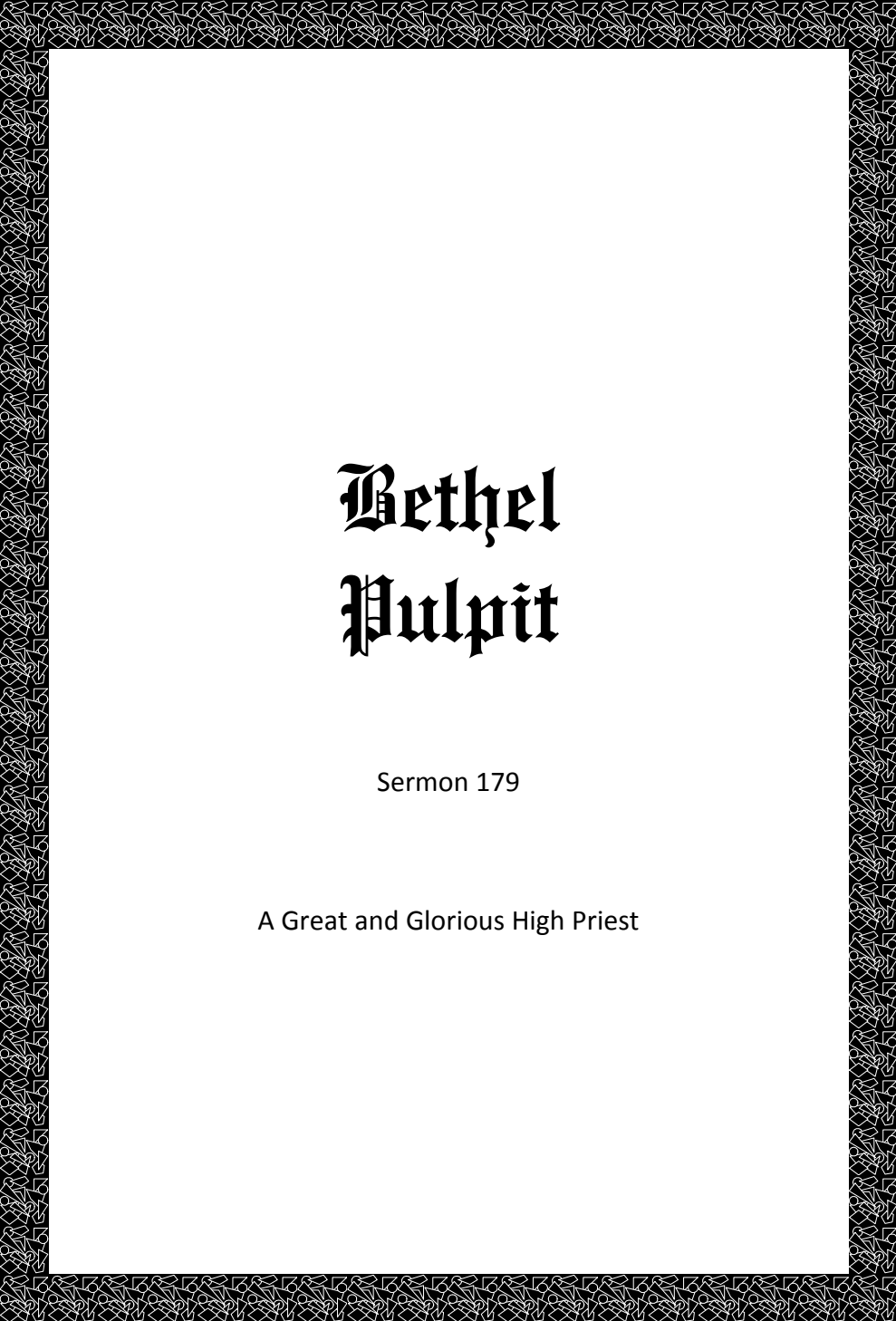




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 179

A Great and Glorious High Priest

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 26th March, 2000**

Text: *“But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9. 11, 12).*

On one occasion the Apostle Paul said, “I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” When we go to preach, we pray that that might be so and we hope it may be so, but the apostle was blessed with that sweet assurance to say he *knew* that it would be so, that he would preach “in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” Now beloved friends, I find that a most attractive word, “the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”

