

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 258

Looking unto Jesus (2)

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

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

This verse contains a most beautiful summary of what the Lord Jesus did. "For the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Now what a body of divinity there is here! This is the One to whom we look. This is Christ crucified, Christ exalted. We are told it was "for the joy that was set before Him." The joy of seeing multitudes of wretched, ruined sinners being with Him for ever in heaven, and the wonder of it, that it is a joy to Him. It was such a joy to Him that rather than lose them, because of His great love to them, He was willing to endure the cross and to despise the shame. Now was ever love like this? It was "for the joy that was set before Him." We read that He rejoices over His people with joy. O that joy of seeing every one safely landed in heaven at last! "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." So it will be in the last great day. So, beloved friends, I believe it was even so at Calvary when in agony and blood He cried, "It is finished." There was that glimpse of "the joy that was set before Him," of having His beloved people with Him for ever.

Now it was for that joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross. He endured it. And "what He endured no tongue can tell." He endured it. He willingly endured it. He said, "No man taketh [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." He endured the cross, the crown of thorns, the spear, the nails, the bitter sufferings of His holy soul, the sin laid upon Him, He who knew no sin, the Father hiding His face, divine wrath poured out. He endured the cross and all the shame, the shame of the crucifixion. But He despised it. It was "for the joy that was set before Him." He both despised the shame and He endured the cross. He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." He "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God," the place of dignity, the place of honour. "Him hath God exalted ... to be a Prince and a Saviour," because He is His own beloved Son, because

He has accomplished the work of redemption – this glorious Saviour was once crucified, now risen, exalted – Christ.

Now this is the One to whom poor sinners look for salvation, for help, for everything, for heaven at last. He says, “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” Of course, that means people in all places, at all times, but it means you who feel you are far off, you who tonight feel left out, you who tonight are afraid of being passed by, you who are at the ends of the earth. He says, “Look unto Me.”

“Ye tempted souls, that sit
In darkness and distress,
Look from the borders of the pit
To My recovering grace.”

“Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.”

Now this is the One to whom we are to look by faith. That is what faith is. That is what saving faith, justifying faith is. It is looking to Jesus. You will have noticed the tense of this word. It is a kind of continuous present: “*Looking*.” It does not say, You have looked, or, You must, or, You will, or, You have got to. “*Looking*.” In other words, it is something that is going on all the time, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, today and tomorrow, right to the end of our lives, right to the end of time. It is a word you and I can never wear out.

This is one of those Lord’s days we have from time to time when the text does not need a lot of opening up and explaining, and all that. It is the text itself that matters. If you go home and you do not remember anything, but this week you walk out the text in the love of it, you will “enjoy a gospel day, and heaven begun below.” Those are good hearing times when in the week that follows you are walking out the text. It is this “looking unto Jesus.”

There are so many things resting on my spirit today about “looking unto Jesus.” One is *in prayer*. I do not really see how we can look to Jesus apart from prayer. In the gospels we have so many who looked to Jesus in prayer. The poor woman who said, “Lord, help me,” she looked to Jesus in prayer. The poor man who said that his little son was diseased with that devil that cast him into fire and water. “If Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.” Now he looked to Jesus by prayer. So

did the leper: “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.” You can go through them all – Jairus, the woman who pressed through the crowd – you can go through them one by one. They all looked to Jesus by prayer. May that be your constant exercise and burden and delight, to look to Jesus in prayer.

