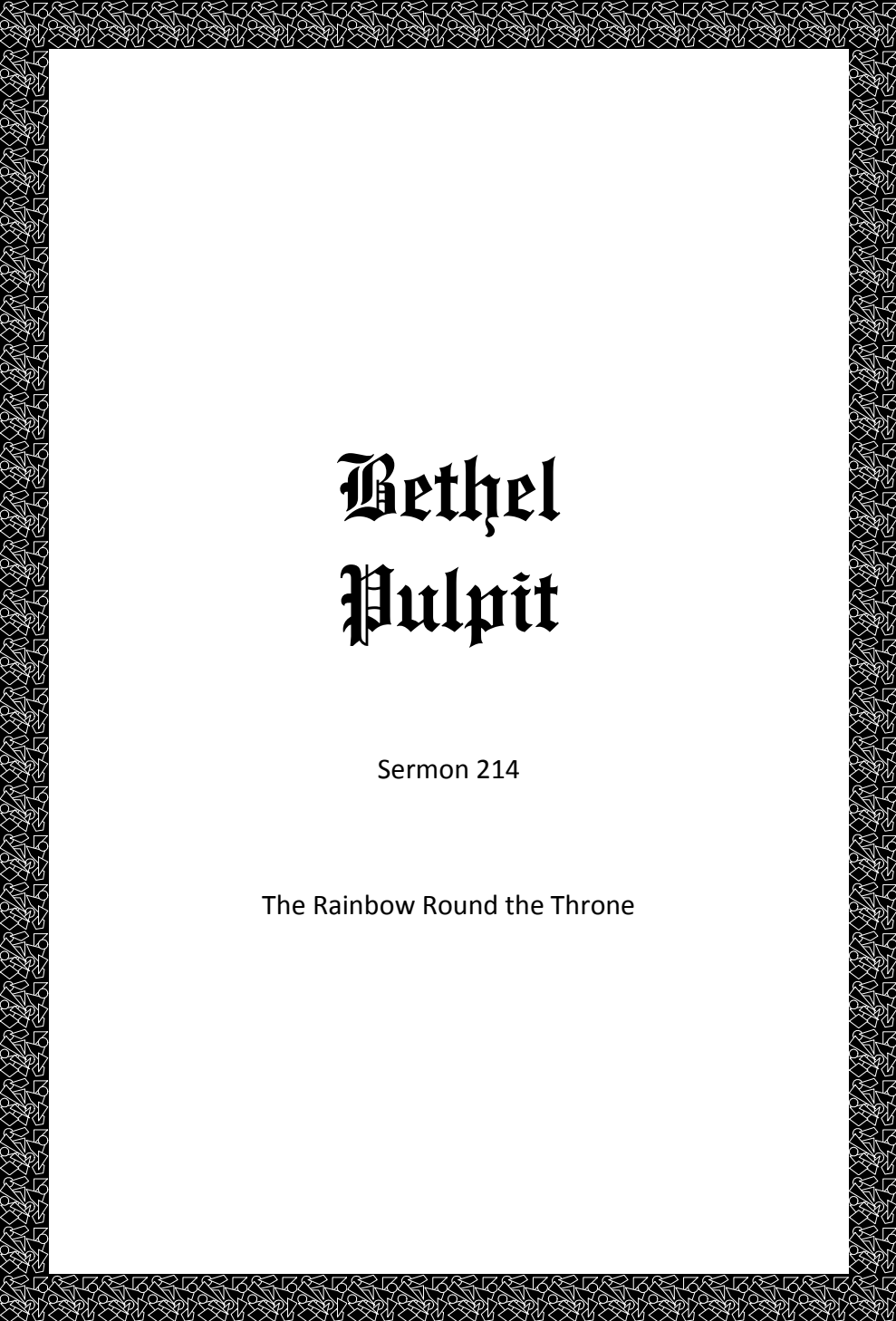




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 214

The Rainbow Round the Throne

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 17th November, 2002**

Text: *"And there was a rainbow round about the throne" (Revelation 4. 3).*

The Book of the Revelation is a most solemn, mysterious, remarkable Book. Much of it is hard to understand, and the best of men have made mistakes trying to be wiser above what was written. But one thing is very clear, that the subject matter of the Book of the Revelation is the conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan, and the clear teaching of the Book is this: that good *will* triumph over evil, that Christ *will* triumph over Satan.

