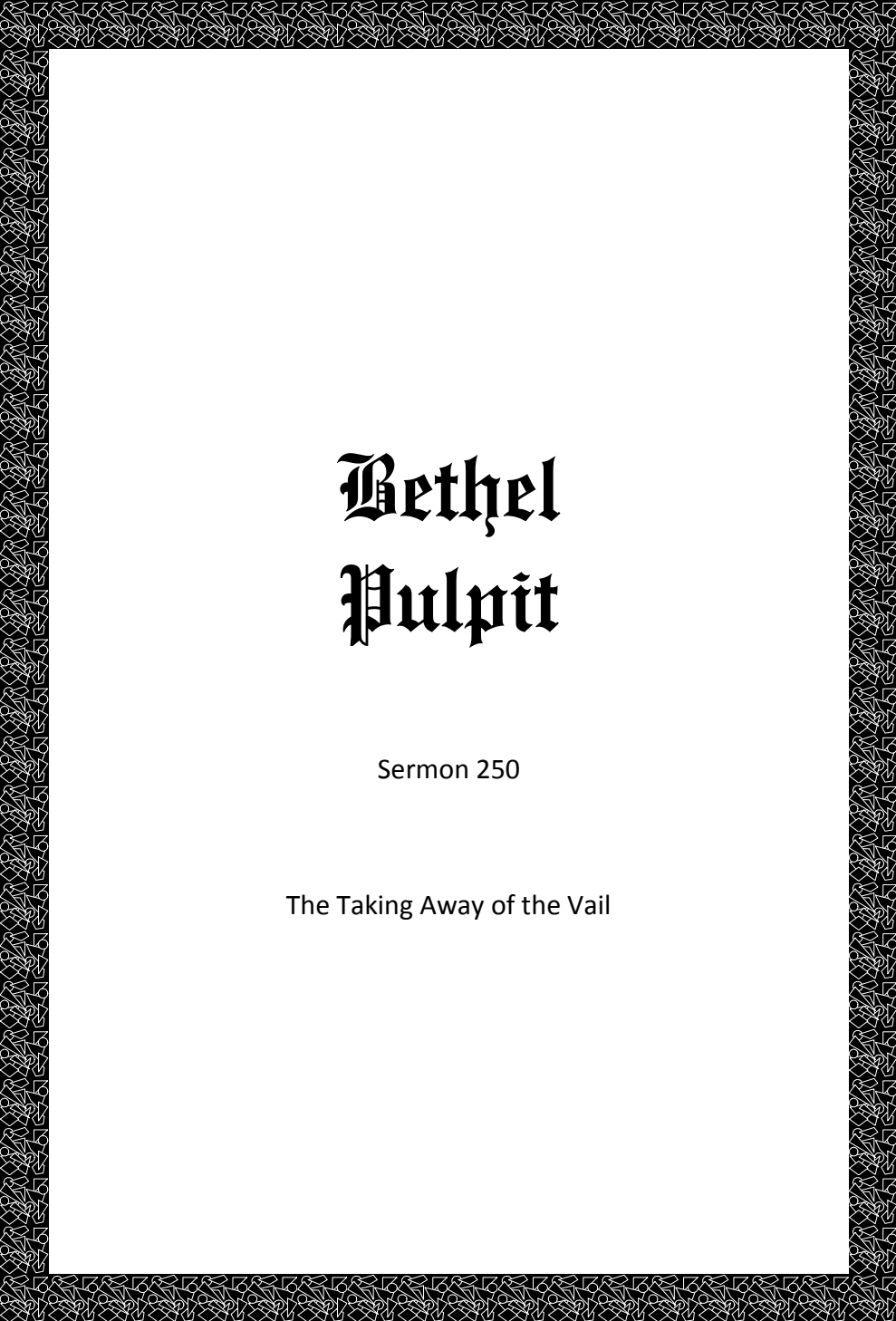




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 250

The Taking Away of the Vail

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 12th February, 2006**

Text: *“But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away” (2 Corinthians 3. 14-16).*

