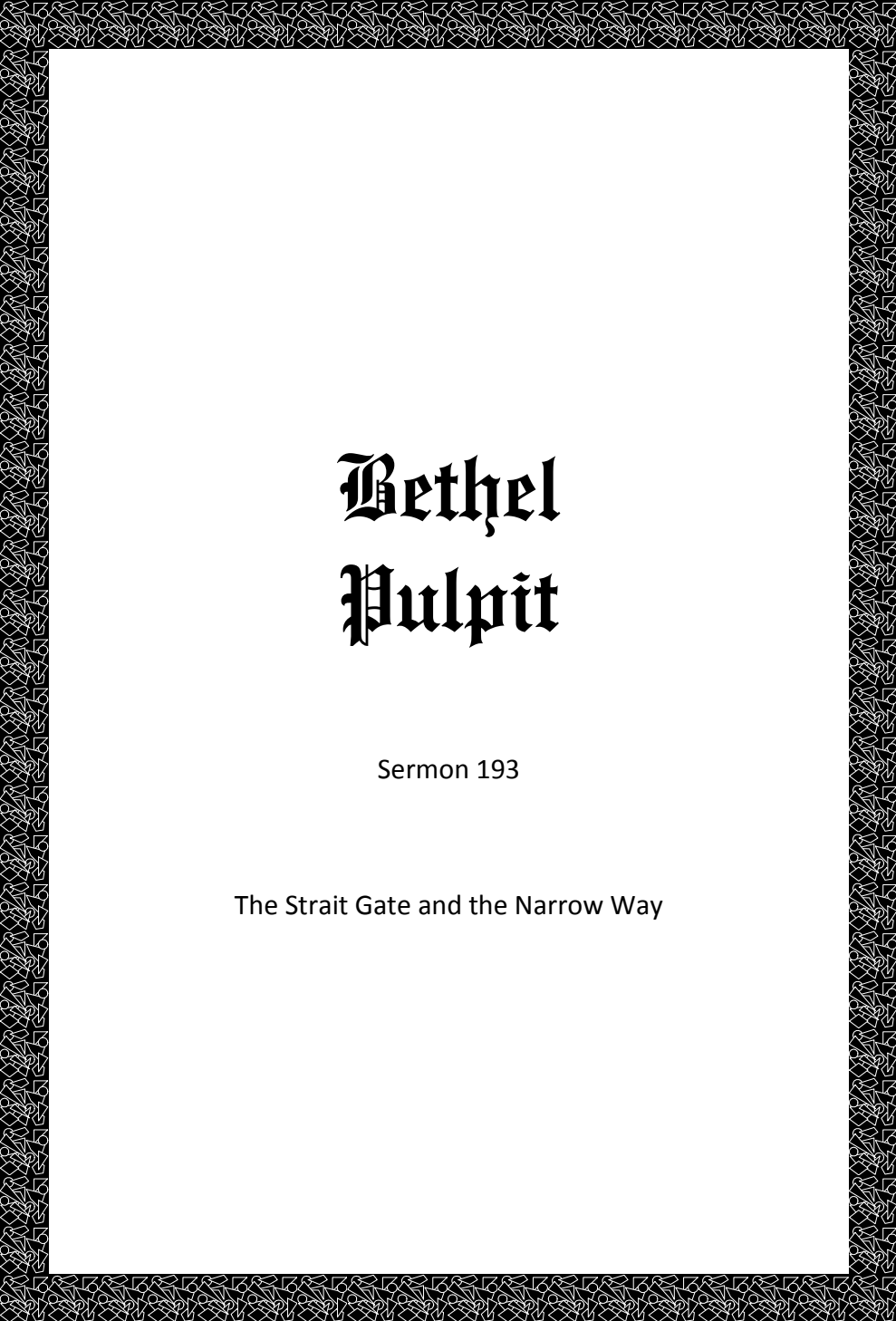




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 193

The Strait Gate and the Narrow Way

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 17th June, 2001**

Text: *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt 7. 13, 14).*

People have been trying for two thousand years to prove the Lord Jesus wrong, trying to contradict the Lord Jesus. In Christianity generally in this country, throughout the earth, there has been a continual attempt to contradict the Lord Jesus. But this word still stands, and do not forget it was the Lord Jesus who said it, the incarnate Son of God, concerning the way that leads to heaven: *“Few there be that find it.”* Now people do not like that today, but it was the Lord Jesus who said it, and it will always be true. There will be multitudes walking in the way that leads to destruction. There will be few, a little “remnant according to the election of grace,” walking in the narrow way which leads to heaven. And this is enough to make us tremble, that out of the multitudes of this world there are only a few who are walking in this new and living way which leads to heaven.

