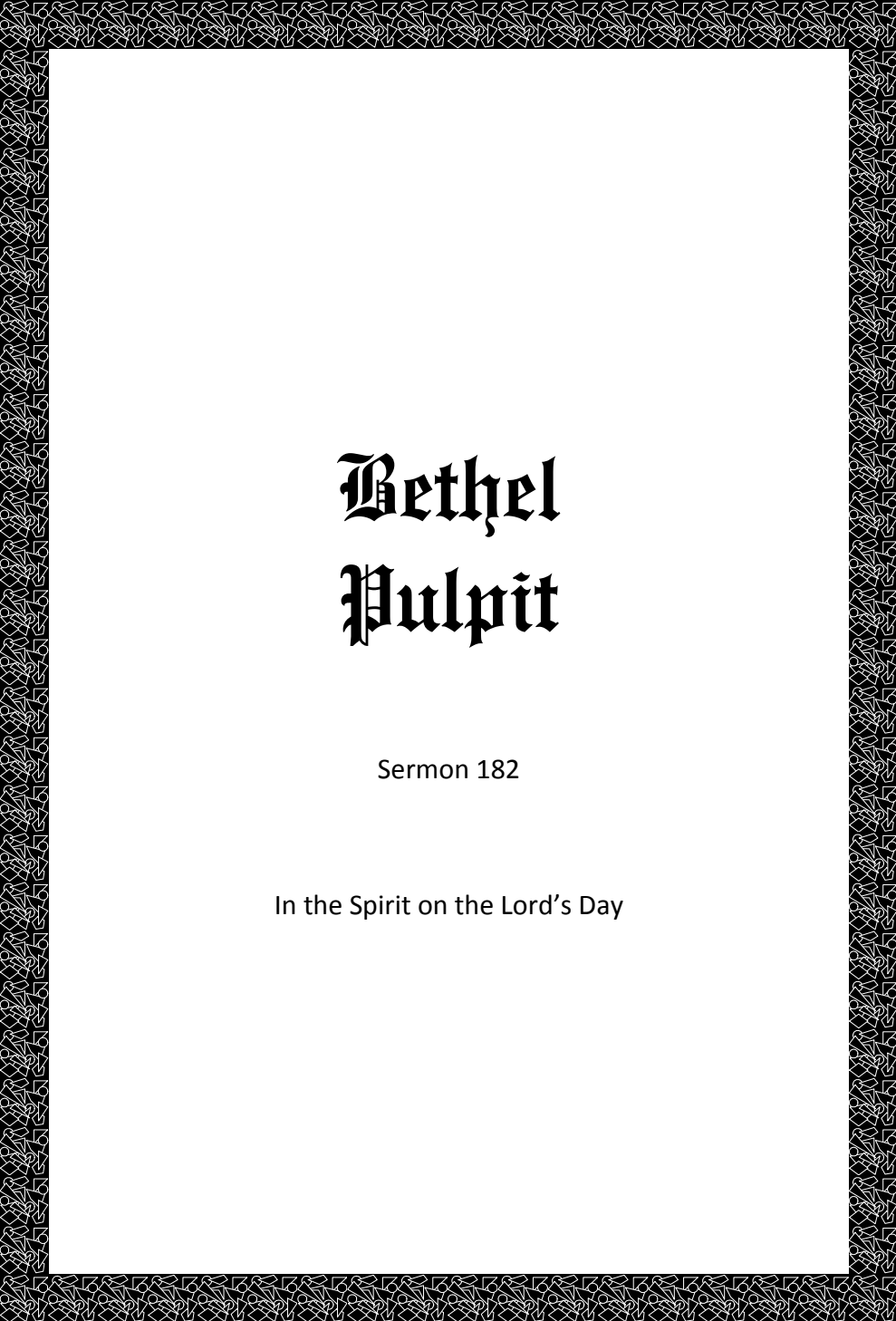




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 182

In the Spirit on the Lord's Day

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 7th May, 2000**

Text: *"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Revelation 1. 10).*

The Apostle John was now a very aged man. Over sixty years had rolled away since the time when as a young disciple he leaned on Jesus' breast. He was now the only survivor of the disciples. All the others had met a martyr's death. And now as an aged man he was in exile for the truth's sake on the little, rocky island of Patmos. O what changes had come in the life of that dear, godly man, that faithful servant and minister of the Lord Jesus Christ! And none of us know what things may take place in our lives, what changes there might be, what trials, what sorrows, where our last days will be spent.

