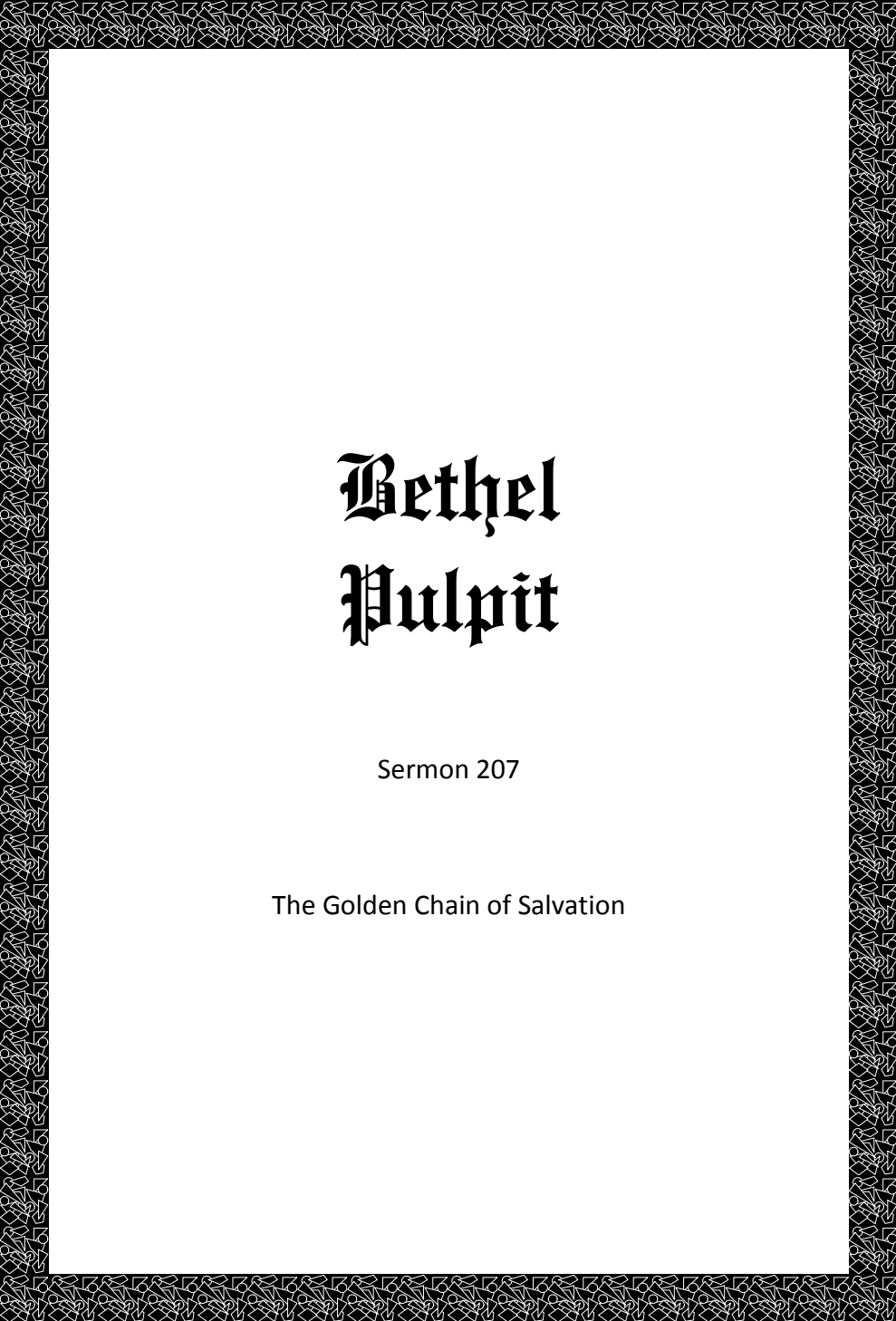




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 207

The Golden Chain of Salvation

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 6th October, 2002**

Text: *"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2. 13, 14).*

It seems that we do not read these Epistles to the Thessalonians just as much as the other epistles, and it is not as often that you hear sermons preached out of these Epistles. If there is a theme, the great theme to the Thessalonians is the second coming of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that as He once came to earth, so He will come the second time. But then it will be in great power and majesty and glory, with all His holy angels with Him, not to save the world, but to judge the world in righteousness. Now that is the great theme of these Epistles to the Thessalonians.

