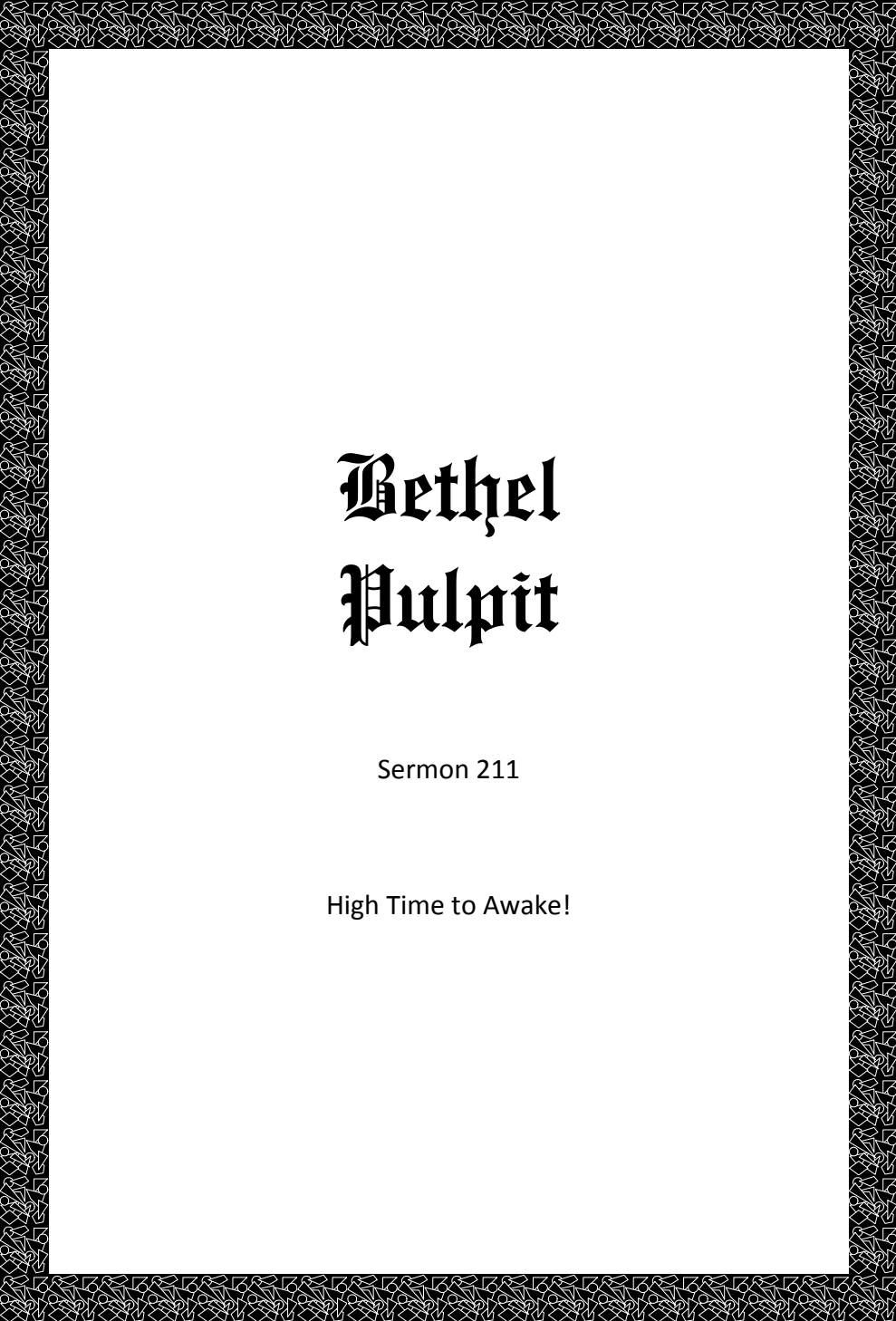




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 211

High Time to Awake!

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 29th December, 2002**

Text: *“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (Romans 13. 11, 12).*

I always feel that the last Lord's day of the old year is an exceedingly solemn time. “Another year of our short life is gone.” We have the reminder of it. Samuel Rutherford in one of his letters said, “There is less sand in your glass than yesternight,” referring to one of those hour glasses where the sand ran out. “The sands of time are sinking”; it is a mercy if we can say, “The dawn of heaven breaks.” With all of us it should be a time to stand still, to stop, to consider, to look back, to look forward, to look within, to look up; especially to ask the important question,

“Am I ready to meet God?
Am I made a real Christian,
Washed in the Redeemer's blood?”