Paul is speaking of the law and the gospel, comparing them, contrasting them. Yet he says there is a glory in them both, a glory in the law, a glory in the gospel, but the glory in the gospel is greater. Now, beloved friends, there is a glory in the law, the law of works, the ten commandments. Do this and thou shalt live; do it not, and thou shalt surely die. Now there is a glory in it. It is the glory of God's commandment. It is the glory of God's holiness. It is the glory of God's justice. O there is a glory in the law, but it is a glory to make you tremble. If you read through some of those curses that proceed from Ebal's mount, it is enough to make you tremble.

“What curses does the law denounce
Against the man who fails but once!
But in the gospel Christ appears
Pardoning the guilt of endless years.”

Blessed be God, there is a greater glory in the gospel than there is in the law.

And then the ceremonial law – there is a glory in it, a shadow of good things to come – the Old Testament priesthood, the services of the sanctuary, the holy ark, the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. There was a glory in it because God instituted it and God was present in it. O but that greater glory in the gospel: to see Christ in all His glory fulfilling the law, moral and ceremonial, obeying the law of works, going to the cross, suffering, bleeding, dying, that divine justice might be satisfied. And then Christ going to the cross, our great High Priest; all the Old Testament types and ceremonies and shadows are fulfilled. This is the apostle's point: there is a greater glory in the gospel than there ever was under the law.

“For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was

made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.” And then the apostle makes a very interesting and remarkable and telling reference to Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai. He had been in the immediate presence of God. He had been holding communion with God, and his face shone – the reflection of God’s glory. His face shone, so much so that when he spoke to the people they could not look on him because of the glory that was shining from his face. So he had to put a vail,¹ a covering, over his face whilst he spoke to them. When he went into the presence of God he took away the covering, the vail, but when he came out again to speak to the people there was that glory of God reflected in his face. He covered it with a covering, with a vail.

And Paul takes this up in a very interesting and remarkable way, in two ways really. That is, the religion of the Old Testament had a vail over it. They could not see clearly. There was a glory in it, but they had a vail over it. The Old Testament was not a clear dispensation. Christ had not yet come. The atonement had not yet been made. He had not yet cried with a loud voice, “It is finished,” and there was a vail over it all. “Which vail is done away in Christ.” And because there was this vail, “the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished.” They had the law, but they could not see the purpose of it. They had the law of works, but they could not see the end of it, to bring them as guilty sinners to a Saviour. They had the ceremonial law. They could not see the end of it, the coming of Christ, the coming of Messiah.

“The children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: but their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament.” Now the second vail was the vail upon Israel’s heart and the vail over Israel’s eyes. And so they were blinded, and Paul says it remaineth “until this day.” And we say concerning the Jewish nation even now, it remaineth to this day. There is a vail over Israel’s eyes. There is a vail over Israel’s heart. When Messiah came, because of the vail, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.”

* The scriptural spelling of the word “vail” is used throughout the sermon.

And it is so today, that the Jewish nation for the most part still has the veil over its eyes and over its heart, and it cannot see that the Lord Jesus is the promised Saviour, the promised Messiah. There never will be another. Their minds are blinded.

“For until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament.” When the Jews read the Old Testament, you would think when they read some of those beautiful promises, they would say, Surely this was fulfilled in Jesus! But there is a veil over their eyes. When they read Isaiah 53, the account of the crucifixion, you would think immediately they would say, This was fulfilled at Calvary! “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.” You would think it was plain. So many places in the Old Testament. But they cannot see it because the veil is over their eyes; the veil is over their hearts.

“Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.” One day a great part of Israel through the Spirit of God will turn to the Lord, acknowledge the true Messiah, and it will be on this ground and this ground only, that the Holy Spirit has taken the veil away. “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me” – their rejected Messiah – “whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him.”

“Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.” Now this *it*, some say, the Jewish nation; some say an individual person in the Jewish nation; some say any sinner saved by grace. I believe, beloved friends, that this is what it means to you and me tonight, because by nature we are no different from the Jewish nation. By nature we have this veil, this veil of darkness, this veil of obscurity, this veil of unbelief over our hearts and over our eyes. I just pause here. You say, Why does it sometimes say, the veil over our eyes, and sometimes, the veil over our hearts? Well, it is the veil over our eyes so that we cannot see, but not our natural eyes, not just the eyes in our head; but the eyes of our understanding, the eyes of our soul, and that is why the Word of God speaks, not only of this veil being over our eyes, but this veil being over our hearts.

Now beloved friends, the subject this evening is vital, the taking away of the veil, and if you and I never have the veil taken away from our hearts, where Jesus is, there we can never come. A person can sit in chapel from the day of his birth to the day of his death and if the veil is never taken away from his heart, then hell is his eternal portion.

The apostle here says, "Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech." The vital thing for you and for me before we die is to have this veil of ignorance, this veil of darkness, this veil of unbelief removed from our hearts, because apart from the taking away of the veil we can see nothing aright, we can see nothing spiritual. I remember my old grandfather when he was ninety-one, not long before he died said one day, "Something has come back to my mind my mother said to me when I was a little boy. I didn't understand it." He said, "One day my mother said to me, 'Did you know I was born with a veil over my eyes?'" He said, "I said, 'Mother, I don't know what you mean.'" He said, "I never thought of it again until now. But I know now what she was speaking about." You and I were born with that veil over our hearts and over our eyes, born in sin, shapen in iniquity. We need that veil to be taken away. "Which veil is done away in Christ," which means that Christ is the only One who can take the veil away and Christ does it by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, beloved friends, it is the great question, Has the veil ever been taken away? Some of us look back in our lives to our early days, our early years, and it seems incredible now that we heard the solemn warnings from the pulpit and they meant nothing to us, and we heard of the glories and beauties of Christ and it meant nothing to us. We sat there happy and contented and unconcerned. We look back now and it almost makes us tremble. We are amazed at it. What was it? We had this veil over our hearts. We were unable to see. We were unable to understand. We were unable to feel. But some of you here tonight know one thing if you do not know anything else, and that is that the Lord has taken away the veil from your heart. You have been brought to see things as they really are, brought to see things as you never saw them before, brought to see them as you never saw them by nature. If you look back and see that the veil has been taken away in Christ, O what cause for gratitude, to praise God to all eternity for it. People go to chapel year by year. Look at this one, a most godly, gracious person walking in the fear of God, and look at this one, going on unconcerned. The difference: the veil taken away.

“Which veil is done away in Christ.” As your heart is made honest this evening, can you pray to the Saviour to take away that veil from your eyes, that veil from your heart, that you might see things as they really are? When the veil is taken away by Christ and by the Spirit of God, then we see eternity in all its awfulness and solemnity there before us like a great gulf ready to swallow us up. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,” and eternity becomes a tremendous sound when we wake up and when we go to sleep and throughout the day. Why? Because the veil of blindness and ignorance and unbelief has been taken away, and now we see eternity as it really is. Where shall I spend eternity?

“Eternity, tremendous sound!
To guilty souls a dreadful wound;
But O, if Christ and heaven be mine,
How sweet the accents, how divine!”

Some of you are getting older and some of you have got old, but is the veil still there? “Which veil is done away in Christ.” Now can you pray to the Saviour to take away the veil from your heart? Or coming very close, in your heart of hearts are you afraid of the veil being taken away? Do you not *really* want the veil to be taken away? Do you think there is plenty of time? Do you say, I am only young? Do you say, There are a few years yet? Do you say, It is too early to give up the world; one day, yes; I want to go to heaven when I die, but I do not want it just yet? You are on dangerous ground. “Sometimes short’s the warning.” O pray to have this veil done away in Christ! Then you see eternity as it really is, a solemn eternity, heaven and hell. And then the great point, to be made ready, to be prepared, to be made right. Now tell me, has the veil been taken away from your heart, or is the veil still there? Do you have to cry to the Lord to take away the veil, because if in sincerity you cry to the Lord to take away the veil, He surely will.

