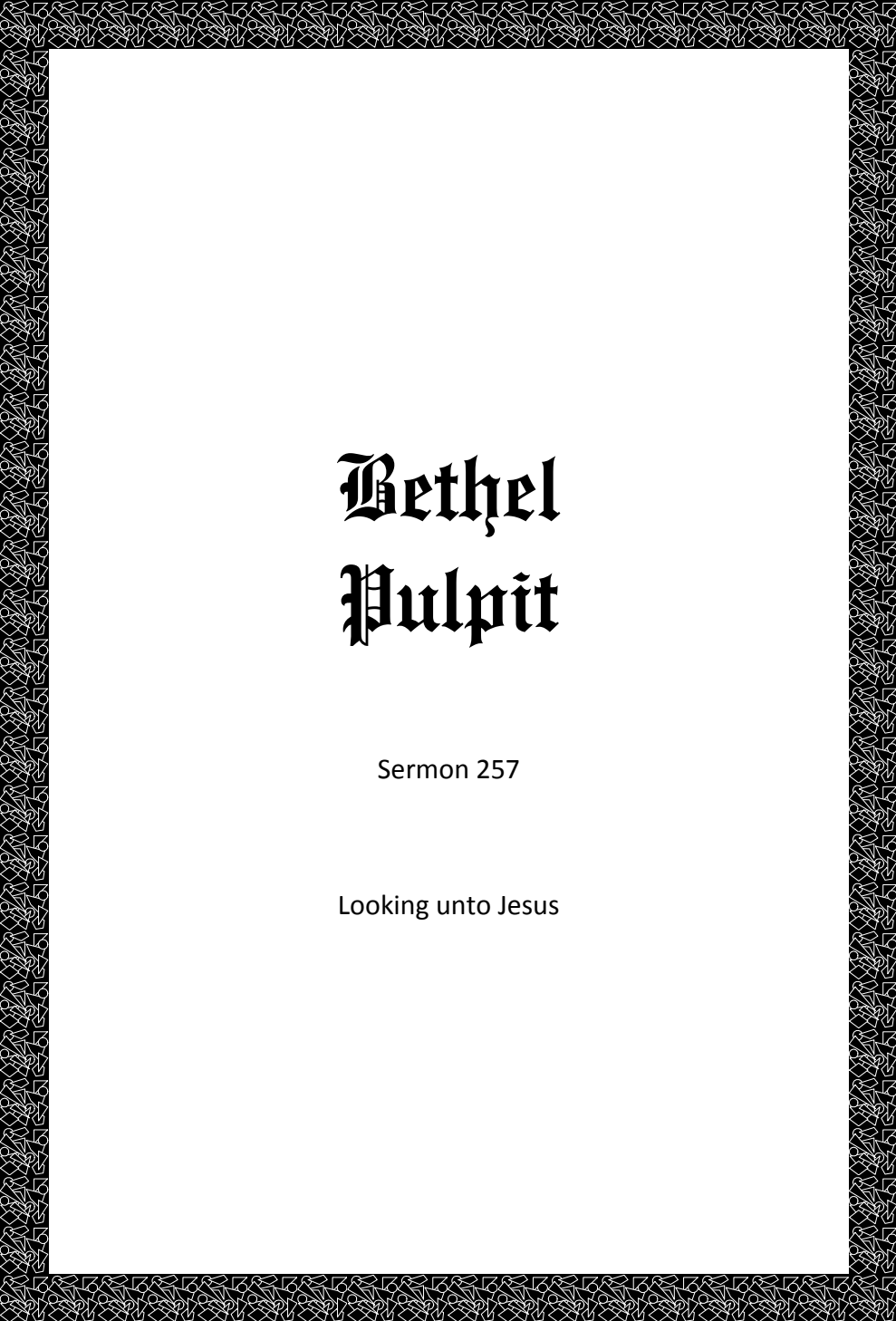




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 257

Looking unto Jesus

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 15th December, 2002**

Text: *"Looking unto Jesus" (Hebrews 12. 2).*

These closing chapters in the Epistle to the Hebrews deal with a very important point, and that is the point of continuing, carrying on, enduring. There has been all the doctrine, the precious truths opened up, the glories of Christ's everlasting priesthood. But these closing chapters are more practical, and not least this solemn point of enduring to the end. There are many who begin well, or seem to begin well, but they do not continue, they do not endure, and so they prove that their religion never had a right beginning. Where religion has a right beginning, it will continue, it will endure. O but the many, many exhortations to us to continue, to persevere, to endure!