The apostle says, “Knowing the time.” Well, do we know the time? What does it mean? Well, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” In other words, the time is fast hastening to its conclusion. The world will not be here for ever. How long, we know not, but terrible things in righteousness are taking place in the earth. Our little lives will soon be over. “The night *is* far spent” with each one of us, especially with the older friends here. But thinking of time itself, the existence of the world itself, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”

But what really, beloved friends, is the message that Paul so starkly and solemnly brings before us here? It is this: that the church of God is in a slumbering, sleeping condition, and *we* are, you know. “It is high time to awake out of sleep.” The Lord Jesus said that before the end everyone would slumber and sleep. This would be the condition of the church of God. This *is* the condition today. May I say it lovingly and affectionately, I fear that at Bethel we too are in that slumbering condition. Do not forget, it was the wise virgins as well as the foolish who slumbered and slept – in that order. First you slumber, and then if you are not roused, you sleep. It

was very solemn that the wise virgins were asleep when the midnight cry came, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.” The mercy was that they had oil in their lamps, and all their lamps needed was to be trimmed. They were ready, “and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.” But these others, solemn thing that they slumbered and slept, and when they heard the cry, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him,” they had not any oil in their lamps; they were destitute of grace; they were not ready; they were unprepared. They started trimming their lamps. There is a lot of lamp-trimming goes on at times. It is perhaps a service and people are strangely moved, and they go home and start trimming their lamps, and Monday morning it is all forgotten. Perhaps it is a baptizing service, the solemnity of the occasion, and people start trimming their lamps. It is soon over. Perhaps someone dies. O the lamp-trimming that goes on, and perhaps it lasts for a few weeks, and then life goes on as before. Perhaps there is some deep sorrow, some disappointment. Doesn’t it seem as if it has been sanctified? But all your lamp-trimming will not get you to heaven. “While the bridegroom tarried, they *all* slumbered and slept” – the wise and the foolish.

The Bridegroom does tarry. We wait for His appearing. We still wait for His coming. The church of God is in a slumbering, sleeping condition, and I fear that we are here. There is nothing wrong in sleeping. It is not going out killing people. It is not doing evil things. It is not telling lies. It is just nothing going on, nothing taking place. O the warnings we have on this point! The Lord Jesus again and again said, “Watch.” Now you cannot watch if you are asleep. You cannot watch if you are slumbering. The need to be watchful, wakeful, alert. O but this sleeping, slumbering condition! It is like a vessel that is moored and the moorings are loose. Nothing seems to be happening. It appears to be still. But in time how far that vessel has drifted up the river! How far back have you and I drifted? We have perhaps not been doing anything wrong. There has perhaps not been anything evil. How far have we drifted back during these last twelve months? “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” “It is high time to awake out of sleep.”

Some of those churches in the Book of Revelation were in that sleeping, slumbering condition. Everything seemed to be right. There was no false doctrine. There did not seem to be anything amiss. The Lord said, “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and

repent.” It came as a solemn shock to them. Now, “It is high time to awake out of sleep.” There can be a kind of happiness, a kind of satisfaction, coming to the house of God, meeting with family, meeting with friends. O what a blessing it is, what a wonderful privilege it is! O but how sad to be satisfied with it, to be in a state of spiritual lethargy, not much life, not much liberty, not much light, not much prayer, not much going on, and yet outwardly everything seems to be right. Now, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” And when that day comes, the day of the Lord, many churches will have a solemn shock, and many gospel hearers will have a solemn shock eternally.

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” “It is high time to awake out of sleep.” This is spoken to the church of God. It is not spoken to unbelievers. It is not spoken to the world. It is not spoken to the wicked. It is spoken to the church of God. “It is high time to awake out of sleep.” You say, What a blessed church this church at Rome must have been! You think of a church to whom such glorious truths were communicated. You think, Romans 8 belongs to this church, yet this church still in that sleeping, slumbering condition. And Paul, before he finishes – he has spoken of the glorious doctrine, the precious experience, but his Epistle is running out. He has come to the end. These solemn warnings. They are the people of God, the real people of God, not the world, not just those who profess the Lord’s name. “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” “It is high time to awake out of sleep.”

Some of you will perhaps have read my annual new year address for 2003 in the *Gospel Standard*. There was one point that struck me very solemnly. This was speaking of our churches generally. I tried to make this comparison. Some of you may have been in the past to the waxworks in London, Madame Tussauds, and in that waxworks there is just one which is supposed to be the best of anything there. It is so life-like, and it is one they have had for many, many years; it is an old one. It is called *The Sleeping Beauty*. There is this figure of a girl or a woman lying on a bed asleep. I believe it was done originally to portray some beauty at the court of one of the French kings, I think Louis XIV. But how lifelike it is! If you did not touch it, you would think it was a real person asleep. And they have done more than that. They have done something so you can almost hear a little gasp of breathing and even see a slight movement in her chest. It is a most beautiful creation, and nothing could be more lifelike. You would have your doubts whether it was a living person or whether it was

not. You touch it; it is nothing but cold, hard wax. Is that the church of God? O, it is high time *for us* to awake out of *our* sleep.