Why do I introduce the subject this morning in this way? Because these two beautiful verses that I have read to you are full of the blessing of the gospel of Christ, what the godly old people used to love to call soul-establishing truths. “The fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” You have it here. This is one of the fullest verses in Scripture. What do I mean? Well, you have the Person, Christ; then you have His incarnation, “being come”; then you have His office, “a High Priest”; then you have His sacred humanity, “a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands”; and then you have the atonement, the shedding of His own precious blood, “by His own blood ... having obtained eternal redemption for us”; and then you have His resurrection, ascension and exaltation, “He entered in once into the holy place.” Really, you have a compendium here of all the precious, sacred truths that are bound up with the Person and work of the Lord Jesus.

And beloved friends, I just pause here for a moment. What do these things mean to you and me? To some, sadly, I fear they mean nothing. If they mean nothing to you, it is because you are strangers to God. It is because you are dead in trespasses and sins. The Lord Jesus still says, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” O but to others these things mean

everything. Our hope, our salvation, our heaven is here. Because the Lord Jesus once said, “What think ye of Christ?” If you read that chapter, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees asked question after question to the Lord Jesus and He most graciously answered them. Then when they had finished, He put the great question, what the godly Scots used to call the great question of the gospel catechism: “What think ye of Christ?” Because this will weigh up our religion, whether it is right or whether it is wrong.

Well then, these beautiful verses with these very precious, sacred truths concerning the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and especially His everlasting priesthood. Before coming right into these verses: “But Christ.” I am told that Mr. J. K. Popham once started to read through the Epistle to the Hebrews and after about an hour he found he had not got beyond the first word, “God.” He seemed swallowed up in meditation. And looking at these verses, I seem to be stuck on these first two words: “But Christ.” In the verses before, without going into detail and expounding them, the apostle is speaking of things that did not really satisfy, things that disappointed. He is speaking of the whole of the Levitical dispensation, where so many things did not really satisfy, did not really help, did not really save. They did not really deal with the problem. “But Christ” – the answer to every problem, the answer to every sorrow, the answer to every perplexity. If you get these two words into your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit this morning, “but Christ,” then you will “enjoy a gospel day, and heaven begun below.” Some of you, conscious of your sin and your faults, your failures, your guilt, “but Christ,” His finished work, His great salvation, the answer to all. And then others, all these problems and perplexities and sorrows, these things which have lain heavily on you during the week, you cannot shake them off as you come to chapel this morning. O you feel these burdens, these weights. “But Christ,” the answer to them all, the One who knows, who understands, who cares, the One who sympathises, the One who is almighty, the One who can answer your prayers, the One who can uphold you in the midst of all your sorrows, the One who can deliver you, bring you safely through. May precious faith be given this morning to look up to heaven, to find a resting place there, a once-crucified, and now risen, glorified Christ.

“But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come.” So we have the Saviour’s coming, Christ “being come.” He came as sent by

His Father. He came out of love to sinners. He came with a covenant engagement. He came to save His people from their sins. “But Christ being come.” Really, if a minister had the time and the grace and the ability, how many sermons could he preach just on those few words, “But Christ being come”! It takes you to Bethlehem. It takes you to the manger. It takes you to the reason why the Saviour came. It shows you the wonders of His love. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” “But Christ being come.” There is that solemn word in the Gospel according to John where the Lord Jesus spoke to the unbelieving Jews and He said, “If I had not come.” Do you ever tremble before such a word as that? “If I had not come.” And do you ever rejoice in this: “But Christ being come”?