Now these early Hebrew Christians were under dreadful temptation to turn back to the Jewish religion. They knew that the law was given by God to Moses. They knew that the ceremonial law had been revealed at Sinai. But now they were no longer keeping it. They were under dreadful persecution, dreadful temptation to go back. Because of this, so much in the Epistle to the Hebrews, these exhortations that they must not turn back. It is fatal. If they go back they will perish. If they go back they will perish eternally. And so at the beginning of chapter 12, the Christian life is compared to a race. You can think of it in different ways: a long-distance race, or a race with obstacles which have to be surmounted. But the point is not falling out during the race, not getting weary, not giving up, continuing to the end. "So run, that ye may obtain."

So you notice these beautiful verses (1 and 2) follow that interesting chapter, Hebrews 11, the account of the worthies: Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. All these are those who ran the race. They ran it by faith. They persevered. They endured. They reached heaven at last. So our chapter begins, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." *They* ran the race. *They* persevered. *They* reached heaven. Now we are surrounded by them. They have gone before, the great cloud of witnesses. We are "followers of them who through faith and

patience inherit the promises.” They are left to us as an example, the example that is set before us.

So we too are to run this race set before us. They ran the race set before them. But how are we to run it? Not looking to them, not praying to them, not depending on them. “Looking unto Jesus.” Now it is in this way that this beautiful, blessed, sacred truth is set before us, the secret of endurance, the secret of continuing to the end, the secret of perseverance, the only secret: “looking unto Jesus.”

“Looking unto Jesus” – in one or two different ways. The Lord Jesus as our Example. *He* ran the race set before us. “*He* was tried and tempted too.” *He* endured to the end. *He* “suffered being tempted.”

“But spotless, innocent, and pure,
The great Redeemer stood,
While Satan’s fiery darts He bore,
And did resist to blood.”

And because He endured, His people will endure. So they are to look to Him, follow His example. As our hymnwriter sings,

“They marked the footsteps that He trod,
(His zeal inspired their breast);
And following their incarnate God,
Possess the promised rest.”

We have to follow our incarnate God, looking unto Him. “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses ... let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.” He endured the cross. He despised the shame. But now He is set down at the right hand of God. “And has He not His promise passed, that thou shalt overcome at last?” “Let us” – let us too – “run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,” our eyes fixed on Him, our glorious Example, the One who has gone before; our desire, our hope, our prayer, to reach heaven at last, to come where Jesus is.

They tell me that in ancient times – and do not forget that Paul was writing at a time when the Olympic Games were being established, and there are so many of his references to running a race or fighting in the arena – but I understand those races were different from ours. There was not a finishing tape at the end, but there was a man who was the judge, and he stood at the end, and they had to come where that man was. So as they

endured to the end, they had to be looking for that man. They had to have their eyes upon him. They had to keep their eyes fixed upon him. So it was that man; and there is a Man at the end of our race, a glorious Man, that Man who shall be our peace. O it is to keep our eyes fixed on Him! It is “looking unto Jesus.” It is to come where Jesus is. It is that Man, that glorious Man who bled and died for sinners. “Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.” It is Him, but it is “none but Jesus.” O but it is to keep your eyes fixed on Him! “Life with its path before us lies; Christ is the way, and Christ the prize.”