Now there are so many things that are to follow throughout this Book: the conflict, the awful struggle, the battle, usually put before us in very unusual, striking, picture language, symbolic language. If you try to make every detail mean something, you end in confusion. For instance, the beginning of this verse, God to look at is like a jasper or sardine stone; if you try to deal with everything crudely and carnally, you end in confusion. What about the Lamb of God with seven eyes and seven horns? You cannot understand it crudely. Obviously it means the dear Lamb of God possessing the perfection of strength, the perfection of wisdom, the seven eyes, the seven horns. But before the canon of Scripture is closed for ever, Almighty God in love and mercy to His beloved church gives this revelation that, though to the end of time there will be trouble and conflict, the opposition of the world and Satan, yet the cause of God and Christ is victorious, and that all the people of God shall triumph "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." So do not be afraid of the Book because there are many things you do not understand in it. May you by faith see the clear teaching: that you will have the trouble, the problems, the difficulty, the conflict, but the victory is promised, the victory is sure.

When this revelation was first given, it was at a time when the church of God was enduring most awful persecution for Jesus' sake; yet this clear message that their Lord still lived, still reigned, that He was still with them, that He would bring them safely through, that at last they would be more than conquerors through Him that loved them. Well, of course, many, many, many more things could be said, but that is just a very brief,

rough introduction to the Book of the Revelation, what is going to happen right down to the end of time, the struggle and the conflict and the victory sure.

But before the actual revelation begins, before there is the opening of the seals and the pouring out of the vials, John, the beloved apostle, is privileged to have a view right into heaven and he sees the eternal throne. Let us be clear, that is where it all begins. You have the opening chapter, Christ in all His glory walking in the midst of the churches. What a mercy that is! Then the seven letters to the seven churches, the warnings, the encouragements – how we need them today! But before anything else a voice is heard from heaven: “And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.” Really that is the foundation of it all, that there is a throne in heaven, and there is One who sits upon it. The One who sits upon it is Almighty God, and it is not a precarious throne. It will never be empty. It will never be vacated. It stands for ever. That is where it all begins, with this glorious throne, and it will be a wonderful thing if you and I this morning, not in a vision like John had, but if we can look to heaven and see there a throne and One that sits upon it. He *is* in control, and He *is* almighty, and our times are in His hands, and, “All must come, and last, and end, as shall please our heavenly Friend.” “Our life’s minutest circumstance is subject to His eye,” and He makes “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” If only we had that view by faith this morning. If only we really believed what we do believe, that there is a throne in heaven and One who sits upon it, that God is in control. He is still in control.

O the terrible things happening in England at present, and the terrible things happening in the world, and you wonder whatever will happen next, and then you have all the things in your own lives, and perhaps you wonder where the scene will end. O but to look away from these things, to look upward and see there is a throne in heaven and One who sits upon the throne. “The Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” “The government shall be upon His shoulder.” The great things, the small things, all that is happening with the nations of the earth, all that is happening in the Middle East, all that is happening in the United States, all the confusion in our own country, what people would call the important things. And then as the Lord Jesus put it, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Do you believe it?

“There’s not a particle of dust can fly,
A sparrow fall, or cloud obscure the sky,
A moth be crushed, or leaf fall from a tree,
But in submission to His wise decree.”

O the greatness of God, the sovereignty of God! “Keep silence all created things, and wait your Maker’s nod.” The majesty of God, the glory of God, His eternal throne, from everlasting to everlasting. “He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?”