The sad thing is: when people are asleep, they cannot wake themselves up, and when people are asleep, they do not know they are asleep. May the Lord deliver us from a sleeping, slumbering, drowsing condition: not much liveliness in the things of God; not much holy zeal; not much light and liberty and love in reading the Word of God; not much going on between our souls and Christ, and being satisfied with it; above all, not much prayer. Now we need to be awakened from our sleep concerning our state and standing in the sight of a holy God, our relationship with the Saviour, our prayer or our lack of prayer, our zeal or our lack of zeal, our exercise or our lack of exercise.

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” “It is high time to awake out of sleep.” Well, may the Lord in love and mercy perform it in our churches, and may He perform it at Bethel. But I have often trembled at the mystery of divine sovereignty. There is one thing I have never, never understood, and that was that in the 1700’s when that glorious revival, the Evangelical Revival came and turned England upside down, when thousands were blessed and thousands turned to the Lord, our churches for the most part were passed by, and they were godly churches. Hadn’t they been faithful to the truth, and during those days of persecution hadn’t they suffered imprisonment, exportation, even death itself? But when that glorious work spread across our country, our godly churches which had remained faithful during the days of apostasy were more or less passed by. Why did the Lord do that? Most of the blessing came in the state church, the almost apostate Church of England. They had an Archbishop then who must have been worse than ours; they said the Archbishop then did not even believe there was a God. Divine sovereignty is a great mystery, and we need to tremble before it. There was that wonderful work in which thousands turned to the Lord, but for the most part the Lord passed our churches by. It was men like Whitefield, Berridge, Grimshaw, Venn, and they were all ministers in the Established Church. We do not want the Lord to pass us by and forsake us. We want Him to be mindful of us.

“The night is far spent,” and the end of the year reminds us of it. “The day is at hand.” “It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” He is speaking to the true people

of God. You say, This is a strange statement: “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” Understand it aright; do not misunderstand it, beloved friends. The word *salvation* is used in different ways in Scripture. The people of God were saved in Christ before the world had any beginning. That is salvation. They were saved when Christ died. That is salvation. They are saved when the Holy Spirit begins His work in the new birth and brings them to the Saviour. That is salvation. They are saved day by day from the power of sin. That is salvation. But the point in this verse is salvation eternally, the consummation of it all when time shall be no more and all the Lord’s people are safely gathered in heaven. That is what he means in this verse, “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” We are coming nearer to the end. To the people of God, that should be a comfort. To the people of God, that should be a spur to them more and more to forsake the world and these works of darkness, and more and more to live in the fear of God.

“But now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” The coming year 2003 to many will prove to be their last, perhaps to some here. Well, “If your hope on Christ is stayed, let Him come when He thinks best.” You will prove that the day of your death will be better than the day of your birth, and as we have so often sung in the new year hymn,

“To the saints while here below,
With new years, new mercies come;
But the happiest year they know
Is their last, which brings them home.”

What a prospect, what an awakening eternally, to close your eyes on earth and to open them in heaven! Now may it be so. O but the opposite is unthinkable. If to the Lord’s people their salvation is nearer than when they believed, with the wicked, those out of Christ, their damnation is one year nearer. These are terrible things. “Think and tremble, death is now upon the road.”

“It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” Well, if the Lord’s people need to awake, how much more those who are still asleep with that sleep of death? Now may that be a word to each one out of Christ, each one in a state of unconcern, each one not knowing the Lord as your salvation. “It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day

is at hand” – the day of the Lord when He shall come to judge the world in righteousness. Now *I* cannot wake you from the sleep of death. *You* cannot wake yourself from the sleep of death. Only the Lord can do it. But I can speak to you and I can warn you, and may the Lord use that word. It is high time for you to awake out of your sleep. “It is time to seek the Lord.” “Knowing the time,” says the Spirit of God. “Knowing the time” – it is hastening to its end. “Knowing the time” – there is nothing here to live for. “Knowing the time” – “It is high time to awake out of sleep.”

Now I want to tell you children and little ones, you boys and girls, one of the strangest stories I have ever read, and it illustrates this point. I read this many, many years ago. If I had not read it (it was in a national newspaper), I would never have believed it. There was an engine going along on the railway line and it plunged off. There was a little town there and it started going through the town and the first house it crashed into, there was a man upstairs in bed asleep. It was in the night. It demolished the house, and as the engine came out of the house, it went on plunging its way through the town, and believe it or not it was carrying the bed from that bedroom with the man lying on it and he was still fast asleep! It went on knocking down houses, demolishing, until after a few hundred yards it came to a stop. Do you know, that man was still fast asleep! It seems incredible. It is one of the most unbelievable things I have ever read. Yet that is a description of you and a description of me by nature. We are just like that man asleep in bed and an engine comes and knocks the house down and carries him away, and he is still fast asleep, slumbering and sleeping. That is you and me by nature. We can see people die, we can think of awful things in the world, we can hear of death and hell and damnation, and we still go on in our sleeping, slumbering condition, quite unconcerned. Well may the Lord in His love and in His mercy awaken you. “Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation” – that is for the people of God – “now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand” – the day of the Lord’s coming. So if this is solemn for the Lord’s people, how unbelievably solemn it is for those who are out of Christ!