With John it was a lonely pathway. He was separated from the people of God. He was away from all his loved friends. He was removed from the church where he was pastor. Here he was an exile for the truth's sake on the isle of Patmos, and it was the Lord's day. I suppose John must have had many thoughts. Perhaps some of them were thoughts like this: Why has all this happened to me? I never thought that my last days would be like this. I never thought they would be spent here. I hoped to live and die and be buried amongst the Lord's people whom I love, and why all this? O the change in John's life between his early days, when he was particularly described as "the disciple whom Jesus loved ... which also leaned on His breast," and his old age. And now those happy days had gone, and gone for ever, and it was only a memory. It was a long, long time ago and it was a distant memory.

But now it was the Lord's day. Beloved friends, John never had a more blessed Lord's day in all his life than when he was found "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." He never had a more blessed Lord's day even when the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was here on earth and John was with Him. And perhaps some of you have come in your old age into things that you never expected, or it may be the opposite: "The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me." Perhaps at times you feel the infirmity of old age. Perhaps you feel weakness. Perhaps you feel loneliness, and perhaps especially you think of those far-off days when the Lord blessed

you. It may be the Lord will bless you before the end even more abundantly than He did before, as He did with John. But not just aged people: some of you younger ones, you have been brought into circumstances and trials and fires and afflictions you never envisaged, you never expected. Well, you are not forgotten of your God. John was not forgotten of his God. Why the Lord calls some of His people to walk in these strange paths we do not know. “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.” But we do believe that everything is in the Lord’s hand; He is in control; nothing comes by chance; all things work together for good. Well, John was not forgotten of his God and neither are you. May you know these precious visits of His love. May you know the blessing of the Lord which maketh rich and may there still be some good days, days of the Son of man.

So John on this Lord’s day was found in the Spirit, and O what a happy, favoured day it was! Now very, very simply on these few words, I would first like to say a few things on the Lord’s day, and then what it is to be in the Spirit, and finally the gracious effect of it.

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” Of course by the Lord’s day, we mean what nowadays we call Sunday. To the early apostles, it was the day of the resurrection; it was the Christian Sabbath which replaced the old Sabbath – not what some people call the Jewish Sabbath, as if it was only part of the Mosaic law. The Sabbath was a creation ordinance, as was marriage. Long before Moses, long before the giving of the law, long before Sinai, the Sabbath was given, and it was given for the good and for the blessing of mankind. It has been evident in history that wherever a nation even outwardly has honoured the Lord’s day, then that nation has been blessed. There was a time in France about the time of the French Revolution, just afterwards, when not only did they abolish the Sabbath day but they made a week of ten days, nine working days and then one day of rest. It ended in confusion. They had to go back to God’s appointment, that seven-day week and that break after six days.

Now the Lord’s day is God’s kind, gracious, loving gift, not just to His people, but to the whole of mankind. It is very, very sad that in these latter days the Lord’s day is so terribly desecrated. But the sad thing is this: that the Lord’s people do not value the Lord’s day as they should. Even in our chapels and in our congregations there is that encroachment. The Lord’s day is not kept with such tenderness and such care as it was in

former days. Not just in a legal sense, not just to fear damnation, but the Lord's day is not kept as once it was kept. And do not forget, it is the whole of the Lord's day that has to be sanctified. I am not saying whether it was right or wrong, but just stating it as a fact, that I was brought up like this: "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand." Not part of a day, not half of a day, not two-thirds of a day: morning, afternoon and evening. Now from a child that was how I was brought up, with a service in the morning and in the afternoon and then another gathering for prayer in the evening. Now I am not making any comment whether that was right or wrong, only this, that it is the whole of the Lord's day, not just an hour-and-a-half when you come to chapel and another hour-and-a-half when you come to chapel. It is the whole of the Lord's day that has to be sanctified. But the Lord gave it to all mankind as a day of rest.