So, “Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.” Now it is a terrible throne, you know. It is an awesome throne. It is a majestic throne. From it one day God will judge all the nations, and, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” Ah, but John said, “There was a rainbow round about the throne,” and John knew what that meant. Just one little point in passing. The imagery, the symbolism in the Book of Revelation is steeped in the Old Testament, especially the Book of Genesis. When you come to the last chapter, you have the garden, the garden of Paradise contrasted with the Garden of Eden. You have the river flowing. You have the tree of life. And the beloved apostle well knew what the rainbow meant – the blessed token of God’s mercy, God’s faithfulness, God’s covenant of grace. Now John knew what it meant and you and I know what it means. The bow in the cloud, the rainbow in the sky. Years ago the old godly people used to love to see the rainbow. They used to delight in it. I remember them saying, “The faithfulness of God.” O but this wonderful token, this wonderful emblem.

When the world had been drowned in the days of Noah, God promised in mercy He would never drown the world again, and how faithful He has been to that ancient promise, despite all the wickedness of the human race, and He put this token in the sky. “I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth.” “And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it.” “And I will remember My covenant.” It is that blessed token. The darker the cloud, the brighter the bow. And John with awe and wonder and reverence saw the eternal throne of God in heaven. O but the blessedness of it, the wonder of it! “There was a rainbow round about the throne.” I take that to mean that God in all His dealings with His people is completely bound by

His own covenant of grace, and all the mercy and the faithfulness and the peace and the reconciliation, with His promise. When the Lord put that bow in the cloud, He made that covenant, that blessed covenant. He is faithful to it. O but it was a token of reconciliation. He would not drown the world again. It was a token of this wonderful mercy to undeserving sinners. It was a token, an emblem of peace. O but to think that the eternal throne of God is completely encircled by the rainbow!

“There was a rainbow round about the throne.” Not just that he saw it, not just that it was shining over the throne – it was completely round about it, it completely encircled it. And do you know the reason, beloved friends, why there is a rainbow round about the throne? What is the reason why this awesome throne, this holy throne, this righteous throne, what is the reason why this throne is completely encircled by a rainbow? What is the reason why there is a rainbow completely round about it? You know the answer, don’t you? There is the rainbow round about the throne because the Lamb is in the midst of the throne. Now hold that fast this morning. The reason there is a rainbow round about the throne is because there is a Lamb in the midst of the throne. If there had never been a Lamb in the midst of the throne, if there had never been a Lamb slain, if there had never been precious blood shed, there would never have been that rainbow surrounding the throne. It would have been what it will be to the wicked in the great day: that awful throne, that great white throne, that throne of everlasting judgment, that throne from which the eternal sentence will be pronounced, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

O but to see the Lamb in the midst of the throne! The Word of God tells us that “justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne.” Justice and judgment. What comfort is there here for a guilty sinner who trembles before the throne, if its habitation is justice and judgment? But there is a Lamb in the midst of the throne, and so it is justice satisfied in His precious blood, and it is judgment that has once fallen from the throne upon the Lamb that it might never fall upon the sinner who shelters in the blood of the Lamb. That is the reason, the only reason, why there is a rainbow round about the throne. That is the only reason why it is a mercy seat, because it is sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb. “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat.” That is the only reason why it is a throne of grace to a poor, penitent, venturing sinner, because there is a Lamb in the midst of the throne. “Let us

therefore.” Why? Because the Lamb once slain, the Lamb exalted, the sin-atonement Lamb is in the midst of the throne. “Let us *therefore* come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” All these things which are signified, which are promised in that glorious rainbow that surrounds the throne. O may you see the bright colours of the rainbow round the throne of God in heaven this morning, and may some of you aspire so high with Joseph Hart: “Those lively colours shine to show that heaven is surely mine.”

“There was a rainbow round about the throne.” It is because there is a Lamb in the midst of the throne. O but John says, “I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne ... stood a Lamb as it had been slain.”