It is “looking unto Jesus.” It is as Paul says in another place, “forgetting those things which are behind.” There is only one thing that really matters. “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Now it is the only thing that matters. It is something that is real. It is something that is important. It is something that is vital. That is why here he says, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” You cannot run this race if you are encumbered by your sins. You have to lay them aside. Then there are some things in our lives which are not really sins, they are not wicked, but they are not any help. They are no help at all in the Christian race. To illustrate, there is a man. He is perhaps a business man. He lays aside his briefcase, his tie and his stiff collar. There is nothing wrong with a briefcase, nothing wrong with a tie and a stiff collar, but he does not want them if he is going to run in a race. Have you ever had anything in your life, you felt it was not wrong, but you felt it was not for the honour of glory of God? It is “looking unto Jesus,” His example. He has gone before. It is “looking unto Jesus” for help in your race, for support, for supplies, for strength, for grace. That is the only way you can continue, the only way you can endure. It is “looking unto Jesus.”

There is a third thing. First, it is “looking unto Jesus” as your Example in the race. Secondly it is looking unto Jesus for all you need in your race. But the third thing, and the apostle opens this up at some great length, it is looking unto Jesus in the sorrows and disappointments and trials that there are in the race. Now as you have come to the end of the year, quite a number of you have these things that are troubling you, the sorrows, the disappointments, the problems, the perplexities. Now it is “looking unto Jesus” in these things, for help, and in submission, and in prayer. The apostle puts it like this: “Consider Him that endured” – you

are called to endure, and there will be problems and difficulties and sorrows and perplexities and disappointments you will be called to endure. You have not to stumble; you have not to turn back; you have not to falter; you have not to fall. “Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” Now perhaps some of you have come to the end of the year and as you come to this time of the year and you think of things in your life, in your family, in your circumstances, your troubles, your disappointments, your fears, the thing is “lest you be wearied.” Do you feel weary with it? Lest you “faint in your minds.” Do you feel faint in your mind? Well, it is “looking unto Jesus” like this, in submission, and for help, and for encouragement, so that you do not sink, so that you do not fall.

“Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners.” Of course, when we use this word *contradiction*, we usually mean arguing with someone, or talking with them. The Biblical meaning is: these things that come against you. Do you feel you have things that come against you, great things, small things? Well, what did the Lord Jesus have that came against Him? “Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” You think you cannot bear it; it is so hard, so bad. “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood.” The Lord Jesus did. It is considering Him. “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” Well then, this vital point of continuing, enduring. May that prayer be yours and mine:

“Lord, hast Thou made me know Thy ways?
Conduct me in Thy fear;
And grant me such supplies of grace,
That I may persevere.”

That great point of enduring, continuing, persevering to the end; the secret, the only secret, “looking unto Jesus” in those three ways: your glorious Example, the One who supplies your need, the One who Himself endured such contradiction of sinners, when you are called to endure such things.

Well then, beloved friends, I mention these things to set the text in its context and open up the meaning and the teaching of the apostle here. Of course, this is a very blessed, beautiful word. In one way, it is a vital word, a most important word, and there is everything in it, the whole of the Christian life. If you will, this is what faith is, living faith, saving faith, the

faith that takes a sinner to heaven. This is where every believer is brought, every sinner saved by grace is brought, to look to Jesus. So as we come to ponder over these three beautiful, blessed words, only three, the most important of them all: *Jesus*, the sweetest sound that was ever heard on earth. We think of that time when Mary was told that name *Jesus*. We think of the time when Joseph was told that name *Jesus*, and when the angel made that wonderful declaration, “Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.” Of course, you all know what the name of Jesus means. It means *the Saviour*. So that is the vital point. It is the Saviour. “Looking unto Jesus,” the Saviour. If words mean anything at all, if you and I look to Jesus the Saviour, then we look to Him for many things. But we look to Him for salvation.