I have heard people say that you should pray to the Father; you should not pray to the Lord Jesus. Now I do not like all these subtle distinctions, almost metaphysical distinctions, of those who are wise above what is written. I realise that the usual pattern of prayer in Scripture is praying *to* the Father *by* the Holy Ghost *through* the Lord Jesus. I realise that pattern is laid down. There is a sense, though, when we pray, we just pray to the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, without the distinctions in our heart. But I am as sure as I stand in the pulpit tonight that the eternal Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, the blessed Trinity, are all honoured when a poor sinner prays to Jesus. It would be a terrible thing if we could not pray to the Lord Jesus. What about that word: “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me”? How can they come, how do they come, apart from prayer? What about this: “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out”? How can they come to Jesus apart from prayer? O but some of us in our early days had to go to the foot of the cross in our great need and look up into the face of the One crowned with thorns. We had to say, “Lord Jesus, have mercy. Lord Jesus, save me or I die. Lord Jesus, wash me in Thy precious blood.” O beloved friends, you can pray to each of the Persons in the Godhead. Do not let Satan confuse you and do not let Satan tempt you on it.

It is looking to Jesus in prayer, and never forget there is a looking to Jesus *in thanksgiving*. I wonder if this is where we come very far short. We do not look to the Lord Jesus sufficiently in a way of thanksgiving: thanksgiving for all His mercy day by day, O but especially thanksgiving for what He accomplished on the cross in His sin atoning-death. Have you ever as a sinner gone to the feet of Jesus? Have you ever looked to Jesus? Have you ever thanked Him that He left heaven for earth?

“He left His radiant throne on high!

Left the bright realms of bliss!”

Do not forget to thank Him for it. You say, I do not feel my personal interest in it. Well, you may not, but you can still thank Him for it, and it may be while you are thanking Him for what He has done for sinners, there

will be a sweet hope in your heart that He did it for you. Do not forget to thank Him. Do not forget to bless His name for all that He has done for unworthy sinners, but especially if you have a sweet hope that it was for you. Now may sweet gratitude freely flow.

Now it is “looking unto Jesus.” In prayer and in thanksgiving may there be a looking to Jesus in love and looking to Him in remembrance. That is a beautiful word that the beloved bride of Christ speaks in the Song of Solomon. She says, “We will remember Thy love.” I spoke to you at the Lord’s Supper on that once. That is what we seek to do every time we come to the Lord’s table, to remember His love: to remember His love from everlasting, to remember that “matchless love, which brought the Lord of glory from above.” It is love at Bethlehem, nothing but love, love to sinners. And to remember that love which took Him to the cross. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” “We will remember Thy love.” Now it is a looking to Jesus, remembering His love. O but may it be a looking to Jesus in love with love in your heart and mine, love to the Saviour for who He is, for what He has done. May it be, “We love Him, because He first loved us.”

O this “looking unto Jesus.” Well, we are told that the days of darkness shall be many. The days of trouble come, the days of perplexity. O but to look to Jesus *in days of darkness*. Times when you feel your sin and your unworthiness and your guilt and you are tempted.

“Brethren, in a state so sad,
When temptations seize us,
When our hearts we feel thus bad,
Let us look to Jesus.
He that hung upon the cross,
For His people bleeding,
Now in heaven sits, for us
Always interceding.”

A sinner looking to the Saviour. Let us look to Jesus. O but those days of trouble you have – your health, your business, your family, your circumstances, your disappointments, your trials, the things that make you sad – O but to be enabled to look to Jesus then. Sometimes we look everywhere else, but to look to Jesus.

I suppose when we ponder a point like this, looking up to heaven, looking unto Jesus in the day of trouble, we cannot help thinking of good Jehoshaphat. I call him *good* Jehoshaphat. He was a man who was always making mistakes, yet when it came to the real, trying point he always turned back to the Lord, and the wonderful thing, the Lord was always merciful to him. We need to seek grace to avoid Jehoshaphat's mistakes. He was not a very strong Christian. Perhaps we can walk with him because we feel we are not. We feel we are weak Christians. We have to lean upon our Beloved, "a weakling more than strong." But he was always getting into trouble.