Really my thoughts this week have all been bound up with our one-hundred-and-twenty-fifth anniversary and all the blessings and mercies that surround us, and last week we had a packed chapel. It is a wonderful thing these days to see a full chapel, a packed chapel. But it would be a terrible thing if we as a congregation with our full chapel are walking in this broad way which leads to destruction – a religious way, a way that is sound in the truth, but never entering in at the strait gate. Because never forget, *“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man.”* That is not the way of wickedness. That is not the way of open sin. It is a religious way, and it seems right to a man, *“but the end thereof are the ways of death.”* *“Few there be that find it,”* the way of life. I do not think we are really solemn enough, serious enough in our religion. We live in a dying world. Eternity is before us. Evil abounds on every hand. How long this world will go on, we do not know, and the Lord Jesus declares that in all ages there are only a few people right and the great majority are wrong. These things should make us tremble, and they should make us stop and think, and they

certainly should deliver us from the easy religion that abounds on every hand, even in our chapels, this take-it-for granted religion.

Now, “Few there be that find it.” I will tell you how a word like this affects me. Well, if there are only a few in the way to heaven, may I be one of them. If there are only a few who can find that way, may I be one of those who find it. Like the man who said, “Lord, if there is only one person going to heaven in this town in which I live, let me be that man.” How do these things affect you, and how do they affect me? Do they put an urgency in your prayer and your religion?

“Let *me* among Thy saints be found
Whene’er the archangel’s trump shall sound,
To see Thy smiling face.”

We do not want to be like Balaam. “Let me die the death of the righteous,” and let me go to heaven at last – but you do not want to walk in the narrow way which leads to heaven. Let us be honest this morning. We all want to get to heaven at last. How many of us are willing, made willing in the day of God’s power, to walk in that narrow way which leads unto life, for “few there be that find it”?

I would just say a word to our children at school and our young people. No doubt, as when I was at school, sometimes you get disturbed and distressed. You feel perhaps to be the odd one. You feel like a speckled bird. You stand out. You are different. Perhaps there will be a little whisper in your heart: Surely these other people cannot all be wrong; some are nice people. We have this clearly throughout Scripture, that the majority are not always right. Now look at the time of the Flood. There was this man Noah. He was standing alone, and he was mocked at; he was despised; he was scorned; he was laughed at. Was this man out of his mind? Noah, do you think you are right and the whole human race wrong? “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” There was that little ark and there were eight human souls in it.

“Few there be that find it.” Have you heard the name Athanasius? There came a time in the history of the Christian church when the truth concerning Christ being true almighty God was denied by almost the whole of the professing church of God, impossible as it seems, and God

raised up Athanasius and he was standing alone. Do you know what he said? He said, “Then it must be Athanasius against the whole world and the whole world against Athanasius.” That man in his day and generation earnestly contended for the Person of Christ as the Son of God in His divine nature, and under the blessing of Almighty God he won the day and he carried almost the whole of the professing church of God with him.

“Few there be that find it.” Well then, if you and I want to be found in this way which leads to heaven, of which we are told, “Few there be that find it,” then we must enter through the gate. This is given as an encouragement. It is given as a commandment. “Enter ye in at the strait gate.” Now we are encouraged, if we are interested in reaching heaven, if we are concerned about our sins and our souls and eternity, if we want to reach heaven at last, if we want to be found in the way which leads to eternal life – there is just one entry to it. There is a gate, and you cannot get into the way unless you go through that gate. Remember how John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim’s Progress* speaks. As he went along, he saw two men come tumbling over the wall. He said that they got over somehow, but they never came through the gate, and they never reached the Celestial City at last. Now we do not want a religion where we come tumbling over the wall. “Enter ye” – and that is you personally, ye, – “Enter ye in at the strait gate.” There is no reaching heaven and there is no entering that way to heaven unless you and I come through the strait gate. To be born again of the Holy Spirit of God, to be blessed with saving faith and repentance, that is the only way you and I can ever enter into the strait gate. There is not any other way.