“But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come.” This of course signifies that under the old dispensation there were the high priests but they were only typical high priests. They were only high priests of what the apostle in another place calls “a shadow of good things to come.” But you see, Christ brought the reality. Christ brought all that sinners need. Christ brought all that was necessary that His people might be saved with an everlasting salvation. So “Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come.” From being young, I always saw a very sweet attraction in the priesthood of Christ. Every religion, whatever kind of religion it is, has a priesthood. Essentially a priest is a mediator. That is the essence of the priesthood, a mediator, one who can come between a great and holy God and a lost, ruined, guilty sinner. Even the light of nature has taught that to heathen religions, that they cannot approach directly to a holy God, that they must have a priesthood. And of course this was burnt into the heart of Israel in the Old Testament, through the priests, the many priests, the blood shed and the sacrifices, that there could only be an approach to a holy God through a mediator.

Now you girls and boys, you young people, you children, understand this aright. A preacher of the gospel is not a priest. It is wrong to call any minister a priest. It is completely unscriptural. In the Old Testament, there were many priests. Under the gospel there is just one great High Priest, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And the New Testament also speaks of every believer, every sinner saved by grace, being a priest. This was one of the glorious doctrines of the Reformation, the priesthood of all

believers, signifying simply this: that now a sinner in Christ has the sacred privilege of going directly to God.

“But Christ being come an High Priest.” We do need a mediator to stand between our guilty souls and a holy God, a mediator whereby we might draw near, a mediator through whom we might be accepted. That is the great work of a priest and that is our greatest need as sinners. If there had never been any sin, there would never have been any need for a priesthood. I said at the beginning that these two beautiful verses seem to be a compendium of divinity. They bring in one doctrine after another doctrine. You might notice that one doctrine is not mentioned, that is the doctrine of the Fall, of man’s sin, man’s lost, ruined condition. Yet really, that is the dark, black background to these beautiful verses. If it had not been for our sin, our guilt, there would not be any need for these beautiful things. These things are an answer to man’s need as a lost, ruined, guilty sinner.

“But Christ being come an High Priest.” If you and I are born again of the Spirit of God, if we realise our sinful, lost condition, then we need a mediator, one to stand between. Job in his great distress said, “Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both,” one who could bring together a holy God and a guilty sinner. “But Christ being come an High Priest.” O but it is that solemn point under the teaching of the Holy Spirit to realise your sin, your guilt in the sight of a holy God.

“Since I can hardly, therefore, bear
What in myself I see;
How vile and black must I appear,
Most holy God, to Thee!”

That is the place where you and I must be brought. “My best is stained and dyed with sin; my all is nothing worth.” O but then to see that blessed Mediator, the eternal Son of God, provided in love by the Father in the covenant of grace, a Mediator for His people! O but it is this: to feel your need of a mediator. How can I draw nigh to a holy God, I who am sinful, unworthy, guilty? Yet I must draw nigh or perish. I need His help. I need Him to answer my prayers. I need forgiveness. I need mercy. I must draw near, but how can I draw near? “But Christ being come an High Priest.” May some of you sweetly feel it this morning:

“But since my Saviour stands between,
In garments dyed in blood,
'Tis He, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God.”

This is the gospel as I understand it.

“But Christ being come an High Priest.” So this priest as a mediator had two things to do. One was to offer a sacrifice and the other was to intercede for the people for whom he offered the sacrifice. And so the apostle beautifully opens up here how the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ fulfilled everything which was prefigured, fulfilled all those shadows of good things to come, brought the substance, brought the reality. And here you have those two great aspects of the everlasting priesthood, that He offered the sacrifice, His own blood, and by the sacrifice He obtained eternal redemption. And then just as the high priest entered into the most holy place, so He entered heaven. “He entered in once into the holy place.” “For 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.” So really this is the sacred theme today, the work of Christ as a great and glorious High Priest and those two sacred aspects: the laying down His life a sacrifice, and then the entering into heaven, there for ever to intercede.