Do you ever think about the second coming, the end of the world, when the Lord will come again, when the great judgment seat, the great white throne shall be set up? Do you ever have to say,

"When Thou, my righteous Judge, shalt come
To take Thy ransomed people home,
Shall I among them stand?"

Well, that is the great theme of these Epistles. But it seems that these Thessalonians were misunderstanding the subject. They thought it was going to be tomorrow, literally tomorrow, or the next day, or the next week. There were all kinds of things. Some just gave up working. It seems laziness prevailed. So Paul wrote to warn them. The second coming is certain. We need to be ready. It will come at last like a thief in the night, unexpectedly, but there are certain things which must first take place. So in this chapter he speaks of the great apostasy and the man of sin, that wicked one, the antichrist. Historically since the time of the Reformation, this has always been taken in the Protestant churches to refer to the papacy, to refer to the pope.

But Paul warns them of these dark and evil days which in the years to come will be found upon the earth. So he begins to paint a very dark

and gloomy and dismal picture. And then as he comes towards the end of this chapter, he says, “*But.*” That blessed *but*. “But we are bound to give thanks.” Why? Because in all ages God will have a people eternally chosen, eternally loved, both at that time and in all the darkest ages, in the depths of apostasy. In this present evil day, God will always have a people, and Paul says we are bound to give thanks for that. It is a cause for gratitude, a cause of thanksgiving, that right to the end of time the Lord will have a people upon this earth – especially if you and I are found amongst them. Why, this is the only reason why the world still exists, until all His people are safely gathered in and prepared for heaven. So, “we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you.”

And then follows this wonderful declaration of divine truth. It is really like a body of divinity. You have all the foundation truths of our most holy faith here. You have election; you have everlasting love; you have salvation; you have sanctification; you have faith; you have effectual calling; you have the gospel; and you have heaven at last. Now I am not expanding or developing or opening it up. I am just stating one by one all these glorious doctrines which the Apostle states here. So it is like a little body of divinity, a little compendium of divinity.

“God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now there are both eternities here, from eternity to eternity. Eternity past; eternity to come. Eternity past: “God hath from the beginning chosen you.” Eternity to come: “Obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Really, this is the golden chain of salvation. It is all the work of God. It is all the work of grace. It is all what God can do. He must be first; He must be last; He must be All in all. So you see salvation everlastingly secured at both ends, that golden chain anchored in eternity past in God’s purposes, anchored in eternity to come in heaven. And then it comes right down, this golden chain, this golden cord, it comes right down into this dark, sinful, ruined world, into the hearts of men and women, girls and boys, in the gracious outworking of it, the gracious preparation for eternity to come.

I would that right at the outset this evening, beloved friends, you might see the everlasting blessedness of the people of God. “Bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God.” Eternally safe, eternally secure. “Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” “In every state secure,

kept as Jehovah's eye." The blessed people, the only blessed people, blessed in time, blessed to all eternity. Now this is the church of God, loved with an everlasting love. "Brethren beloved of the Lord." O what a wonderful thing for a poor, wretched, ruined sinner to be called the "beloved of the Lord"! He does not deserve it. He cannot merit it. O but the "beloved of the Lord," the people of God in all ages to the end of time! "The beloved of the Lord," Benjamin's blessing. "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."

