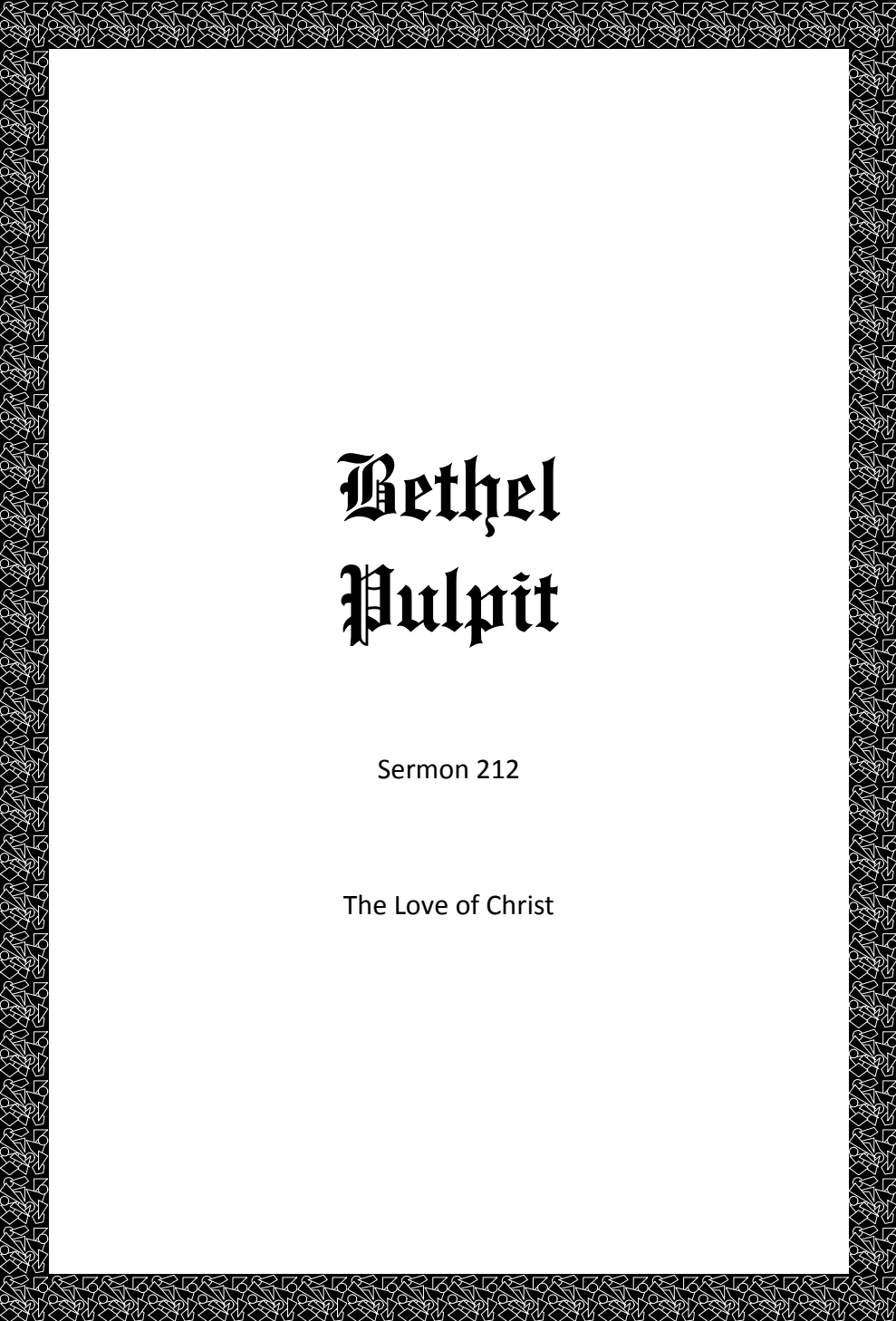




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 212

The Love of Christ

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 19th January, 2003**

Text: *"That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge"* (Ephesians 3. 17-19).