At one time things seemed to be going quite well, quite nicely for Jehoshaphat, and suddenly he heard there were two vast armies coming against him, and not only so, they were joined by a third, and he was very distressed. He gathered the people together and they stood there weeping with their little ones. Why were they weeping? Because it seemed the end; because they did not know what to do; because they were so helpless; because it seemed certain death and destruction. But in New Testament terminology he looked to Jesus. He said, "O our God ... we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee." Now no sinner ever perished there. That is the place in your trouble, to wait upon the Lord. He said, "We have no might." He had not. It was too hard for him. He was weak and they were strong. He had no might, but he knew his God had the might. "Neither know we what to do." Well, it is often like that in our troubles. We do not know which way to turn. We do not know whether to speak or not speak, act or not act. But the Lord knew what to do. That wonderful *but*. You can never get beyond it, never sink beneath it. "*But*."

"To keep our eyes on Jesus fixed,
And there our hope to stay,
The Lord will make His goodness pass
Before us in the way."

That is "looking unto Jesus." What could poor Jehoshaphat do? Nothing, but there was nothing he needed to do. The Lord did it all. Very briefly what happened was this. These three great armies began to quarrel amongst themselves, and fight among themselves, and destroyed one another. "Stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord ... to morrow go out against them." And there they were, fled, and all Jehoshaphat had to

do was to gather the spoil, and he blessed God in the valley of Berachah – and so will you.

“Call upon Me.” That is “looking unto Jesus.” “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” “Looking unto Jesus,” *in trouble*. Daniel did when he was thrown to the lions. The Hebrew children did when they were thrown into the fiery furnace. Moses did on the banks of the Red Sea. So you can go on right through the Old Testament and the New. “Looking unto Jesus.” Now none perished there. It is a kind of posture. It is *the* posture of faith. Faith, however feeble, will always look to Jesus. It is like a compass. Which ever way you turn it, the needle will always spin round towards the north. And faith will always look to Jesus. “Though damped, it never dies.”

O that “looking unto Jesus”! We do need to look to the Lord Jesus *to be kept*. It is not just at the beginning. I tried to speak to you at some length this morning about looking unto the Lord Jesus, the dear Saviour, for salvation. “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” Just as Israel looked to the serpent of brass, and as many as looked lived. But it is not just at the beginning. We can no more keep ourselves than we can save ourselves. It is “looking unto Jesus” day by day that we might be kept. It is one thing to sit in chapel, sing hymns, listen to preaching. What about when you go home? We are called to live the Christian life. It is important; it is vital. “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall shew forth My praise.” O but we have Satan against us and the world and our own hearts. We need to be kept. Now, “looking unto Jesus” to keep you, to keep you from falling, to keep alive His own work in your heart, to keep you finally. And never forget, He “is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”

O it is to be kept, “kept by the power of God.” O but we look to Jesus for it. I take it this is what it means, “Kept by the power of God *through faith* unto salvation.” It is not being kept just like someone might put something in a drawer and shut the drawer and lock it, and it is safe there. It is rather like some living creature that will always be trying to get out and escape. We need the Lord to keep us day by day, to keep us from falling, to keep our spirit, to keep us finally. It is praying for it, not just leaving it, not just looking at the doctrine of the everlasting security of the

people of God. It is praying for it. That is a beautiful word, “Preserved in Jesus.” O that praying to be kept, “looking unto Jesus,” in complete dependence, no dependence on ourselves, “a weakling more than strong,” helpless, all our dependence upon the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, looking to Him, to Him alone, the Saviour almighty to save, almighty to keep.

“Looking unto Jesus.” And then we think of *His glorious example*. What about this? “Looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!” “Have you ever looked upon Jesus as He walked? Have you ever “traced the pure footsteps of Jesus your Lord”? Have you ever seen that Christ also hath left us an example that we should follow His steps? It is “looking unto Jesus” as our Example. “Lamb of God we look to Thee; Thou shalt our Example be.” We come so far short, but we would not have the standard lowered. It is following the Lord, following the Lamb. “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.” May nothing please you and me which would dishonour Him.

“May we ever look to Jesus,
And the place where He has gone;
And may nothing ever please us
He would grieve to look upon.”