"Beloved of the Lord." It is an everlasting love. It had no beginning; it can never end. And that love once fixed upon a sinner will never be taken away. "Did Jesus once upon me shine? Then Jesus is for ever mine." And this love, the cause of His eternal choice, from the beginning, even before Adam fell, before "sin entered into the world, and death by sin," that eternal choice, all of grace abounding to sinners, that choice in divine sovereignty, a people chosen to salvation and a people eternally loved in Christ, because all these blessings are in Christ. God the Father eternally loved His people in Christ, and God the Father eternally chose His people in Christ, and they are safe in Christ, secure in Christ. That is why in the fulness of time of He came to live and die and make atonement for sin and rise again and ascend to heaven. O but this blessed, honoured, favoured people, "beloved of the Lord," chosen to salvation.

And then the certainty of heaven itself at last. "To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." These are the foundation truths of the gospel. This blessed people, eternally loved, eternally chosen, ordained to salvation, ordained to heaven itself. "To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." O I do hope tonight that some of you can see the blessedness of this people, perhaps some of you for the very first time see the blessedness of this people; some of you have the sweet assurance that you are among them; some of you have that longing that you might be among them; some of you tremble lest you are not amongst them. I believe I have known all those three things: to tremble lest I am not among them; to long to be found amongst them; and to have a little, sweet assurance of being found amongst them. Well, may the blessed Spirit graciously work in our midst tonight and may you see the eternal blessedness, the eternal glory of the church as she stands eternally complete in Christ. "Beloved of the Lord ...chosen ... to salvation ... to the

obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Now that is both eternities. That is eternity past; that is eternity to come.

But then you see all this coming right down in time, right down into this sinful world, into the sinner’s heart, the work of salvation performed, the work of salvation accomplished. “Whereunto He called you by our gospel.” Now there is a call in the gospel. The gospel calls to self-examination. The gospel calls to remember your low estate. The gospel calls you to consider what a sinner you are. The gospel calls you to think about eternity and the judgment day. The gospel calls you to consider whether you are ready or not. Where there is a felt sense of need, the gospel calls you to come to Jesus. That is the outward call. And then there is an inward call, an irresistible call, what the old divines called an effectual call.

“There is a period known to God
When all His sheep, redeemed by blood,
Shall leave the hateful ways of sin,
Turn to the fold, and enter in.”

So you see it is “beloved of God.” It is “chosen ... to salvation.” But never forget, “Whereunto He called you by our gospel.” Perhaps for you and me this evening, beloved friends, this is the vital thing: the way in which a sinner is called by God’s grace, the way a sinner is prepared for that everlasting glory to come, the way a sinner is granted the sweet assurance of an interest in that everlasting love and eternal choice. Now this is it, the channel, the only channel, the way, the only way: “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Now that is absolutely vital. If you and I are among these who are chosen, these who are eternally loved, if you and I are among these who one day are going to see His glory, it is the only way to heaven. There is not any other, not many different ways. It is a narrow way. It is the way the church of God has always trod. “Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” So if you are one of these favoured people, you must know these two things. If you are going to reach heaven at last, you must know these two things: “sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

Well, with the Lord’s help, seeing they are so important, so vital, let us try to look at them one by one. “Through sanctification of the Spirit.” What is sanctification of the Spirit? It is that work of the Holy Spirit in a sinner’s heart in which He separates him to God. It begins in the

new birth. It is a personal, inward work, and it is carried on all through the life of that sinner whilst here on earth. “Sanctification of the Spirit.” It begins in the new birth. “Ye must be born again.” So if you know this sanctification of the Spirit, old things are passed away for ever and all things are become new – new thoughts, new feelings, new desires, new hopes, new aims, new expectations. Tell me, has that vital change been wrought in your heart, “sanctification of the Spirit”? Holy Ghost conversion, that is part of it. There is no hope, no salvation, no heaven without it. This is the Holy Spirit’s work in fitting and preparing a sinner for heaven. “Through sanctification of the Spirit.” It is separating that sinner unto God. It is God taking possession of that sinner He has chosen and eternally loved. It is the Holy Spirit leading that sinner out of self to Christ.