There is no sweeter subject than the love of Christ to sinners, that Christ, the eternal Son of God, should ever love lost, ruined guilty sinners, and love them so much that He left heaven for earth that He might die for them. The love of Christ to sinners! This was the apostle's great desire for those he loved at Ephesus. They were sinners who had been called by God's grace, quickened into life, saved through the mercy of God, and the apostle's great desire was that they might know this love. And surely that should be our desire, our chief prayer for ourselves, that we might not be strangers to the love of Christ; that we might know it personally and savingly; that the Holy Spirit might take of this love, show it to us, shed it abroad in our hearts; that we might know Christ the Saviour Himself, in all the wonders of His love, His love in Gethsemane, His love on the cross, His love eternally the same in heaven, His love to us personally in teaching our need, His love in answering that need. And then that blessed truth that there is no separation from it. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." "They who once His kindness prove, find it everlasting love."

Now that is the great point the apostle is pressing here. It *is* the great point, isn't it? There are surely some of us here can look back to that time when we first viewed the Saviour by faith, when we first felt His love in our hearts, when He was made precious to us, when we loved Him in return, when we could truly answer the great question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Those days when our hearts were made soft. Well, beloved friends, one thing is clear:

"If *once* the love of Christ we feel
Upon our hearts impressed,
The mark of that celestial seal
Can never be erased."

The love of Christ to sinners!

What beautiful words those were we read this evening in that well-known chapter, Romans 8. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” It is not a question; it is a challenge. Let hell, let Satan do their worst, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Do you know it? Do you possess it? You can never be separated from it. This chapter begins *no condemnation*. It ends, *no separation*, and written across the whole of the chapter in letters of gold, *everlasting love*. But, “Who shall separate us?” And he starts on all these things that might: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword – terrible things. We can read them, read them easily. Famine, it is a dreadful thing. The sword, it is a terrible thing. Now there can be all kinds of things, dreadful things. What do you read almost every day from Africa? Either about persecution, or about famine, or about sword. Now can they separate? He says, “Nay.” Such a simple, resounding answer: “Nay.”

And then the conclusion: “I am persuaded.” It is a lovely expression; it is a favourite of Paul’s. All these things: “Neither death.” Death is the great separator. That cannot do it. “Nor life.” To the Lord’s dear people, life is sometimes more frightening than death. That can never do it. You wonder why he suggests angels. It seems he is going to mention every creature. “Nor principalities, nor powers.” What about this: “Nor things present”? Well that includes everything in your little lives tonight. You can fill your piece in there. Put the worst in you have tonight. “Nor things present.” That cannot separate. “Nor things to come.” O aren’t many of God’s people fearful of the future, tomorrow, next week, the unknown way? How can I live until the end? As they used to say at Bethel, How can I live until I die? “Nor things to come.” I think I have told you about the godly man I knew in the Midlands. The Lord blessed him when he was young, but one day Satan harassed him that he might go on in a good profession for fifty, sixty, even seventy years, and something might come and he might make shipwreck at last. He said, “Satan, it is written, ‘Nor things to come.’” “Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature” – it is like those wills that put in a phrase to cover any contingency – “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Tell me, have you ever felt it? Was there ever one occasion in your life when you felt the Lord had loved you with an everlasting love and therefore with lovingkindness He had drawn you? Have you ever listened to the preaching and felt anything of the love of Christ?

“He left His radiant throne on high!
Left the bright realms of bliss!
And came to earth to bleed and die!
Was ever love like this?”

Have you ever felt the love of Christ under the preaching, or in prayer, or when you are at home, or when you are reading? Have you ever felt your hard heart softened, your hard heart melted?