It is “looking unto Jesus.” And then there are those *times when we need to be guided*. You have a decision; you have a choice. What is right and what is wrong? It is looking to Jesus for guidance. Lord, lead me, teach me, guide me. “Shew me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths.” Looking to Jesus in His holy Word for guidance; looking to Jesus in the preaching of the everlasting gospel for guidance. He has most kindly, graciously promised that He will guide His people. He will guide you aright. He will not let you wander out of the way.

Now, “looking unto Jesus.” I realise there are so many things here and I seem to be bringing all these various things before you one by one. Why did I read to you this evening the opening chapter in the Epistle to the Colossians? Really, the sum and substance of the chapter we read was this: that the Lord Jesus is everything; the Lord Jesus is our All in all. Whatever we need, whatever we seek, it is to be found in the Lord Jesus and only in the Lord Jesus. So really it is coming to this. I have been talking about looking to Jesus for one thing and another. It is looking to Jesus *for everything*. “That *in all things* He might have the preeminence.”

That is looking to Jesus for everything. “For it pleased the Father that in Him” – in the Lord Jesus – “should all fulness dwell.” That is what we need, what we look for, that complete sufficiency.

There were so many things in that beautiful chapter. “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.” It is looking to the Lord Jesus for everything. He is almighty. He is full of grace and truth. There is that wonderful fulness in Him, that all-sufficiency in Him, whatever you need, whatever you seek, today or tomorrow, great or small, in providence or in grace. It is “looking unto Jesus.”

The other Scripture reading this evening, Psalm 121, is a most beautiful passage. You children know it, you young people. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,” where the Lord Jesus dwells. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” Now that is “looking unto Jesus.” It is the pilgrims’ Psalm. They were journeying to Jerusalem. As they neared the holy city, they saw the hills, they lifted up their eyes with holy delight. The temple was there; the priest was there; the sacrifice was there; the blood was there. It all spoke of the gospel. It all spoke of Christ. In a New Testament sense, they were “looking unto Jesus.” May it be like that when you and I come to the house of God. “Looking unto Jesus.” “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” But they were on pilgrimage. They were travelling. Well it is a good prayer if you have a journey by car or by train, lifting up your eyes unto the hills from whence cometh your help. And then in the greater journey of life, and that wonderful promise: “The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.”

It is “looking unto Jesus.” But the thing that has laid hold upon me this last few days, that word *whence*. We do not perhaps use it so much now. We would perhaps put it like this: *where from*, or, *from where*. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence” – from where – “cometh my help.” The source of every supply. “Whence.” I have thought of John chapter 6, the well-known chapter, the feeding of the five thousand. It was an impossible thing. How was it possible to feed this great multitude when there was nothing to feed them with? Jesus said, “Give ye them to eat.”

Well, they could not. They did not know what to do. They had not any way they could feed them. “Jesus lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him.” He said, “Philip, whence?” In other words, Where from, Philip? “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this He said to prove him.” When the Lord asks you a question, it is not because He does not know the answer. “This he said to prove him: for He Himself knew what He would do.” He always did, and He always will. Beloved friends, when you look to Jesus you are always looking to the One who He Himself knows what He will do. So often I do not; so often you do not; but He does. This is the One to whom we look. He knew what He would do.

Well, Philip tried some kind of calculation. He was not looking to Jesus; he was calculating. That is what you and I sometimes do, oftentimes do. He tried to count up the people. He tried to think how much bread they would need, and tried to work out how much it would cost, and he came to the answer: two hundred pennyworth. A penny was a lot then; it was a day’s wage. Well, that did not help at all, and your calculations will not help. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, had a different idea. He did a little bit better. He spied a lad with five loaves and two fishes. He said, “But what are they among so many?” He was not looking to Jesus. Sometimes you and I try to calculate, and sometimes we look at things. We cannot help *seeing* things, but you must not *look at* things, and you must not *rely on* things. Still that question stood: Whence? Where from? And then the Lord Jesus sovereignly displaying divine, almighty power, told them what to do. He took the bread and fish, He blessed, He brake, and told them to distribute it. “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