But then there is a spiritual keeping of the Lord's day as we have it in the Epistle to the Hebrews, knowing something of that rest in Christ which remains for the people of God. And O that spiritual keeping of the Sabbath! "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" I believe that one good mark of grace at the beginning is this: that for the first time you begin to love the Lord's day and you begin to anticipate it, you begin to look forward to it. I believe that is a good mark of grace, because there is a change, there is a difference. You remember once you woke up on the Lord's day morning and that sadness and disappointment came over your spirit. It was chapel all day, and all those things you wanted to do, the places you wanted to go, the people you wanted to meet, and you could not do it and it was irksome and you were waiting, and you were glad when the Sabbath had ended, and you were anticipating Monday morning. Now did there come a change so that you were looking forward to the Lord's day and when you woke up, "Welcome, sweet day of rest, that saw the Lord arise," and at the end of the day, O you felt so sad, so sorrowful? I think of those early days spiritually when I could hardly wait for the Sabbath to come. As a child, you wait for your birthday eagerly, you wait to go on holiday eagerly, but nothing like the eagerness with which an awakened soul longs for the Lord's day to come. I remember those times of sorrow looking back in the chapel when I left on the Lord's day evening and thinking of that time "when congregations ne'er break up and Sabbaths have no end." O but that difference! So just these few, I

suppose they are very rambling comments on the Lord's day, this blessed day, the day of the resurrection, the day that Christ has set apart.

Now then John says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." I realise, beloved friends, that in the case of John it was something very special. In that sense we can never emulate John. He was going to be used by divine inspiration to write this sacred book. He was going to be the Lord's messenger. There was going to be this wonderful revelation to him. In a sense, when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day it was almost as if he was in a trance or a vision. What is it for us to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day? It is a capital S, in the Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit. What is it to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day? Really it is this: for the Holy Spirit to take possession of us, so that we are not in our own spirit, not in a carnal spirit, not in a bad spirit, not in an unconcerned spirit. O but to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day! I want to ask you a very solemn, searching question: how long is it since you were in the Spirit on the Lord's day? This year, or is it longer than that? O when you knew the difference, when you came to chapel and there was something moving, something acting, something working in your heart. To be in the Spirit on the Lord's day.

Now there is a difference. We have our services; we have our order; we have our hymns, our reading, our prayer, our preaching, our hearing, but it is a solemn thing if we are never in the Spirit, if it is dead, empty formality, a name that liveth and yet we are dead. Someone commented recently that with some churches, if the Holy Spirit was completely withdrawn from them, it would not make the slightest difference. Their services and preaching would go on exactly the same as before, and they would not know any difference. Would we, would I, if the Spirit was withdrawn? But is the Spirit of God still amongst us? Do we have to pray, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us"? "In vain we meet to sing and pray, if Christ His influence withhold."

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Now there is only one way that you and I can ever be *in* the Spirit, and that is if the Lord in love and mercy *puts* us in the Spirit, because we cannot put ourselves in the Spirit. We have no power over the Spirit. O but may we know the difference! Do you just come? Do you just go? The old preachers used to say, "like a door on its hinges." It swings backwards and forwards, forwards and backwards. It does not know anything. It does not feel anything. It does not hear anything. It just swings backwards and forwards. May it be our

prayer this evening and whenever the Sabbath day comes that we might be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. If we are in the Spirit on the Lord's day, we shall be alive. We shall be awakened to the things of God. As they used to say, a congregation with its necks on the stretch. "In the Spirit." "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." Is there any word from the Lord of hosts for me? There will be that eagerness and that prayer and that anticipation. "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed!" "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people." To be in the Spirit. You will have a soft heart. Always beware of hardness in the things of God. Watch that when you are becoming hard. But if you are in the Spirit on the Lord's day, it will be a soft heart. It will be a tender heart. It will be affected by the Word. It will be a humble heart. It will be tender in the fear of God. It will be tender in repentance. It will be tender in love to Christ. Now that is what it is to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day.