What about this: “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: *therefore* with lovingkindness have I drawn thee”? This poor soul says, But how do I know I am loved with an everlasting love? You know what the Lord said to Moses: “Take it by the tail.” Sometimes if you take a text from the opposite end of it, you can find an entrance where you could not at the beginning. “Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” Have you ever felt the attraction of God’s lovingkindness? Has it ever drawn you away from the world, drawn you away from your idols, drawn you away from your past life, drawn you to the people of God, drawn you to God’s holy Word, drawn you to the blood-stained mercyseat, drawn you to the house of God, drawn you to the gospel, drawn you to the Saviour Himself? What does this *therefore* mean? Well, if you know these drawings, it is because the Lord has loved you *and* it is with an everlasting love. He puts a *yea* at the beginning because He knows blind unbelief in league with Satan will say, No, it is not for you. Yea, I have loved such a sinner as thee, and with an everlasting love. You did not deserve it; you never will, you never can. It is sovereign, rich and free. “I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” And the proof of it. Surely some of you can put your hand on your heart tonight and lay claim to the proof: “Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” These precious drawings of lovingkindness! Let me mention one of these drawings. A certain woman had an issue of blood. O what a case! It was so deep-seated, so deep-rooted. It left her exhausted, weak, unclean. “Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” What was that drawing? Well, she pressed through the crowd with her case, if only she might find the Saviour, if only she might touch the hem of His garment. That was the drawing. It pulled her right through the crowd, despite all her fear and unbelief and weakness and all her uncleanness. “Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love.”

Well then, beloved friends, this is the love of Christ to sinners. No sweeter theme! And Paul longed that his friends, his hearers, the church at Ephesus, might know that love. Surely we should pray for it for ourselves. Paul prayed for it for his friends at Ephesus and for those who would read his Epistle to the end of time. Then surely we should pray it for ourselves. He prayed that they might know this love and that they might be established in it. “That ye, being rooted and grounded in love.” Now that is the establishing. We do not see so much of it. May we pray for it. May we have it at Bethel. May we have it personally. “Of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest Himself shall establish her.” Now this is a sinner, a sinner born again of the Spirit, a sinner blessed with grace, and he is being established, graciously established by God. He is not going to be established in his love to Christ; he is being established in Christ’s love.

How does he explain this establishment? Well, in two ways: like a plant being planted and like a building being builded. Rooted in the love of Christ – that is the planting. Builded on the love of Christ – that is the building. O beloved friends, do seek a religion with good roots. You cannot see the roots; they are out of sight. You cannot hear them. But they are vital. They go right down into the ground, and they lay hold, and they receive all that living plant needs from the soil, and they hold it firmly fixed. That is establishing, and it is for you and me to be established in the love of Christ, for the roots of vital godliness, the roots of the Spirit’s work, the roots of faith in our heart, to reach out and receive all we need. O beloved friends, cling and cleave to the love of Christ. You will not falter there. That is the place of establishment. It is being rooted in love. O to be built there!

“O God, my heart is fixed.” Perhaps you say, I do not think mine is; it feels anything but fixed. Well, “My heart is fixed,” and I will tell you where it is fixed. “If ever my poor soul be saved, ’tis Christ must be the Way.” That is where my heart is fixed. Is your heart fixed there? “That ye, being rooted and grounded in love.” To be rooted and to be grounded, like a living stone, firmly laid in the building, resting solid on the foundation, cemented on the foundation. What is the foundation? The love of Christ to sinners, all your weight to be there. It will not let you go. It will not give way. To be fixed there. “Fixed on this ground will I remain.” To be cemented there. So this being established in the love of Christ to sinners! It is free love, sovereign love, undeserved love,

unchanging love, love to the chief of sinners, love which saves, love which redeems, love which brings to heaven, love which will never leave you nor forsake you. To be established in it, to be rooted in it, to be grounded in it.