“Which veil is done away in Christ.” Another thing, when the Holy Spirit takes away that veil from your heart, then you will see something of your sin and ruin and lost condition. You are not perfect; you are not fit for heaven; you are not suitable to be accepted by a holy God. “My best is stained and dyed with sin; my all is nothing worth.” Now that is the taking away of the veil from your heart and from your eyes, to look into your own heart and to see something there of what you really are, so that you have to say, “Jesus, save me, or I die,” so that it

forces you to the sinners' Friend, so that it makes you pray, so that you have to come.

“Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

This is the language of a sinner where the veil has been taken away.

“Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.”

This is the taking away of the veil.

“Which veil is done away in Christ.” And then another thing. When that veil is taken away from a sinner's heart, you will see the world in all its vanity and all its emptiness. You will. You loved it once. It was your element. It was your delight. Why? Because you had a veil over your eyes, over your heart. You could not see things as they really are. A blind man may be in the midst of the vilest sights. They do not bother him at all; he cannot see them. O that taking away of the veil, and you look on the world that you once loved and see it in all its vanity. “Which veil is done away in Christ.” You want to be rid of it. You want to be away from it for ever. “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.”

“Which veil is done away in Christ.” Another thing, beloved friends, when the veil of blindness, darkness, ignorance, unbelief is taken away, you see the people of God as they really are. You see them as they stand in everlasting union with Jesus, a happy people, a blessed people, an honoured people, a favoured people. You never saw that before. Perhaps you did not like them. Perhaps you thought they were peculiar. Perhaps you thought they were too narrow. O but the difference! “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” O but it is the veil that has been taken away. You see them eternally safe, eternally secure. “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?” There is a difference. And what made the difference? You will be like the Shunammith woman. The prophet said to her, “Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?”

Really, I should have thought Elisha would have known a bit better than that. He was offering her earthly honours: to be spoken of to the king or the captain of the host. It was like saying, Would you like an invitation to Buckingham Palace? Would you like to be recommended for an O.B.E. or an M.B.E., or even a knighthood? She said, “I dwell among mine own people.” When the vail is taken away, you see the vanity of the world and all that the world can give – if only you might be found among the Lord’s people.

“Wealth and honour I disdain,
Earthly comforts, Lord, are vain;
These can never satisfy;
Give me Christ, or else I die.”

Have you got a religion like that? Have you had the vail taken away? Is there a Ruth here this evening in the land of Moab? O you look on Naomi. You look on the poor, despised people of God. You see them even in their sorrows. “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” Or is there a Moses here? He could have had the best of earthly honours – a prince, riches, pleasure. “By faith” – the vail was taken away – “By faith ... choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” He had had the vail taken away to see the blessedness of God’s people and the awful state of the wicked. Some of us look back to those days when we believe we did by faith choose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” And, “though the world may think it strange, we would not with the world exchange.”

“Which vail is done away in Christ.” But above all, when the vail is taken away, you will see that beauty, that attraction in Christ that you should desire Him. We have that word in Isaiah 53: “And when we shall see Him” – this is Christ the Saviour – “When we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.” What! A glorious Saviour, no beauty in Him? We have the vail over our eyes, the vail over our heart. But when the Lord graciously works, O what a sweet attraction there is in the Saviour!

“Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.” Which means that when the Holy Spirit of God sovereignly,

graciously works, there are these two things. There is the taking away of the veil and there is the turning to the Lord. I do not want you to think of this in a kind of Arminian sense, that if you will turn to the Lord, the Lord will take the veil away. It is all God's work from first to last. "Which veil is done away in Christ."

"Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." So what in one verse he speaks of as the taking away of the veil, in another verse he speaks of as the gift of liberty. So you will see the Saviour as you never saw Him before. You will pray to Him, look to Him, rest upon Him. He will be your only hope, your only plea, your only foundation, your only salvation. It is the taking away of the veil. It is the great point, the vital point. "Which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart" – Israel's heart, and the heart of every sinner not saved by grace.

"Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away." I just want to come for a moment to a point which tries and troubles me and I think it does try and trouble some of you older ones. You look back to former days when you had that sweet hope that the veil was taken away, and O what beauties and glories you saw in the Saviour! But now as you grow older, it will never be completely darkness and ignorance and unbelief – that is past, that is gone for ever, never to return – but at times your sight is dim. The eye of faith is dim. There is not the sight you seemed once to have. There is the darkness. Am I speaking to some here who have seen the Saviour, your eyes have seen the King in His beauty, but now you mourn? Have we become careless? Has there not been the spirit of prayer? Have we become entangled with the world? Have we been too bothered by our trials and troubles? It is as if that veil in measure – and it can only be in measure, blessed be God – but that veil is creeping over our hearts and over our eyes. O how we have to pray, "Lord, take away the veil." "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." May the eyes of my understanding be enlightened. May there be clear, believing views of the Saviour. But sometimes there seems to be a veil that creeps over your heart again and you cannot see your marks of grace and your evidences as you once did. O we want the Lord to shine, because when the veil is over our heart, there is a veil over the Word, and however brightly the sun shines, well there is that veil. We

cannot see things as we would. O may the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings! We want that removing of the vail.

And then with the most eminent saint, there are some things he does not know. How often there are things we feel we ought to know, we must know, but we do not! Lord, take away the vail. Let me see clearly. “That which I see not teach Thou me.”

“When it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.” The Lord enable us each to turn to Him in urgent, heartfelt prayer, to turn to the Lord that the vail might be taken away from our eyes and our hearts. And may we pray for it in the land, and may we pray for it in the churches. May we pray for it in our young people and children. May we pray for it here at Bethel. Above all, may we pray for it for ourselves. O may there be this turning to the Lord, because if you are sweetly enabled by the Spirit of God to turn to the Lord, then the vail will be taken away. That is all the difference.

It is the old story, but I had a magazine from America only on Friday, I think, and it told this story again. There was a little boy who was born blind, and they found there was an operation which wonderfully recovered his sight, but only little by little was he allowed to see. At length the day came when his mother could take him out. He said, “But Mother, why didn’t you tell me that things were really like this?” And when he went into a beautiful park and in a lovely garden, “But Mother, why didn’t you tell me?” With tears she said, “But my dear, I did, but you could never understand what I meant.” That is it. We read the Word of God; we speak; we preach from the pulpit; we speak of the awfulness of sin and a lost eternity, the vanity of the world, the blessedness of the people of God, the glories of Christ. O but by nature we do not see them. When the Lord opens our eyes, when the vail is taken away – “which vail is done away in Christ” – then, why didn’t I know this before? Why was I not told this before? O the difference! And it is the Spirit’s work.

“Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.” “Which vail is done away in Christ.” But the whole subject here is glory, and the Lord Jesus before He suffered, prayed, “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory,” first of all by faith here on earth, and then eternally in heaven. But with the vail over our hearts, we do not see the Saviour’s glory. O but the taking away of the vail and then that view, “Behold the

glories of the Lamb,” the glory of His Person, His suitability, His fulness of grace, His wonderful love, His precious blood, His righteousness, His intercession, the glory of it all, and a glimpse of heaven where “the Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel’s land.” And when the veil is taken away, then the sinner beholds His glory, beholds His glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ.

Hear the whole conclusion of it: “But we all, with open face” – the veil taken from our face – “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass” – the glass of the gospel – “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” In a word it is this:

“Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place;
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.”