“But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.” Now this tabernacle is the sacred humanity of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is the “true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” Those priests in the old dispensation had the tabernacle wherein their work was performed. And so Christ had His tabernacle and that is His pure, spotless, sacred humanity. It is quite customary in the Word of God to speak of a body as a tabernacle. We just think of the Apostle Paul: “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved,” speaking of his body, “we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” And those who understand the Greek tell us that that well-known Scripture, “The Word was made flesh, and *dwelt* among us,” in the original Greek reads, “The Word was made flesh and *tabernacled* among us.” Well then, here we have the Son of God in our nature, yet without sin, dwelling in this

tabernacle that He might perform His work as a great and glorious High Priest.

“But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.” Now we just pause here for a moment. I do not want you just to think of these things as doctrines. They are doctrines, beautiful doctrines, but I want you always to think of the wonderful love of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that He should ever become “a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” that ever He should tabernacle here below, and the reason for it. “Love to sinners fills His heart, and makes Him choose to die.” “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” Now there is the doctrine and there is the fact, but never forget that wonderful love that flows through it all, revealed in the coming of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into this world, and then to see that love in His death.

“Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.” Now in trying to speak to you on this very sacred subject today – and I hope it might be made precious to your souls and especially that the Lord Jesus Himself might be made attractive, made precious to your souls – I want to speak of the two things: the sacrifice and the intercession; that is, the death of Christ and His resurrection and ascension and glorification, His all-prevailing intercession. So this morning there will just be time for me to speak on the sacrifice, and then this evening, if helped, I should like to speak to you about His glorious resurrection and ascension as He entered into heaven, there for ever to intercede, and of all those good things to come which are brought to us as lost, ruined, guilty sinners through the work of Christ, this great High Priest.

Well then, the wonderful sacrifice. It was burned into the hearts of Israel that without the shedding of blood there could be no remission, that for life there must be death. Every Israelite knew of how Isaac lay bound on the altar but the lamb was slain in the place of Isaac – substitution. The lamb slain, Isaac set free. He instead of me. “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust.” I believe that was when Abraham rejoiced to see Christ’s day and he saw it and was glad. So every

Israelite knew of life through death, Isaac and Abraham and the lamb, substitution. And every Israelite knew of the solemn passover. Why, they remembered it every year by divine commandment. The destroying angel was going to pass through the land, bringing death, the death of the firstborn, but Israel had to realise that they were no more worthy and innocent than the Egyptians. And yet, “Ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.” The difference was this: there was the lamb, and how precious that lamb was! Where the lamb was, there was life; where there was no lamb, there was death. But that lamb had to be taken without blemish, without spot. The lamb had to be taken; the blood had to be shed. There was death in every house. Every Israelite knew this. They remembered it every year. It was either the death of the firstborn or the death of the lamb in the place of the firstborn – substitution. Every Israelite knew this. But the blood had to be applied to the lintels and door posts of the house, speaking of a personal interest in the blood of the lamb. And Israel sheltered under that blood. How precious the blood of the lamb was to an Israelite sheltering beneath it, and they were safe, but there was not safety anywhere else but under the blood of the lamb. Every Israelite knew these things.

Then there was the ceremonial law, the daily sacrifices, the sin offering, the burnt offering. There was that offering where an Israelite under a sense of guilt could bring a lamb and see it slain and while he saw it die he had to put his hand on its head. He identified with it. It was the innocent suffering for the guilty. He deserved to die; he was guilty; but the innocent lamb suffered in his place. He confessed his sin and rested his hope on that dying lamb. And God said, “It shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” Every Israelite knew this. They knew about the great day of atonement. The two goats were taken, one for the people, one for the Lord; one slain, its body carried right out of the camp and there burnt, its blood brought into the holy of holies by the high priest. The other goat, Israel’s sins were ceremonially laid on that goat and that goat led into the wilderness, the scapegoat, symbolising the complete removing of sin. Every Israelite knew these things.