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love” – the love of Christ to sinners – “may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love Christ, which passeth knowledge.” Now at first this passage seems to abound with contradictions, doesn’t it? You have to know something, but it passes knowledge. You have to comprehend something, but it is incomprehensible. You have to measure something, but it is immeasurable. How do we understand it? The simplest way I can see it, and whether it is a good explanation and illustration I do not know, but the simplest way I see it is like this. You can have a tiny child, only three or four years old, and he knows how to put the light on. All he knows is it is dark and he presses the switch and it gives light. Does he understand or does he not? Well, he does not understand electricity; he does not understand the mechanics of it; but he understands when it is dark and when it is light. He understands that when the light goes on, it makes the difference. “To know the love of Christ,” and yet the love of Christ passes knowledge. We are just like the little child. We know the love of Christ, yet we do not know it. We comprehend it. We do comprehend the love of Christ – we dare not deny it – yet it is incomprehensible. And measure it. Well, like a tiny child on the edge of the ocean with a bucket we do measure it, yet it is immeasurable.

O “to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” I think also the apostle is making this point, that if we do know the love of Christ it is not very much we know, and we need to know more, and we should seek to know more. “To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” There are some subjects that a person can learn almost all there is, know it all. I mean, if you were studying history, you could take a period like Roman Britain and define when it started, 55 B.C., define when it ended, 410 A.D., and you can work out it lasted 465 years and you can understand and comprehend the whole lot of it. With some subjects, you do not know one thousandth of the subject you begin to study. Well, the love of Christ is like that. The people of God to all eternity in heaven will be basking their souls in the everlasting love of Christ to sinners, and yet they will never completely comprehend it, never completely understand it.

O but what a prayer! May you and I pray it, that we “may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” It is to know it by experience, not just to know it as a theory, a philosophy, or a doctrine. It is to know it by experience. When I was a boy in my spiritual beginnings there was one verse of a hymn which really captivated me and I have liked it ever since:

“It passeth knowledge, that dear love of Thine,
My Saviour, Jesus, yet this soul of mine
Would of Thy love, in all its breadth and length,
Its height and depth, its everlasting strength,
Know more and more.”

“To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” And to “be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ.” It is by faith. It is as led by the Spirit of God. It is like Ezekiel 47, those waters which flowed from the sanctuary, living waters. They brought life. That is the love of Christ to sinners. It flows from under the sanctuary and brings life wherever it goes. The prophet said he stepped into it and it was up to his ankles, and he went on and it was up to his knees, and soon up to his loins. Soon his claim was this: it was “waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.” That is the love of Christ in all its fulness: “waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over.”

“I stood amazed, and wondered when,
Or why, this ocean rose,
That wafts salvation down to men,
His traitors and His foes.”

I will tell you another verse I used to love when I was a boy:

“Here the vast seas of grace,
Love, peace, and mercy flow,
That all the blood-bought race
Of men, or angels know:
O sacred deep, without a shore,
Who shall thy limits e’er explore?”

“To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” What then? “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in

love” – in the love of Christ – “walk in love, as Christ also have loved us, and hath given Himself for us.” O to know the love of Christ, and then to walk in that love, “to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,” to know its powerful, sweet constraining, to walk in the ways of the Lord, to leave the world, to take up your cross, to follow the Saviour. “This is the way, walk ye in it.” “If ye love Me, keep My commandments.” “To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”

And, “to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ.” What shall we say about what William Huntington called the *dimensions of Christ’s love*? I take it really the point here is it is completely immeasurable. It is the immensity of the love of Christ to sinners. You feel the immensity of your sin and guilt. There is a greater immensity here in the love of Christ. O that “bottomless abyss, my sins are swallowed up in thee.” When we read in the minor prophets that almighty God will cast all the sins of His people into the depths of the sea and they can never be seen again for ever, *these* are the depths of the sea: “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of “the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” So it is the immensity. It is an ocean without brink, or brim, or shore, that can never be measured. O “to comprehend with all saints.” What a scene for comprehension! May the Holy Spirit lead you into it and may you feel your interest in it. You are sealed up in it; you are overwhelmed by it. Well, you will be eternally.