Now, “Ye *must* be born again.” It is something like this: a person coming home late at night, and there is not any street lighting; that person struggling to find the keyhole to put the key in, and perhaps spending five or ten minutes to find it. Then perhaps someone has come along and struck a match, or brought a torch, and then it is so easy. Blind eyes opened, heavenly light shining in our hearts to show us our need, to show us the necessity of entering in that narrow way which leads to heaven, and divine light shining on the strait gate. Now you will never enter in that strait gate by your own efforts or your own ability. You will only enter the strait gate as the Holy Spirit illuminates your heart. “Ye must be born again.” And then that true repentance, that sorrow for sin, that turning from the world, that faith in Jesus, that venturing on Him, that looking to

Jesus only. That is the only way you will ever enter in through the strait gate.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate.” I want to make one point very clear, perhaps a simple point, but strangely most people misunderstand it. This word *strait* is not a word we normally use. It is not the word *straight*. It does not have a *g* and an *h* in it. It does not mean the opposite of crooked. It is an old-fashioned word meaning very small and very tight. We still have it in “a straitjacket,” and things like that. This is not speaking of strait as being the opposite of crooked. It is, “Enter ye in at the strait gate.” It is small and it is tight. You have to stoop down to go in. It is low. You have to stoop down. It is a way of humility. You have to be brought down. You have to be brought low. You cannot go in with your carnal pride and your self-satisfaction and everything of the flesh. Pride and self must be brought right down, because the strait gate is low. You have to stoop to go in.

If you ever visit Bethlehem and go to the famous Church of the Nativity, the unusual feature of it is that the door, the main door as you go in, is exceedingly low and exceedingly small. They give an explanation for it, that hundreds of years ago with some of those famous churches out in the East, people would just go riding through the door on horseback without getting off their horse. So they made this door very low so that nobody could ever go in on horseback. They had to dismount and leave their horse outside. That is just a faint picture of this strait gate. You have to leave a lot outside. “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.” It is a strait gate. Pride and self must be brought down. You have to stoop to go in. You have to be humble. You have to leave so much behind, so much outside. You have to leave the world outside. You have to leave the world behind. You have to leave your past life behind, and leave it behind for ever. You cannot bring the world. You cannot bring your own carnal pleasures. You cannot bring all those sinful delights. All those past pleasures, you have to leave them. You have to squeeze through that gate. You cannot get through bringing all these things with you.

Especially you have to leave your own righteousness behind. Why so few people can get in at the strait gate is because they have never learned to renounce their own righteousness. God demands a perfect righteousness, and His holy Word teaches us that “our best is stained and dyed with sin; our all is nothing worth.” Our very best, our own

righteousness is as filthy rags. Now we can never get through the strait gate if we bring our own righteousness, our own covenant of works righteousness with us. We have to renounce it and that is hard. It is one thing to renounce your sin; it is another thing to renounce your own righteousness. But it comes to this, and this is the only way any sinner ever entered in at the strait gate and any sinner ever will: “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling.” You cannot bring the world in. You cannot bring your creature righteousness. You have to go just as you are, as a sinner hoping only in Jesus. And then it is “come and welcome” as you enter in through the strait gate.

Now the Lord Jesus in another place puts it even stronger. He says, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” Beloved friends, you will never get to heaven *because* you strive to enter in, but you will never get to heaven *unless* you strive to enter in. Now this is strong: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” What do you make of that word (we do not talk of these things so much): “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force”? There is not much violent religion about today. I think some of us were a bit violent in our early days when we saw a never-ending eternity before us and were on the brink of eternity. We were made violent. “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” But, “Enter ye in at the strait gate,” leaving your creature righteousness behind, the world behind, a sinner hoping in Jesus.

“Just as I am without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd’st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.”