“But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come.” The Levitical sacrifices were only the shadows. These were just types foreshadowing these good things to come. Now Christ came, not “by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood.” There is something

unspeakably solemn in this: “His own blood.” “He bought our souls from death and hell; the price, His own heart’s blood.” O this precious blood was shed at Calvary when He suffered in the place of His people, when “He took the dying traitor’s place, and suffered in his stead,” when all the sins of all His people were laid on Him. He bore them, He bore them away, when He bore divine wrath, bore the curse in the place of His people that they might never bear it. “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood.” O how precious the blood of Christ! Have you ever said, “I can see nothing between my guilty soul and a deserved hell but the blood of Christ”? Have you ever come there? O but to see the blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin, the blood of Christ which makes atonement. It speaks of His sacred life poured out in death. The Godhead could not bleed, but He who did bleed and die is true Almighty God. That is what gives it all its efficacy. And it is cleansing blood, that fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. It satisfied divine justice. It is the sacrifice, the one sacrifice for sin. “By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” There were innumerable sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament. They could never put away sin. They could only remind Israel of two things: the enormity of sin, that there had to be these sacrifices each year, yet none could put away sin; and secondly that One should come, the Son of God, who would put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

“But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come,” not “by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood.” The apostle opens it up very beautifully. “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh” – now this is it – “*how much more* shall the blood of Christ ... purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

“Come, then, repenting sinner, come;
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death.”

“His own blood.” And the apostle adds this: “Having obtained eternal redemption for us.” When the Lord Jesus with a loud voice cried on the cross, “It is finished,” He had obtained eternal redemption for us, that is, for all for whom He stood, for all His people. It was not an

indefinite, a general redemption, as much for Cain as Abel, as much for Judas Iscariot as Peter. It is a redemption that redeems. It is a salvation that saves. And that redemption of Christ secured the everlasting salvation of all for whom He died. "Having obtained eternal redemption for us." Not to make a possibility of it; not just to open up a way for it. "Having *obtained* eternal redemption for us."

You see, this word *redemption* is an interesting word. Its means *to set free by the payment of a price*. There are always those two things in redemption. Israel in Egypt, they were a redeemed people. The blood was shed, the lamb was slain, but they were not left in Egypt. They were brought out with a mighty hand, an outstretched arm. They were set free by the payment of a price. I have often given this very simple illustration. I will repeat it for our children this morning. In a far-off country there was a cage and it was full of beautiful birds. They were for sale and the price was exceedingly high. Just to pay for one was a tremendous price. There were all these beautiful birds cramped up in this cage. Lots of people were watching them admiringly. They were most beautiful birds. They were for sale. No-one really could afford to buy them. A stranger came, quite an influential stranger, and enquired how much they would cost. He said, "I will pay for the lot." It was a vast sum, but he paid the whole of that price and then to the astonishment of all who were watching, he opened the cage and let all of the beautiful birds fly away. He said, "I was once in prison. I could not bear to see those little birds cramped up in that cage." That is redemption, to be set free by the payment of a price. He did not go and attack the owners. He did not make a hole in the cage. He paid the price. They belonged to him. They were legally his to set free. That is redemption. "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine."

So you see, one beautiful name of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the *Redeemer*. For years I have found such a sweet attraction just in that very name. I believe I tried to preach from that word here many years ago: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer." I remember one of you telling me in those days how your very heart and soul laid hold on that word, "My Redeemer." It is a lovely word. Job in all his sorrows: "I know that my Redeemer liveth." We sometimes sing, "Thou dear Redeemer, dying Lamb, we love to hear of Thee." Well, may the dear Redeemer be

made attractive to us and may there be a sweet attraction in that eternal redemption He obtained. It is for ever and ever. And may the great point with you and me this morning be this: as lost, ruined, guilty sinners to see our all in Christ, this great Redeemer, this great and glorious High Priest. The apostle says, “Ye are complete in Him” – completely lost in ourselves, completely ruined in ourselves, completely guilty in ourselves, but completely redeemed, completely saved in Christ, this great Redeemer, this great High Priest. “Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” These are the things which really matter, the only things which really matter.

“But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

(If the Lord will, the evening sermon on the same text will be published next month.)