There will be worship. Worship is better experienced than described. There is everything in it really, a sense of reverence and awe and godly fear and humility and love, something moving and something flowing. Like that precious perfume under the ceremonial law made by the art of an apothecary. There were all kinds of different ingredients skilfully blended together. There will be that when you worship. We meet for the solemn, sacred worship of God – that is the purpose of the Lord's day – but how often, or is it how seldom, do we *really* worship? "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." When you come to chapel it will not always be a clear blessing; it will not always be a clear word; it will not always be a clear deliverance; but value those times when you feel just a little spirit of worship. "Go worship at Immanuel's feet." Now as a congregation may we not be strangers to this. May we pray for it. May we know it. May we experience it. It will be for our real, lasting, eternal good. It will be for the honour and glory of the Lord's name. There is no honour and glory to God if it is empty worship, formal worship, dead worship, especially if it is false worship. O but to be found in the Spirit on the Lord's day! This favoured spot, this favoured experience, this blessing. Now as a congregation may we seek it, may we pray for it, may we not be satisfied without it: to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day.

And then, beloved friends, there will be an effect. What was the effect? What happened with John when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day? Well first of all, he had a sight of Christ, and secondly he heard His

voice, and those are the two great blessings that we seek and for which we long: to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day, to see the Saviour and to hear His voice. Now when we talk about seeing the Saviour, we do not mean anything visionary or fanciful or a dream. We mean that view by faith, faith's apprehension of Him, not with our mortal eyes; to see Him in the Word, to see Him in the gospel. This is it: "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty." To have a little glimpse as through a glass darkly, to have a little glimpse as He comes leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills, to show Himself through the lattice. I realise with John it was something a little bit different, something special. It was more in the way of a vision, but this was for a special purpose, that he might receive that revelation from heaven, that he might communicate it to the churches, that he might be inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, that he might record it as part of holy writ. You and I can never be like that. We can never be inspired like the apostles because we are not writing part of holy Scripture, but it is still the same Holy Spirit and He blesses with faith and when in the Spirit and when faith is given and when faith is made strong, there is that view of Christ in all His glory and beauty and suitability.

John said, "I saw ... one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle." He recognised Him. It must in a way have been a solemn shock when he looked round and saw the Lord Jesus whom he had seen crucified, seen risen, seen ascending to heaven. And he recognised Him at once, but there was a difference. It was the awe and the majesty and the glory. This was Christ exalted. This was Christ glorified. John had seen Him, known Him, loved Him in the days of His flesh, the days of His humiliation. O but the majesty and glory that John now saw! O this appearance of majesty and glory, this garment, this golden girdle, whether the glorious garments of a king, Zion's exalted God and King, or the garment of a great high priest, or whether it was both, as He was seen in the Book of Zechariah. A Priest upon a throne, a royal Priest, a priestly King. But John saw Him in all His glory and all His beauty, and it was an awe-inspiring sight. John used to lean on Jesus' breast familiarly. He did not now. He fell down at His feet as dead.

What was the reason for this appearance, the reason for this appearance in such glory and awe and majesty? Well, very, very simply, this was about the year 96 A.D. and the church of God was suffering the most dreadful, the most awful, the most excruciating persecution under the

Emperor Diocletian. Also it seemed that the powers of hell were let loose against the truth and it seems they were going to triumph. The point is this: John sees this glorious Christ, and the great point of the Revelation is that this glorious Christ is on the throne, this glorious Christ is almighty, this glorious Christ is in control. And if there is going to be a conflict between Christ and Satan, between the church and the world, it is going to be Christ victorious, the church victorious, because Christ, the great Head of the church, is almighty and He is in complete control; He is on the throne. Now that is why John had this view of Him in all His glory.

And of course it is needed just as much for us today in this wicked, wicked world. Since the beginning of this millennium it seems as if things go from bad to worse, and we wonder whatever is going to happen. What about the people of God? What about the church? What about our children? What about our grandchildren? But O to view this glorious Christ. He is on the throne, He is in control, and nothing can ever take place apart from His divine permission. “All must come, and last, and end, as shall please my heavenly Friend.”