“Enter ye in at the strait gate.” “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” You remember when the Lord Jesus said, “Strive to enter in,” it was in answer to a question. They came to the Lord Jesus and they asked Him a question. They said, “Are there few that be saved?” And the Lord Jesus said, “Strive to enter in.” Now did He answer their question or did He not? They had this interesting question. Many people ask it. Are there going to be a lot saved or only a few saved? How many are going to be saved? Really, what the Lord Jesus said was: *What about you?* I think you will find that with so many of the questions people ask and questions in Holy Scripture. The Word of God never seeks to satisfy our curiosity. They came; they had this question; but the Lord Jesus said, *What about you?* It

does not matter if there are millions saved if you are not one of them. “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” Added to that He said, “For many ... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” That has tried many of God’s little ones. I think if you read it carefully in the context, the Lord Jesus is speaking of the last great day, when the work of grace, when the day of grace is ended, when the judgment comes and thousands of the wicked will strive to enter in then. Now that is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, “Many ... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Never was there a sinner who by God-given grace and repentance strove to enter in and was not able, but there will be a day when like the foolish virgins many shall knock and say, “Lord, Lord, open to us,” and He shall say, “I never knew you.”

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate.” It is easy to get through *that* gate. You do not have to leave *anything* behind, not a single thing. I wonder if the Lord Jesus was not just speaking of wickedness; He was speaking of religious people. “For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” But the point is, entering in through the strait gate as born of the Spirit of God, then you find yourself in the way which leads to heaven. And that is the great point. We want a religion which will take us to heaven at last, but there is only one way, and that one way is entering through the strait gate into this narrow way, but it ends in heaven. But have you got grace to be made willing to walk in this narrow way? Many people want religion, but they want to keep in the broad way, and sadly, solemnly, we live in a day in which for the most part people are trying to broaden the narrow way which Christ has appointed. Now the Lord Jesus will never make the way to heaven any wider, any broader. It is a narrow way, but it leads to life eternal; it leads to heaven; it ends in everlasting salvation. And we want to be found in it. Are you willing to be found in it? We want to be like Bunyan’s Christian when he was awakened. He had his fingers in his ears and ran shouting, “Life, life, eternal life!” Now we want to set out in this narrow way which leads to eternal life.

So brought through the strait gate, we have set out in this narrow way, and it is not an easy way. Sometimes it will be a rough way, and sometimes it will be a hard way, and many times it will be a mysterious way, but it is a right way, and it ends in heaven. “He led them forth by the

right way.” It was this narrow way which leads to life. It was not an easy way; it was not the way they would have chosen; but it was the *right* way and it ended in heaven. “He led them forth by the *right* way, that they might go to a city of habitation.” “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.”

“’Tis the right way, though hard and rough;
Mysterious, yet ’tis plain enough;
And when our faith is turned to sight,
We’ll know the ways of God were right.”

Now that is the Lord giving you “the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction ... and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.” Satan will tell you it is not the way and your carnal, unbelieving heart will tell you it is not the way, but, “This *is* the way, walk ye in it.”

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.” It is a way of complete separation from the world. The Lord has laid down this standard: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” There is not any room for love of the world in this narrow way which leads to eternal life. But though it is a narrow way to the people of God, it is a pleasant way. The world has only known one side. The people of God have known both sides. By nature they were walking in the broad road. Now they are walking in the narrow way. The world just knows the one side; the Lord’s dear people know both sides. “And, though the world may think it strange, they would not with the world exchange.”

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,” which leads to heaven at last. It is conformity with Christ. It is being crucified with Christ. It is walking in His suffering image. It is following the steps that He trod, and this: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” It is, “Few there be that find it.” There is not much of this religion about today.

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.” You remember that Moses on one occasion, as he was leading the people of God through the wilderness to Canaan, had to go through enemy ground, enemy territory which was belonging to those kings, Sihon and Og, and he sent a message and it was this. He said, “Let us pass, I

pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders." This is the narrow way which leads to life. It leads through this world of wickedness. We are *in* the world though not of it. The Lord Jesus said, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them *out of* the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Now let us pass through your land, but we will not turn to the right hand or the left. Have you a religion like that? We will not eat of thy vineyards or drink of thy wells. We are not going to turn aside from the narrow way after the pleasures of the world.

