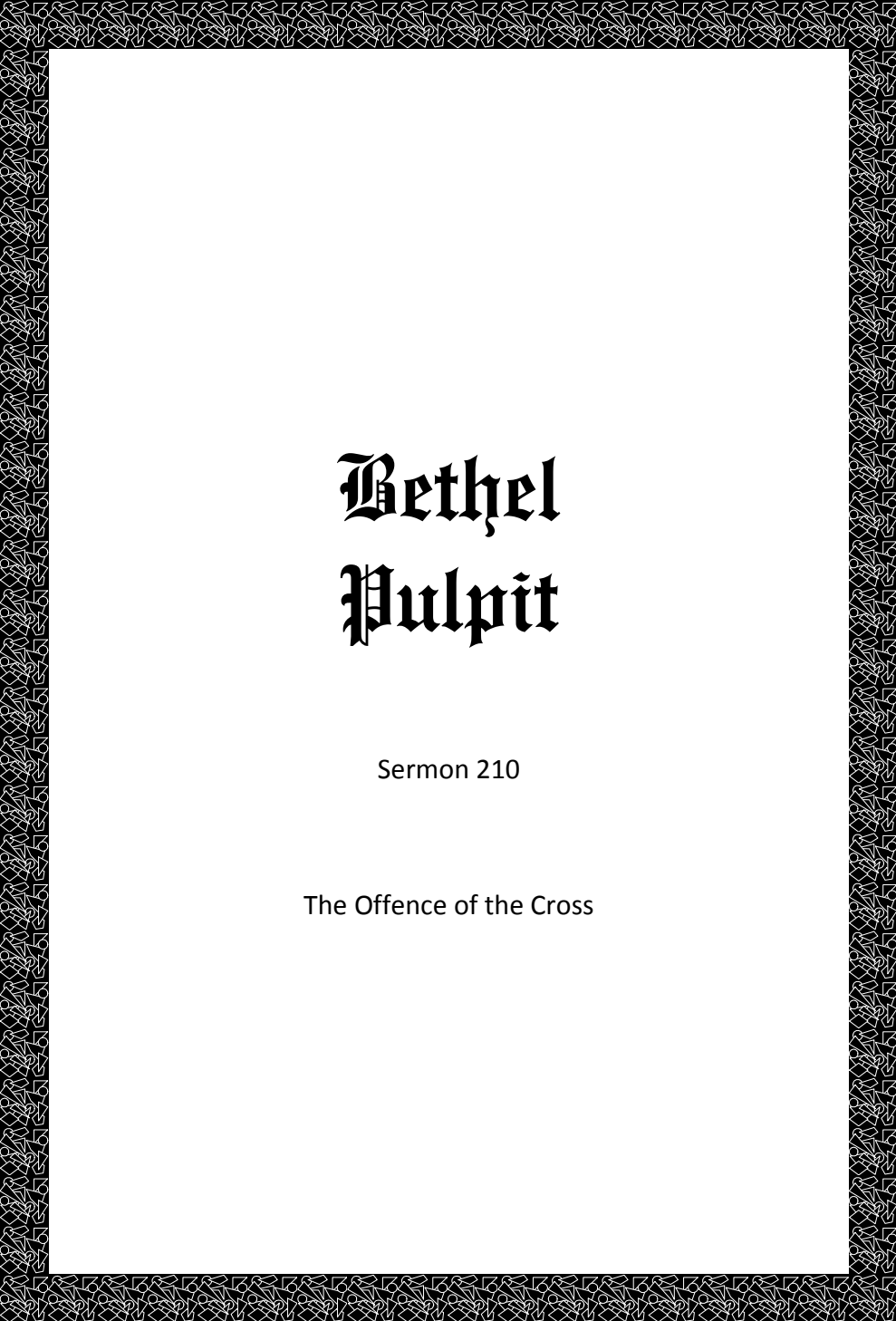




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 210

The Offence of the Cross

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 13th October, 2002**

Text: *"The offence of the cross" (Galatians 5. 11).*

This is "the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died." When the Apostle Paul speaks of *the cross*, he means the whole of the everlasting gospel, the whole precious doctrine of Christ and Him crucified; what he so often referred to as the preaching of the cross, and what he meant when he said, "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." So this is the great point, the preaching of the cross, the glorious Person who suffered and died there, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; a real Man, but true Almighty God; a real Man, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners"; a real Man made in all points like unto His brethren apart from sin, yet the Son of God from all eternity. Now this is the preaching of the cross, that glorious Person who suffered and died there.