“Through sanctification of the Spirit.” And so as that sinner is separated to God, that sinner is separated from the world. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” “Through sanctification of the Spirit.” This separation is from your old ways, from your past life. In this sanctification of the Spirit, that holy, tender fear of God is implanted in your heart. Your conscience is made tender. The things you once did, the way you once behaved, the places you once went, all these things are gone and gone for ever. “Through sanctification of the Spirit.” It is never a perfect work while here on earth. It will never be perfected till the work of grace is done and “death, that puts an end to life, shall put an end to sin.” There will be the struggle, the conflict. There will be the new nature, and it will fight against the old, and the old nature will fight against the new, and there will be the temptation. “But has He not His promise passed, that thou shalt overcome at last?”

“Through sanctification of the Spirit.” And you will be separated to that pathway of prayer, separated to that pathway of dependence on Christ. “Through sanctification of the Spirit.” There will be death in it and there will be life in it. “Through sanctification of the Spirit.” You will die to your past life and you will live to God. You will die to any hope of heaven in anything you can do, or have done, or may do. Your only hope will have to be placed in Jesus. You will know death to the world “through sanctification of the Spirit.” And as you are brought to know and love the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that will always, always have a sanctifying

effect. “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” The grace which saves always sanctifies. Let not a man speak of salvation if he knows nothing of sanctification, this denying self, denying the flesh, taking up the cross, following the Saviour, this dying to sin and living to God, this being crucified with Christ. Now this is the sanctification of the Spirit, and those who are loved with an everlasting love, and those who from the beginning are chosen to salvation, have that salvation made known to them personally through the sanctification of the Spirit, and as they are going to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is through the sanctification of the Spirit that they are being prepared for heaven.

I am going to ask you the great question, but first I must say this. We are not good judges of our own sanctification. But the great question: have you a sweet hope that you know anything of the sanctification of the Spirit? Why do I say we are not good judges of our own sanctification? Well, the work of Christ for His people was finished on the cross. We look on that and see it as a perfect work. Now we can judge of that. But the sanctification of the Spirit is the work of grace in our hearts, and when we look within we hope we can trace the Spirit working, but there is so much sin and self and dross that has to be purged away. We are still pilgrims. There is still a fight to be fought with sin, Satan, death, hell, the world. But this is a vital work, this sanctification of the Spirit. You notice how so often Peter says exactly the same things as Paul in a different way. The opening of Peter’s first Epistle: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, *through sanctification of the Spirit*, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Now this is the second vital thing: if you and I are amongst those loved with an everlasting love, if you and I are amongst those chosen from the beginning, if you and I are amongst those who shall obtain eternal glory, then it must be “through ... belief of the truth.” What are we to understand, then, by “belief of the truth” that is so important, so vital? Well, by “the truth” really we understand the whole of the gospel that is preached. I want to make a most solemn point to you. When a person has ever heard the gospel preached, then that person can never be the same again, because

that person is accountable before God as to how he hears the gospel, how he hears the truth preached. By nature we do not receive it, do we? But when the gospel is preached, a sinner who hears it is never the same again, however many times he hears it or does not hear it, because he is accountable, and that person who hears the gospel hears these sacred truths, and either receives them or rejects them. You have heard the truth preached, you have heard the gospel preached, and you either receive it or you reject it. Now it is an unspeakably solemn thing to reject the gospel.

The Apostle has been labouring this point: “through belief of the truth.” Really he concludes his denunciation of all this wickedness and evil in the world with this: “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (verse 10). They did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. So because they did not receive the love of the truth, they never can be saved. And then he goes on to say this: “That they all might be damned who believed not the truth” (verse 12). Now this comes very close. I hope most of you, if not all of you, here this evening receive the truth; you do not reject it; you do not deny it. It is a terrible thing if you do. O but I say it in much love and affection, have you received the truth in the love of it? What do I mean? God’s holy, infallible, inerrant, inspired Word – well you receive that; you do not deny it; you do not contradict it. Well I hope you do not. But have you received the truth in the love of it, the love of God’s holy Word, more precious to you than fine gold, “sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb”? Now have you received the truth in the love of it?