“Looking unto Jesus.” I hope there are many of you here who from an honest heart can say, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds!” Perhaps you feel you cannot say much, you dare not say much, but you do know you like to read about the Lord Jesus, to sing about Him and hear of Him. Perhaps some of you cannot explain it, but when you hear the name of the Lord Jesus and what He has done, there is something seems to spring out of your heart. You know what the Word of God means when it says the name of the Lord Jesus “is as ointment poured forth.” If you went into a room and there was a most beautiful aroma, perhaps from a lovely, scented rose, you would find it hard to explain or write it down or analyse it, but you know what it is. There is no mistaking it. With a living soul it is something like that with the Lord Jesus. Have you ever been in a room and there is an artificial flower? It is so beautiful, you can hardly tell the difference, but if you smell it there is no scent, no aroma. That is the difference between life and death, the savour of life and the savour of death, what it means and what it does not mean. I hope there are a few of you, you girls and boys, you children, and you feel there is something very sacred, something very precious in the name of Jesus.

Well, it is “looking unto Jesus.” But do not forget, Jesus the Saviour, Jesus who brought salvation. We have many, many needs, and we constantly feel it, but beloved friends, our great need is salvation. We have sinned against God. We are guilty. We have broken His law. He is our Judge. One day we must give an account, and we need to be saved from the awful guilt of sin and from sin’s everlasting penalty, that just condemnation for ever and ever: “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” O we need to be

saved from that. And daily we need to be saved from the power of sin, that sin may not have dominion over us. We do need a Saviour. We do need that great salvation. It is “looking unto Jesus” for many things. It is “looking unto Jesus” for everything. But the most important thing, the vital thing, “looking unto Jesus” for salvation, and that is by faith.

Now tell me, have you got eyes to look? Thousands have not; millions have not. If the Lord gives you seeing eyes, if He opens your blind eyes, you will see many things. You will see many things you never saw by nature. You will see many things you never saw before. You will see how vain and empty this world is. You will see how blessed God’s people are. You will see how awful it is to be left among the world that lieth in wickedness. But you will see such a need in your own heart. You will see such sin, such vileness. “My best is stained and dyed with sin; my all is nothing worth.” You did not always see it, did not always realise it, but you do now, and you want a Saviour. Well, it is this: “Pore not on thyself too long.” (You need to pore on yourself long enough! Some people do not pore on themselves at all.)

“Pore not on thyself *too long*,
Lest it sink thee lower;
Look to Jesus, kind as strong –
Mercy joined with power.”

It is “looking unto Jesus.” That is the way of forgiveness, the way of salvation. That is the way to heaven, and it is the only way. What did we read this morning? “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

I understand in the original Greek this word “looking unto Jesus” is hard to be translated. It means looking away from everyone and everything else. It is looking to Jesus only, the way of salvation, the way to heaven. Now the work of the Spirit of God in a sinner’s heart is to give him eyes to see, to open his eyes, and to enable him to look to Jesus. O beloved friends, may each of you this morning be enabled by faith to look to Jesus. It is a look of dependence. It is a look of hope. It is a look of expectancy. It is not just looking *at* Jesus. You can look *at* someone, but it is completely different if you are looking *to* them. You have perhaps had that experience some time in your own life. There has been some responsibility placed on you, and people say, We are looking to you. They

mean depending on you. It is a look of dependence. The whole of your hope, the whole of your dependence, “looking unto Jesus.”

Now I know what some of you are going to say to me. You will say, I feel so dark; I feel so blind. How can I look? Well, there is an answer to that. There was once a man called Bartimaeus and he could not see. He was completely in the dark. He was entirely blind. But he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, and he did not want Jesus of Nazareth to pass *him* by. What did he do? He looked to Him with blind eyes, with unseeing eyes, and he got the blessing. “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” He was in the dark, but he wanted mercy. They said, “Jesus of Nazareth,” but he said, “Jesus, Thou Son of David,” the promised Messiah, the One who can open the eyes of the blind. He ventured on Him with those sightless, unseeing eyes, but he got the blessing, and then he could see Him. The first thing he saw was the Saviour’s face, and he followed Him in the way, and beloved friends, you will follow Him in the way when you get that sight by faith of the Saviour’s face.