And then the wonders of His love. This is the preaching of the cross – the wonders of His love to wretched, ruined, lost, hell-deserving sinners, and yet He loved them so much that He was willing to die for them. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." O there was never love like this! "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." There was never love like this. The preaching of the cross – what the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ suffered! O the agonies, the cruel nails, the spear, the crown of thorns, the greater sufferings of His holy soul, the loads of sin laid upon Him, the sins of His people, the weight that pressed Him down, the hiding of His Father's face, the smiting with the sword of divine justice, the divine wrath that He bore. Now all this is the preaching of the cross.

And that He *died*, death being the wages of sin, and the Lord Jesus as His people's Saviour and Substitute undertaking to receive their wages and to pay their debt. This is the preaching of the cross, why He suffered, why He died.

"He took the dying traitor's place,
And suffered in his stead;
For man (O miracle of grace!)
For man the Saviour bled."

This is the preaching of the cross – the Lord Jesus taking the sinner’s place, paying his debt for him, suffering what he deserved, dying that he might live. This is the preaching of the cross – that precious blood that He shed, a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, where the vilest sinner plunged beneath that flood shall lose all his guilty stains. This is the preaching of the cross and this is the way to heaven, the only way to heaven. It is the way of salvation. It is the way of forgiveness. It is the way even into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. Here is justice satisfied. Here is the law of God magnified and made honourable. This is the preaching of the cross.

And also that Jesus rose again. We preach Christ crucified, but we do not preach a dead Christ. We preach a Saviour who died, but that death could not hold Him. We preach a Saviour who was buried, but we preach a Saviour who rose victorious, triumphant, taking the sting from death and the victory from the grave. All this is the preaching of the cross, and it is so suitable for sinners who feel their need, so suitable for those bowed down with guilt, so suitable for those who want to be prepared for the great day when life here must cease. It is such a precious gospel, such a precious doctrine, the preaching of the cross. It is all that the sinner needs. It is free; it is without money; it is without price. There are so many precious promises in the preaching of the cross. “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” O the wonders of the cross of Christ! Here is salvation.

“Here it is I find my heaven,
While upon the Lamb I gaze;
Love I much? I’ve much forgiven;
I’m a miracle of grace.”

This is the foundation, the only foundation on which our hope is built. This is the remedy, the only remedy, but an all-prevailing remedy. We need no other. It is, “Dying sinners, look and live.” It is, “Looking unto Jesus.” “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” – on the cross – “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” It is, “Dying sinners, look and live.” It is free, sovereign, amazing grace. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Now this, all this, is the preaching of the cross. It is all this that the apostle signifies when he

speaks of the cross – the wonderful doctrine, the preaching, the whole of the gospel in all its beauty, in all its preciousness.

Well then, does this come as a kind of solemn shock, a kind of solemn surprise, that Paul says that the cross of Christ *offends*? Well, it does. It did then, and it does now, and it will to the end of time. But at first it comes as a solemn shock, a solemn surprise, that these glorious tidings of the gospel, of the cross, that these things *offend*.

Let me first of all, then, set this in its context. These Galatian Christians had been abundantly blessed and had received the gospel in all its fulness and freeness. They gloried in the cross of Christ. Now these Judaising teachers had come in and were trying to bring them back to the law. They were speaking of circumcision. It was a mark of being under the law. Those who were circumcised as a religious rite put themselves under the law and must obey the law. Among the arguments they were using, they said that even the Apostle Paul preached circumcision, and Paul stoutly denied it. Paul says, “I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution?” I am suffering persecution because I am *not* preaching circumcision. I am suffering persecution because I am preaching Christ and it is causing offence. If I were preaching circumcision and the whole of the law of God, the ceremonial law, obedience by what a sinner can do, I would not be suffering persecution, but I *am* suffering persecution. If instead of preaching the everlasting gospel, I was exalting the ceremonial law, I would not be suffering persecution. But the preaching of the cross is causing offence to these Jews. If I were preaching circumcision, I would not be suffering persecution, but I *am* suffering persecution. The preaching of the cross is offending. That is putting it in its context.

“I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.” Well then, “The offence of the cross.” I want to speak closely to you this evening. You as my beloved congregation, you expect me to say these things. You expect a Strict Baptist minister to say them. You expect them to be said in Bethel pulpit. But there always has been an offence in the preaching of the cross of Christ, and in days of real prosperity, when people like Whitefield went through the land preaching the cross of Christ, the majority who heard were offended, but the rest of them were mercifully delivered and blessed under it. It used to be one or the other. People were either blessed with a

saving interest in the cross, or else they were offended and they rejected it. We seem to be going along, drifting along in a lukewarm way at present. The people do not mind the minister preaching the cross because he is expected to do it, but few are really being blessed through it. These things come very close. They are matters of life and death, because there will not be any “no man’s land” in the great day.