Beloved friends, what is the application of all this? Well really it is this: the way in which God’s people should live in these solemn, last days. As we pass from year to year, as we live in this dark, evil, wicked day, how should we live? Of course, the figure the apostle is using is light and

darkness. Well, it is a favourite way of speaking of the apostle. The Lord Jesus just the same, all the apostles, they speak of light and darkness. But it is night. “The night is far spent.” But the Lord’s people are not of the night. Ye are not children of night; ye are children of the day. Walk then as children of the light. There is always this contrast between light and darkness. So then the Lord’s people are to walk as the children of light.

I do not want to keep turning up a lot of different passages, but there are many on this point. Let me just remind you of one, and I am quoting from 1 Thessalonians 5. “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” You know what that means. The burglar does not give any warning. He comes unexpectedly. “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety” – they are asleep, they are slumbering – “when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” Now this is it: “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” The apostle’s argument is very simple. It is night-time. But God’s people are different. God’s people have had their lives changed. God’s people belong to the light. God’s people belong to the day. Well, people sleep during the night, but it is not night for the Lord’s people. In their soul, in their experience, in their witness it is day, so they must not slumber, they must not sleep. “We are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” It is night-time, night-time in the world. But God’s people are not the children of the night; they are children of the day. That means they have to be different. That means there is a witness. That means they have to “walk in the light, as He is in the light.

“Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness.” Now there are two things really here. The first is that the Lord’s people are

called to be watchful. “The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” What have you to watch? Well, you have to watch the times. You have to watch your own spirit. You have to watch out for Satan. You have to watch out for temptation. You have to be watchful in prayer. In other words, you are called to be alert. It is a sad thing to find a child of God slumbering and sleeping. You know what happened in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. They were found asleep on enchanted ground. They were captured by Giant Despair and put in a dungeon. Gadsby quaintly says, “Watch ye against sleeping, and stand to your post, lest you should go weeping, while Canaanites boast.” “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness” (verse 13). That belongs to the night. That belongs to the ungodly. That belongs to the unregenerate. “Not in chambering and wantonness.” That belongs to the night. “Not in strife and envying.” Perhaps some of you say, I am not guilty of rioting, drunkenness. I am not guilty of chambering and wantonness. “*Strife and envying*.” That is of the night. “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (verse 14). The light and the darkness, the day and the night, and ye are the children of the day.

Now it is first this call to be watchful, and then secondly this call to walk worthy. That is to be as different from the world, as separate from the world as the light is from the darkness and as the day is from the night. “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Do you redeem the time? We sang of it: “While our days on earth are lengthened, may we give them, Lord, to Thee.” That is redeeming the time. Do you spend your time wisely and well? How much time do you mis-spend? How much time do you spend on carnality and lust and pleasure? How much time do you spend with godly books and in prayer? How do you spend the Lord’s day afternoon? Do not forget, the Lord’s day afternoon has to be sanctified. The Sabbath day has to be kept holy as much between twelve o’clock and six o’clock as during the morning and evening services. “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of ” – what? Well, just what you would expect: “the armour of light.” There are certain things to be put on: the robe of Christ’s righteousness, the Spirit’s work of sanctification. Strangely, he says, “Put on the *armour* of light.” Why is that? Well you know the answer. Because it is going to be a fight.

Tomorrow you are going to have to fight with Satan. Not just tomorrow; before you leave the house of God, even while you are on your way home. You have to fight with Satan and indwelling sin and yourself and the world. Our hymnwriter quaintly says, “Believers are not called, we see, to sleep or play, but fight.” So you need armour and the armour is provided. There is a fight, and it is the armour of light against the power of darkness. And, “Your Captain stood the fiery test, and ye shall stand through Him.”

Beloved friends, I realise these are very close things and very solemn things. I speak them in love and in affection. The great thing is that the days are evil and the time is short. “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” The great thing is to be right, to be ready. The only way we can be right and ready is to be made right, to be made ready by the Spirit of God. “In Christ’s obedience clothe, and wash me in His blood.” But that is not the end. It is that walking worthy, walking in the light, walking as the children of light, discarding the world, separate from the world, casting off the works of darkness, cleaving to the light. Now may the Lord sanctify these things to us in the denomination, and here at Bethel, and in our own homes, and in our lives and personally in our hearts.

“Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.”