What about the virgin birth? The Son of God came into this world, became a real Man, born of a virgin. That is the gospel, that is the truth, and thousands just do not receive it. Now I hope all of you do receive it. O but do you receive the truth in the love of it? “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.” O but can you say, “I love the Incarnate Mystery, and there is all my trust”? Do you receive the truth in the love of it?

Now what about the preaching of the cross, the death of Jesus on the cross, that He did die, and why He died, that sinners might be saved by His death, by His precious blood? Now surely you do not deny it, do you, you do not reject it? O but do you receive it in the love of it? Is it precious to you, that dear Man who suffered, that death He died, that precious blood He shed, the only way to heaven, your only hope, your only foundation?

Now do you receive the truth in the love of it? The Apostle says, “We preach Christ crucified”; not a dead Christ – He is risen, exalted, glorified – but a Christ who did die that sinners might be saved. But generally speaking, the world does not receive it; the world rejects it. “Unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” You could not have two more different people than the Greeks and the Jews. They did not agree on anything; they disagreed on everything. These were the self-righteous Jews and the intellectual Gentiles, and these were the moral Jews and the generally immoral Gentiles. They did not agree on anything. But have you noticed that if the world does not agree on anything, it does agree on rejecting the gospel, though for different reasons? To the Jews it was a stumblingblock. They thought the Messiah would come and would be an almighty deliver. They did not want a Saviour to die in their place. And the Greeks were so intellectual. It seemed nonsense to them, a Man dying on a cross to save from sin, death and hell. Now I hope you do not reject it, but do you receive the truth in the love of it?

What about the resurrection? People generally today scoff at it, mock at it, reject it. O but have you received it in the love of it? What does a risen, living, exalted Saviour mean to you? “Here is my hope, my joy, my rest.” Just one other thing. The second coming of the Lord Jesus to gather His people eternally to Himself, do you reject it? Do you scoff at it? Do you tremble before it? Do you receive it? It is “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

O but this solemn warning: “They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” They did not receive the truth in love, and so, “That they all might be damned who believed not the truth. ... *But* we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you.” What a mercy if there is this difference! “Through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” O but especially, beloved friends, He whose name is truth and grace, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself. If you are called by our gospel, this is the place where you are brought as an evidence of eternal love and everlasting choice, as an evidence that one day you will see His glory. It will be to believe on the Son of God to the everlasting salvation of your soul. Now that means to be made a possessor of real faith, saving faith, and that saving faith does not just believe that Jesus is the Son of God, just that He lived and died and rose again. Now this is it: “Other Refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on Thee.” Now that is the belief of the truth. That is salvation. That is the preparation for heaven.

You as a sinner with no other hope, no other way of escape, having to rest your everlasting all on Jesus, sink or swim. It is this: to trust in Him and Him alone; to trust His glorious Person; to trust His righteousness and precious blood; to trust His faithfulness to His promise; to trust His mercy; to trust His power to save even to the uttermost. Now this is salvation, salvation personally made known, salvation made known in the heart. O beloved, is this salvation yours, or is it not?

Let me ask you the second great question: are you a true believer on the Son of God? Is He your only hope? Is He your only trust? Can you say,

“Upon a life I did not live,
Upon a death I did not die,
Another’s life, Another’s death,
I rest my whole eternity”?

O you can never perish there. Now that is salvation, that is heaven, and may the blessed Spirit seal it in your heart “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” These two important things, these two vital things: “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

“To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” There are many ways in which heaven is spoken of in Scripture: paradise, the many mansions; you might go on and think of all the descriptions of heaven. But what about this: “the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”? And Paul says, You shall obtain it. You must obtain it. “The glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Where glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel’s land.”

“The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom’s face;
I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace;
Not at the crown He giveth,
But on His pierced hand:
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel’s land.”

“To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Well then, this golden chain of salvation from eternity to eternity, from everlasting to everlasting, but coming right down in time into the hearts of poor, lost,

guilty sinners, embracing them, fitting them, preparing them, taking them to heaven at last.

“We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”