It is looking unto Jesus in dependence, in hope, in expectation. “None but Jesus.” No-one ever looked to Jesus in vain. The way of salvation, the way to heaven. “Looking unto Jesus.” But who is this Jesus? He is the Son of God from all eternity. He is equal with His Father, equal with the Holy Ghost. He is almighty. In creation He spake and it was done. But in matchless love to sinners He veiled His glory and left heaven for earth. He was born at Bethlehem. He lived a holy life. He fulfilled His Father’s law. He brought in an everlasting righteousness, and then He died. No man could take His life from Him, but He laid it down. He died on the cross. He died at Calvary. He shed His precious blood that sinners might be saved. He opened up a way of forgiveness, a way to heaven. He died; He was buried; He rose again; He ascended. He ever lives, ever reigns in heaven. He is the Saviour, an almighty Saviour, an ever-living Saviour. His power is the same. His love is the same. “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him.” What is salvation personally? A guilty sinner being brought by faith to look to this risen, almighty Saviour, to look to Jesus, to “look to Jesus, kind as strong – mercy joined with power.”

“Looking unto Jesus.” So really this is what true faith is. Looking is believing, and believing is looking. “He that believeth on the Son hath

everlasting life.” Believing is not just believing that Jesus lived and died and rose again; not just believing who He is. It is looking to Him in hope, looking to Him in humble trust, looking to Him in dependence. So the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself explains to us what believing really is and what looking to Him really is. He referred to that remarkable event in the Book of Numbers when the children of Israel were bitten by fiery, flying serpents, and much of the people died. Now whatever means they tried, whatever remedy, it did not avail. It was a deadly poison and there was no cure. Moses cried to God, and God Himself provided the remedy, the answer. Moses was to make a snake, a serpent of brass. He had to put it on a pole, bid the dying look to it, in dependence, in hope, in expectancy, away from everything else, and the promise was that as many as looked should live. Now it was a very strange remedy, but it was the remedy God appointed, and it was the only remedy, and it worked, it availed, it saved. It was looking to that serpent of brass. Now, said the Lord Jesus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man” – that is Jesus – “be lifted up” – in His death on the cross, in His glorious resurrection, in the preaching. “Even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him” – all those who by faith look to Jesus in dependence, hope, expectancy, to Jesus only, away from everything else – “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Now that is the explanation by the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself of what living faith is, saving faith is, what looking to Jesus is. Our hymnwriter sings,

“Jesus, thus for sinners smitten,
Wounded, bruised, serpent-bitten,
To His cross directs their faith.”

It is the only way, the Lord Jesus an almighty Saviour, able to save even to the uttermost, and the Lord Jesus a willing Saviour. It is looking to the cross of Christ. It is looking to the wounds of Jesus. I have often told you of Luther in darkness, blackness and despair in that German monastery, not knowing what to do, where to look, wearing himself out by his own fruitless works. There was a visitor to the monastery named Staupitz who showed an interest in him. He did not know much himself, but he said, “Brother Martin, look to the wounds of Jesus.” That is it, looking to Jesus, to the cross, looking to Jesus risen, exalted, glorified; looking to His precious blood to cleanse from all sin, looking to the riches of His mercy, looking to His everlasting love, looking to His exceeding

great and precious promises, the way of salvation, the way to heaven, the only way.

I have often said that in the wilderness, as the serpent of brass was lifted up on the pole by Moses, there must have been those who were close at hand who could see all the marks, all the engraving on it. But the camp of Israel extended a long, long way. There must have been those on the extremity of the camp who could hardly see anything at all, especially those who were wounded, those who were dying. But as many as looked lived. O the value of it! What did it mean to Jonah in the whale's belly? If ever a man was in an extremity, if ever a man was perishing without hope and mercy, he was. "Yet I will look again" – one last look. With Jonah under the old dispensation it was to the temple at Jerusalem, which spoke of Christ, the priest, the sacrifice, the blood. "I will look again toward Thy holy temple." And he did not look in vain. He received the answer. He proved, "Salvation is of the Lord." But,

"See the Lord of glory dying!
See Him gasping! Hear Him crying!
See His burdened bosom heave!
Look, ye sinners, ye that hung Him;
Look how deep your sins have stung Him;
Dying sinners, look and live."

"Looking unto Jesus."

(If the Lord will, the evening sermon on the same text will be published next month.)