O but what a view, Christ exalted in all His glory, with this glorious garment, this golden girdle. “His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.” In the Song of Solomon, the church saw Him and His locks were “bushy, and black as a raven” – Christ in all the glory of His eternal youth. But here John sees Him as the Ancient of days. “His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire.” Those penetrating eyes that see the evil and the good, that search the churches, search our hearts, that see all the evil projected against the church of God. In the Song of Solomon, He has dove’s eyes, so tender and gentle and loving and adoring and gracious. But this is Christ in all His glory. “His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.” Well, once they did burn in a furnace when He trod the winepress of the wrath of God and when He suffered, bled and died. But now His feet like unto fine brass to crush in pieces all His enemies, all His foes and the church’s enemies, the church’s foes. “And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and His voice as the sound of many waters.” John could hear the roaring waters of the Adriatic Sea, but this was something stronger, more powerful, the voice which spoke in creation. “He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” This almighty voice. “Out of His mouth went a sharp twoedged sword” – to destroy His enemies, to convict

sinners of their sin. “And His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.” “Behold the glories of the Lamb, amidst His Father’s throne.” Christ exalted, Christ glorified.

But you see, there was one thing that touched John’s heart. It was this: that in His right hand He was holding the seven stars, and John was told that these seven stars represented the ministers of the gospel, the pastors of the churches. There is that revelation that to the end of time the pastors of the churches are in the right hand of Christ. What a comfort that was to John in his loneliness and in his exile, that he was still held secure in the hands of Christ! Well, that was John in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and what he saw. May we too from time to time in the sanctuary, in worship, in our homes, in the preaching, be blessed with faith, strong faith to have a glimpse of this glorious, once crucified, now risen and exalted Saviour, whether it be in all His majesty and awe and glory or whether it be in all His tenderness and love and suitability and ability to save even to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. But you know that promise does stand and may it be fulfilled, especially to those of you who come to the sanctuary praying, “We would see Jesus”: “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.”

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” Now the second effect was this: he *heard* His voice. Now that is it. When you come to chapel if it is the Lord’s day, you want to be in the Spirit. You want to have a glimpse by faith of Christ, but you want to hear His voice. You want to hear Him speaking to you. “He laid His right hand upon me,” that right hand of authority, that right hand of divine favour. “He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not.” That is what some of you long to hear from this glorious Christ. “Fear not; I am the first and the last.” There at the beginning of time, there at the end of time, beginning the work of grace in your heart, carrying it on, completing it; in control. “I am He that liveth, and was dead.”

“Faith views Him dead upon the tree;
Then buried in the grave;
And waits around the tomb to see
Him rise with power to save.”

O to hear the Lord Jesus here at Bethel on the Lord’s day saying to you and me, “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore.” And to hear Him saying, “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

“Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” That is, the Lord has authority, complete authority over hell and death. He has the keys. And you see that day comes, it is the day appointed, when you have to leave this world. It is the day of your death. When that day comes, this glorious Christ will turn the key in the door and bid you enter, and there will be no delay, no remaining, even if you are like the great Queen Elizabeth who said, “I would give the whole of my kingdom for another day on earth.” But the door was open and she had to enter. “I ... have the keys of hell and of death.” Hell is a dreadful place. May none of us here this evening come there, to hear that dreadful word, “Depart.” “Prevent, prevent it by Thy grace.” Christ has the keys of hell and of death. When He died, He turned the key in the door which leads to hell and locked that door for ever for all His people; and sin, Satan, death and the world can never open that door to hell for one of the Lord’s people, one of His redeemed.

O to be found in the Spirit on the Lord’s day! Not dry and hard and dead and formal, but in the Spirit, to see the Saviour’s face, to hear His gracious voice.

There is just one other thing. John saw that this glorious Christ was walking amidst the candlesticks and he was told that the candlesticks represented the churches of truth in the earth. O what a wonderful thing that Christ is present with His people, that Christ is in the midst, that He still says, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there *am* I in the midst”! That the word still stands, “Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.” That it is still true, “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty.” May we see it by faith, may we realise it, may we prove it, and when we are in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, may we feel it. May there be that blessed anticipation of heaven where to all eternity this glorious Christ appears in the midst of saints and angels and blesses them to everlasting days. There He appears a Lamb as it had been slain, the Lamb exalted, and then the everlasting song, “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.”