“Jesus, the King of Glory, reigns
On Zion’s heavenly hill;
Looks like a lamb that has been slain,
And wears His priesthood still.”

I take that expression, “a Lamb as it had been slain,” to mean that the efficacy of the precious blood of the Lamb is the same this morning as when He hung bleeding, dying on the cross. “A Lamb as it had been slain.”

“Dear dying Lamb! Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.”

“There was a rainbow round about the throne.” “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne ... stood a Lamb as it had been slain.” Now there is something round about the throne beside the rainbow. If you read on, you will find that there was a multitude that no man could number round about the throne. And the reason they were round about the throne is because the rainbow was round about the throne. And the reason the rainbow was round about the throne is because the Lamb is in the midst of the throne. That is why that great multitude who were round about the throne all sang the same song, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,” “and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood.”

“There was a rainbow round about the throne.” God in all His dealings with His beloved people deals according to that covenant of grace of which the rainbow is the emblem. “He will ever be mindful of His

covenant.” When He chastises you, when He blesses you, “He will ever be mindful of His covenant.” O but all those things which the rainbow symbolises! That wonderful peace made between God and sinners in Christ; that reconciliation by the blood of the cross; that mercy so freely given. “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” And then the wonderful faithfulness of God.

“There was a rainbow round about the throne.” That wonderful chapter Isaiah 54 is full of precious, covenant promises. You know to whom they are made, don’t you? Those who are “afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.” Now perhaps there are some of you here this morning and you have your problems, troubles, sorrows, bereavements, ill health, all kinds of things. Well, these precious promises of Isaiah 54 are all bound up with the rainbow, all bound up with the covenant of grace, and they are all made to the “afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.”

Not to labour this point unduly, but in Isaiah 54, when the Lord is speaking about the fair colours, “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours,” it seems clear He is referring here to this rainbow, which was revealed to Noah after the flood, still there for succeeding generations, mentioned in the vision Ezekiel had in chapter 1, and then here, the “rainbow round about the throne.” This is how Isaiah takes it up in chapter 54. This is the rainbow and all that it symbolises and is an emblem of. There are precious promises that come from the throne, because it is completely encircled by the rainbow. But, “This is as the waters of Noah unto Me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.” That wonderful, new covenant promise is confirmed with the solemn oath of God. “So have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.” Now then this is it: “For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed.” They did so literally when the world was drowned in the days of Noah; the tops of the mountains could not be seen. The mountains *did* depart and the hills *were* removed. And the awful day when there will be the burning up of all things, then the mountains will depart and the hills be removed, not by flood, but by fire. But don’t you find it in your own little lives? Those mountains, those hills, those solid things, you thought they would always be there. You say, I never thought I would lose my home. I

never thought I would lose my health. I never thought I would lose my loved ones. “The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed.” This is the rainbow round the throne: “But My kindness shall not depart from thee.” “His lovingkindness changes not.” “My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.” Now the rainbow round about the throne, and this is the glorious promise, all bound up with the rainbow, which comes from the throne. “There was a rainbow round about the throne,” the token of mercy, faithfulness, reconciliation, peace, everything embraced in the covenant of grace.

But what is the other thing? It is not just that the rainbow is to be seen round the throne of God in heaven, but God has decreed that the rainbow is to be seen in the cloud. It is to be seen in that cloud, in that dark cloud. “When I bring a cloud over the earth ... the bow shall be seen in the cloud: and I will remember My covenant.” Do not forget the rainbow round the eternal throne of God in heaven, and also the rainbow in the cloud, every cloud that comes in the life of a believer. Now do not forget this: “When *I bring* a cloud over the earth.” They do not come by chance. “Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds?” There cannot come a cloud in your life, there cannot come a cloud in your sky, apart from divine permission. “When *I bring* a cloud over the earth ... the bow shall be seen in the cloud.” Well, beloved friends, what is your cloud this morning? May you by faith see the bow in the cloud, but if you do not see it, the Lord does. He says, “I will look upon it.” If you want to view it in its fullest gospel sense it is this: the eternal Father eternally looking on His beloved Son and looking on His people in Christ.