O “to comprehend ... the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.” Let me with the Lord’s help just try to say one or two things on each of these four dimensions. “That ye ... may be able to comprehend ... what is the *breadth*.” O the amazing breadth of the love of Christ! Your doctrinal opponents will say, “*You* do not think it is very broad. *We* think it is as broad as the whole of Adam’s fallen race, and *you* make it narrow, as narrow as the elect.” Well, beloved friends, we do not give the Arminians any quarter there. What kind of love is it if the Lord Jesus loves with that ineffable love every single member of the human race and lets millions of them perish – if He loved Cain as much as Abel, if He loved Judas Iscariot as much as Peter? What kind of love is that? A helpless love, a weak love, not a very faithful love. I mean, to put it in very simple terms, what does that new bride feel if she knows her new bridegroom loves her so dearly, and yet if he tells her he loves every other girl equally as much? What kind of a love is that?

Beloved friends, we comprehend the breadth, the glorious breadth of the love of Christ. It reaches to every sinner saved by grace. It extends to “the vilest sinner out of hell, who lives to feel his need.” It reaches to the east and to the west and to the north and to the south, wherever there is a sinner ready to perish. It reaches out as far as a dying thief, as far as a guilty Manasseh. O there is a wonderful breadth in the love of Christ to sinners. We can sing the little children’s hymn, “Wide, wide as the ocean, high as the heaven above.” O, “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy, like the wideness of the sea.” This glorious breadth of the love of Christ to the vilest of sinners, to the chief of sinners.

What is the breadth, and what is the length? That ye may be able to comprehend what is the *length* of the love of Christ. Well, it is from eternity to eternity. That is its length. It had no beginning; it can never end. That is its length. As old John Warburton said, the cords of everlasting love are secured in eternity at both ends. “From everlasting to everlasting.” O the length of the love of Christ! “They who once His kindness prove, find it everlasting love.”

O but what about this: what is the *depth*? Who can fathom the depth of the love of Christ? How deep did the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ stoop in His matchless love? From heaven to earth. And how deep did He sink in the Garden of Gethsemane? O to what awful depths did the love of Christ go at Calvary? Sweating as it were great drops of blood in the garden falling to the ground. “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Now what a depth is there! “None can penetrate through thee, doleful, dark Gethsemane.” O the depth of the love of Christ to sinners! And what a depth in the judgment hall, and what a depth on the cross, when all the sins of His people were laid on Him, and when His Father hid His face, and when He was smitten with the sword of divine justice, and when divine wrath in all its fulness fell upon Him. O the depth of the love of Christ, when you see it like this:

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly;
But love to sinners fills His heart,
And makes Him choose to die.”

“Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” Now that is the depth, the amazing depth of the love of Christ to

sinner. O that you and I might know it, and comprehend it, and be rooted in it, and be grounded in it, and come to this:

“Here’s my claim, and here alone;
None a Saviour more can need;
Deeds of righteousness I’ve none;
No, not one good work to plead;
Not a glimpse of hope for me,
Only in Gethsemane.”

And in all that flowed from Gethsemane, and on the road to the cross, and then when the dear, dying Saviour still in love cried with a loud voice, “It is finished.” And now in heaven, risen, exalted, glorified, He still loves with that ineffable love. “What is the breadth, and length, and depth.”

And what is the *height*? Well, it is amazing love. It is stupendous love. In a word, it is divine love. It is love that is worthy of a God. Now was ever love like this? The breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ. It is this: to know it, to comprehend it, to feel it, to receive it, to experience it. O beloved friends, pray for it, seek it, ask for it. Do not be satisfied until you know it. Do not be satisfied until you possess it.

Let me say one thing. If you know the love of Christ, if you feel it, if you possess it, the time will come when you do not feel it just the same, you do not feel the power, the warmth, the preciousness. But never forget that the love of Christ is eternally the same. It was even with David in the depths of his sin. “*Our love* through many changes goes, *His love* no variation knows.” O “to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”