"Then let the worldling boast his joys,
We've meat to eat he knows not of;
We count his treasures worthless toys,
While we possess a Saviour's love."

Israel did not want the wells and the vineyards of Moab. Why, they had manna from heaven and water from the smitten rock. We will not turn to the right hand or the left. We will keep ourselves to the king's high way.

"The way the holy prophets went,
The road that leads from banishment,
The King's highway of holiness
I'll go, for all His paths are peace."

We will keep ourselves to the king's high way till we be passed thy borders.

"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." Really, beloved friends, the great point about the narrowness of the way is this. We talk about it being a hard way, a rough way, and we talk about the separation from the world and so on. The point about the narrowness of the way is this: that those who walk this way to heaven are under Christ's yoke. "Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price." Those who walk in this narrow way to heaven are under constraint, under commandment, under the precepts of the gospel. They cannot do what they wish. They cannot go where they want. They cannot act as they please. They have the rule of God to order all their ways, and that is the rule the world does not want and the professing church does not want, but the Lord's dear people gladly fall under it. Did the Lord die for me to

redeem me? Then gladly I take His yoke. Gladly I fall before His commandments, His precepts. Gladly I become His servant. Gladly I am bound by His holy Word. Then farewell to the world and its pleasures. This one walking in the narrow way which leads to life hears a voice from heaven, or shall we say a voice from Calvary, saying, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." So it is not a miserable way though it is a narrow way. It is a happy way. I do not want you children, you young people to think of it as a miserable way. It is a happy way. It is, "Solid joys and real pleasure, none but Zion's children know."

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." But O may I be among the few! It is a pilgrim way. We set out on pilgrimage. You will never reach heaven unless you journey heavenwards. It is a pilgrim way and the pilgrims are divinely led. "And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them." So there is going to be darkness. "I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." So there are going to be crooked things. "These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life." It is a dangerous way, and yet it is a safe way, because no pilgrim ever yet perished in that narrow way which leads to heaven. I know sometimes there is an experience like Christian and Hopeful when the way seemed very rough and they saw another that seemed pleasant and they went over the stile after it, but they were captured by Giant Despair and locked up in Doubting Castle. It was only when they found the key of promise they could return, and that with humiliation and repentance. They wandered, but they were brought back. It is the pilgrim way, and every single pilgrim is divinely kept at last.

"He'll lead them on fair Zion's road,
Though weary, weak, and faint;
For O! they ne'er shall lose their God,
Or God e'er lose a saint."

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.” Now the only way that it can be walked out is by prayer. All these pilgrims are praying people, and they have to pray their way along day by day, and hour by hour, and moment by moment – praying for mercy, praying for help, praying for strength, praying for endurance.

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.” But the great point about it all is this, and this is the vital point, this is the most important point of all: this narrow way which leads to heaven is a way of dependence on Christ. That is why Christ says, “*I am* the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.” That is why we sing, “Life with its path before thee lies; Christ is the way, and Christ the prize.” It is a way of dependence on Christ. “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” It is a living, newborn soul, loved with an everlasting love, redeemed by blood, now sweetly constrained to enter in through the strait gate, whose feet are in the narrow way which leads to life. Now, “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?” Why does she lean? Because she is so weak and helpless. Why does she lean? Because His arm is almighty.

“A weakling, more than strong;
Vents in His bosom all her woes,
And leaning moves along.”

Now that is the religion, the only religion that will bring a sinner to heaven.

“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life.” And this is the point, that it ends right, and it ends right to all eternity, and it ends in heaven, but that broad road, however much religion is in it, will only end in everlasting destruction. O but, “Few there be that find it.” This remnant. “One of this remnant I would be.” The world despises it. The world does not want it. The religious world despises it, does not want it, mocks at it. O but be it my sacred privilege to be found one of this remnant, one of these few that find it, one whose feet are led through the strait gate in the narrow way, one of those –

“My soul to Thee alone
I therefore now commend;

Since Jesus, having loved His own,
Will love them to the end.”

Now beloved friends, these are solemn, solemn things. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”