I know what some of you say and feel, that the greatest and the most awful cloud, the blackest cloud is that cloud of your sin and your guilt and your iniquity and all your eternal concerns. You say that is your black cloud. Well, may you see the bow in the cloud. But what is the bow in the cloud? He says, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins.” That is the rainbow round the throne. That is the rainbow in Christ. That is the rainbow in your cloud. But some of you will say, What about the word, “When I bring a cloud over the earth”? You say, It is my sins that bring the cloud. The Lord in no way is the author of sin in bringing a cloud over the earth, but the Lord is the Author of the gracious work in a sinner’s heart, making him feel the

guilt of his sin and repent of it and confess it and look for mercy. In that sense, the Lord brings the cloud over the earth. Has the Lord ever brought a cloud in your conscience? Everything was bright. You were happy. But there is a cloud now. You have to die. You have to meet your Maker. “When I bring a cloud over the earth ... the bow shall be seen in the cloud ... and I will look upon it.” The Father ever beholds His own beloved Son and His atoning sacrifice. He is ever before His face. But may you and I this morning by precious faith behold Him. He says, “I will remember My covenant.” And He remembers all those who are bound up in His covenant.

“There was a rainbow round about the throne.” But what is your thick, dark cloud? Is it something in providence? Is it your sadness, your sorrow, your bereavement, your loneliness, your old age, your affliction, the trouble you are in, your health, the things in your family, your circumstances, your relationships with other people? Perhaps like old Jacob you are saying, “All these things are against me.” But Jacob, there is still a rainbow in your cloud, and Jacob saw it and rejoiced in it. He said, “Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.” And perhaps some of you feel that all these things are against you. That glorious rainbow – what it is the emblem of, what it is a token of, the precious things it signifies – round about the throne and in the promise. But when you see it in the cloud – “It shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud.”

Well, beloved friends, may you see it, however dark your cloud is this morning. That beautiful hymn you sang, “How firm a foundation,” really deals with two things: the many clouds that the Lord’s people have, but secondly, the bow in the promise that is seen in every one of them. “What more can He say than to you He has said, you who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?” “The bow shall be seen in the cloud ... and I will look upon it.” That is where the eyes of a holy God and a guilty sinner meet, when *you* look to the bow in the cloud and *the Lord* looks to the bow in the cloud. It is an easy thing to see the cloud. You can see the cloud, the dark cloud, the gloomy cloud with your natural eyes. It needs precious, God-given faith to see the bow. May you see it.

“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread

Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.”

There is a bow in the cloud. “I will look upon it.” “And I will remember My covenant.” You know, beloved friends, covenant truth, covenant reality, covenant salvation was once the glory of the pulpits of our land, church and chapel alike, the glory of the gospel ministry. We do not see so much of it, hear so much of it today. O but to hold fast to covenant truth. It is all safe, all secure. It is outside you. It is between the Father and the Son. It is bound up in Christ. Now hold it fast.

If ever a man had a dark cloud, it was David as he came toward the end of his life. It seemed everything was wrong, without, within, but by faith he saw the bow in the cloud and he could die in peace. “Although my house be not so with God” – that wicked Amnon, that wicked Absalom, all the sorrow in his own family, the sins in his kingdom, his own vile sin. “My house be not so with God; yet.” Now this is faith and this is the bow: “Yet He hath made with me” – even though the cloud be dark, even despite all my sin – “He hath made with me” – even me – “an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.” And how brightly that bow shone in David’s cloud so that with all his circumstances and all his sins he could die in peace!

O beloved friends, may we have faith this morning to view the rainbow in the cloud, the rainbow in the promise, the rainbow round about the throne.