Well, what is the offence of the cross? Well, there are many things. One is this: that you and I can do nothing, *nothing* to merit our soul’s salvation. That is the offence of the cross, because it lays us in the dust as helpless and ruined and useless and impotent and unable to save ourselves. Now that is the offence of the cross. Why, the preaching of the cross tells us that all of us, each of us, are completely lost and ruined, guilty through sin, through the Adam fall, through personal sin. We are accountable to God. One day we must give an account to our Creator, and we are not meet, we are not right, we are not righteous. Now that is the offence of the cross. I do not know whether some of you remember in the early days of my pastorate, one Thursday evening an old tramp came in and sat at the back, and he seemed to be very interested and listened very carefully, and people were amazed how beautifully he sang the hymns in a lovely tenor voice. I began to speak of man’s lost, ruined condition, that all who were present that evening were lost, ruined, guilty sinners. The man stood up and abused me and said, “Don’t say that about me.” And he said, “Let me get him,” and tried to come up to me. All the Strict Baptists were used to hearing it and it did not offend them, but this tramp was offended. His fists were drawn. This is the most remarkable outward example I have ever seen of the offence of the cross.

“Our best is stained and dyed with sin; our all is nothing worth.” That is the offence of the cross, that our very best, our very righteousness is but as filthy rags, that it does not avail at all. We must be rid of them. We must be stripped of them. That is the offence of the cross. It is an offence to those who really realise how close the preaching of the gospel comes, and it is only those who by the Holy Spirit are made to know and feel their lost, ruined, guilty condition to whom the gospel is made exceedingly precious and it is not an offence.

The apostle opens this up at great length in 1 Corinthians 1, the preaching of the cross. “We preach Christ crucified.” It is an offence. “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock.” The Jews

were so religious. They were so self-righteous. When they heard that they had to renounce all their righteousness and all their religion and all the law of works and all ceremonies, they were offended. “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” Now it was an offence to them. The intellectual Greeks were so learned and so wise, and they heard about a Man dying on a cross, and they were told that was the only way to heaven, the only way of salvation. It was foolishness to them. That is the offence of the cross. “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; *but*” – now here is the difference – “but unto them which are called,” called by God’s grace, effectually called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness.” That is the offence of the cross to them that perish. “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

“The offence of the cross.” It always will offend the self-righteous, the worldly wise, the intellectual, the carnal. O but sinners taught by the grace of God, sinners enlightened from above, with what delight do they hear of the cross of Christ and are not offended by it! Many people are offended by many things, but Jesus said, “Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me.” And blessed are you if you are not offended in Christ. You say,

“Here is my hope, my joy, my rest;
Hither, when hell assails, I flee;
I look into my Saviour’s breast.”

O but the offence of the cross to a soul dead in trespasses and sins! And perhaps especially this, that this is the *only* way of salvation, that there is no other. Whoever that sinner is, a king on his throne or the poorest man lying in the gutter, the cleverest man or someone of low mentality, the cross is the only way to heaven. And that is the offence of the cross.

“The holiest saint who yonder sings
Before God’s throne,
Is saved, like Mary Magdalene,
By blood alone.”

So you have to come side by side with Mary Magdalene and side by side with Manasseh, and side by side with the dying thief. That is the offence of the cross.

Now when Whitefield was preaching, through the influence of that very godly woman the Countess of Huntingdon he was introduced to the court of King George III and he used to preach at the court. Remarkably, there were some wonderful conversions, real Holy Ghost conversions of some very eminent people. But there was one eminent duchess and she asked for an interview. She said, "Mr. Whitefield, I am offended." He said, "I didn't wish to offend you, madam." She said, "If I understand you aright, you are saying the only way I can get to heaven is the same way as my footman, my servant, my maid. You don't really mean that I have to go to heaven in the same way as they go to heaven?" Well, that is just it. It is everyone on the same ground here: the only way of salvation, the only way to heaven through the blood of Christ. "Herein let self be all abased, and sovereign love alone confessed." Now this is the offence of the cross.

And then there is a second way in which the New Testament speaks of the offence of the cross. Usually when the Word of God speaks of the cross, it speaks of where the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ suffered, bled and died. But the Lord Jesus also spoke of His people having to bear their own cross, or that each one has a cross to carry. You see, that also is an offence. For instance, Jesus said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." That will always be an offence. It is an offence to those who hear the gospel. It is an offence to religious people. It is an offence to self-righteous people. Yes, how willing to become a Christian, how willing to become a follower of the Lord Jesus, how willing to become a church member, but O the offence of the cross! Do I really have to give up the world? Do I really have to give up my idols? Do I really have to walk in that narrow way which leads to eternal life? Is this the way? Is this the only way? Is there not a broader way? Is there not an easier way? And that is where thousands perish, and thousands who hear the truth perish, and thousands of religious people perish. It is the offence of the cross, that unwillingness to deny self and to take up the cross and to follow the Saviour. Now Paul later on says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Now that is the offence of the cross.

“Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.”

Now that is the offence of the cross, and that is why it will always be an offence to the world which lieth in wickedness. It was so in Paul’s day, it has been down the ages, and it is today. Why? Because both the preaching of the cross and the Saviour’s demands that His people shall take up their cross and follow Him have always been in complete, absolute contradiction to the lifestyle of this world. The preaching of the cross of Christ is in complete contradiction to the lifestyle of this world; and the preaching that those who are saved through the cross of Christ by blood alone and by grace alone are called to deny themselves and take up their own cross and follow the Saviour, now that is always an offence to the world, and it is an offence to the religious world. It is a complete contradiction, an absolute contrast to the lifestyle of this world that lieth in wickedness. But in all ages the Lord will have His own people who are willing, made willing in the day of His power, to endure the offence of the cross.

There is not much of this religion about today, is there? In most places a person can be accounted a Christian and never know anything of the offence of the cross. It is not the religion of the New Testament. In so many places a person can be a church member without knowing anything of the offence of the cross. But there must be that vital difference, that gracious difference, that work of sanctification, that dying to sin, that living unto God. O are you made willing in the day of divine power to endure the offence of the cross for Jesus sake? Now what is it? “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” That is the offence of the cross. “Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” That is the offence of the cross. “For he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”

O to be made willing in the day of God’s power to endure the offence of the cross, to be despised by the world. “His institutions would I prize; take up my cross, the shame despise.” O this offence of the cross. There is only one thing that will ever do it, and that is the sweet constrainings of the love of Christ. Nothing else will do it. So there is that

intimate connection, whether you think of the cross as where the blessed Saviour loved and died, or you think of that cross that you are commanded to take up and bear and carry right to the very end. O that bearing the reproach! There does not seem to be so much reproach for Christ's sake today. We used to sing,

“If on my face for Thy dear name,
Shame and reproaches be,
All hail reproach, and welcome shame!
If Thou remember me.”

O but for a sinner by faith to look to the cross of Christ, to see the Lord of glory dying in agonies and blood, to feel a little, solemn, sacred interest in it and to feel that wonderful love, and then to be made willing in the day of divine power to deny self. Did Jesus suffer this for me? Then to deny self, to deny the world, to deny your past life.

“Jesus, at Thy command
I launch into the deep;
And leave my native land,
Where sin lulls all asleep;
For Thee I would the world resign,
And sail to heaven with Thee and Thine.”

O this offence of the cross! As we get older, some of us are troubled. Our lives do not seem what they used to be. They seem to come so far short. We feel we are not what a child of God should be. There does not seem to be so much of this denying self. There does not seem to be so much of this bearing the cross. There does not seem to be so much of the offence. But beloved friends, we can say this, that in our spiritual beginnings we had to come there by faith: “surrendered to the Crucified,” all on the altar, lives completely yielded, everything laid at the Saviour's feet. In those days it was something like this: if Jesus is really the Son of God from all eternity, and I know He is; and if He came down from heaven to earth to suffer, bleed and die, and I know He did; and if it was for sinners, unworthy, guilty sinners, and I know it was; and if it was for me, and I have a sweet hope that it was, then I should be willing to lay everything at the Saviour's feet, to be willing to do anything, endure anything, go anywhere, all on the altar, constrained by the love of Christ, “surrendered to the Crucified.” O beloved friends, may we be brought there, and may we live there, and may we be kept there, and may we feel

through grace what a blessed honour, what a sacred privilege to be permitted to know something of the offence of the cross, all the shame to ourselves, all the glory to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, once crucified, now risen, exalted, glorified. Now O to know what it is to be made willing in the day of God's power, to be wrought on by God's grace.

“Emptied of earth I fain would be,
The world, myself, and all but Thee;
Only reserved for Christ that died,
Surrendered to the Crucified.”

There is only one thing will do it: the love of Christ. That is what made the martyrs willing to go to the stake and be burnt, not accepting deliverance. That is what made those early martyrs in Roman days willing to be thrown to the lions as a spectacle. O to be made willing in the day of divine power. “Thus make me willing, glorious Lamb, to suffer all things for Thy name.” Now, “Be this religion mine.” How far short we come! O but may we have that real religion that is more than notion, that real religion which is not just talk, that real religion separated unto the gospel of Christ, that real religion which glories in Him and Him alone, that real religion which leaves all to follow Him – made willing in the day of divine power to bear the offence of the cross.