I want you in your minds to think of Colossians 1, everything in Christ, that full provision in Christ; and Psalm 121, lifting up mine eyes to the hills *whence*. Well, that is the source for all our supplies. That is what John Newton calls a “never-failing treasury, filled with boundless stores of grace.” So what is it? “Looking unto Jesus” *for everything*, because everything is in Him, because He can do everything, because nothing is too hard for Him, because He has promised to supply all our needs, because He still is Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide. Now it is looking to Jesus. “All my springs are in Thee” – all of them. “Looking unto Jesus” *for help*. Did you pray, “Lord, help me” today? Do you think you will pray it tomorrow? Do you ever lift up your eyes to the hills whence cometh all

your help? Do you know your help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth? As I so often tell you, *help* in the New Testament and the Old does not mean just a little aid, a little helping hand, a little assistance. It means the Lord doing everything. It is almost the same as salvation. “Looking unto Jesus” for help.

“To Christ for help I fly,
The Friend of sinners lost,
A Refuge sweet, and sure, and nigh,
And there is all my trust.”

“Looking unto Jesus” *for wisdom*, wisdom to direct our way. “If any of you lack wisdom” – any of you, whether you are young or old, whether it is natural wisdom or spiritual wisdom. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God” – that is “looking unto Jesus.” “Let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.” He will not upbraid you. He will not find fault. “And it shall be given him.”

“Looking unto Jesus.” “Looking unto Jesus” *for strength equal to the day*, for tomorrow, for next week, the coming days, the coming year, that trial, that mountain before you. Looking to Jesus for strength. And He has promised that “as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” That complete equation, just however many days, and just how much strength you need. “Thy God hath commanded thy strength.” It is looking to Jesus for everything. It is all in Him.

And especially looking to Jesus *for grace*. “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Grace abounding, grace reigning, grace to be with our spirit, grace in the trying hour, grace to uphold us, grace which “shall to the end, stronger and brighter shine.” Now it is that “looking unto Jesus.” Samuel Medley has a hymn, not so well-known, not in our hymnbook, and as his usual custom, repeating the last line; so every verse ends like this: “Looking by faith to Jesus *still*.” You will find that. Perhaps next week you will come into something. “Looking by faith to Jesus still.” Perhaps the coming year a sense of sin and thrall forcing you to the sinners’ Friend. “Looking by faith to Jesus still.” Perhaps the next day something in your family. “Looking by faith to Jesus still.” The same source of supplies, the same glorious Man, once crucified, now exalted.

What a wonderful subject this is, this looking by faith to Jesus, our eyes up to Him, our eyes upon Him, in hope, in dependence, in expectation, nothing in self, everything in the Saviour. This is how He endears Himself to you, in the wonders of His love, mercy and grace as you are enabled to look to Him.

Well, beloved friends, as you go home tonight, and then tomorrow, and during this week, and the coming days, may it be “looking unto Jesus.” There will be a lot of other things you will see. You will see many, many things – you cannot help seeing them – that the world sees. O but may you be “looking unto Jesus,” if only you might find Him. “Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” If only you could catch a glimpse of Him. May some of you before the week has ended be singing,

“Hail, great Immanuel, all divine!
In Thee Thy Father’s glories shine;
Thou brightest, sweetest, fairest One,
That eyes have seen or angels known.”

Then you will be looking to Jesus with eyes of love and eyes of amazement and eyes of adoration. And then in the new year, and as we go nearer to eternity, looking to Jesus, our only hope, looking to Him *in dependence*, and “looking unto Jesus” right to the end, nowhere else. “Looking unto Jesus.” They used to talk of the beatific vision. Is that the right word? A sinner gazing on the Saviour to all eternity. Well, may we look to Him and then one day may we “see the King in His beauty,” and then may we gaze on Him for evermore, lost in wonder, love and praise.

“Looking unto Jesus.”

(The morning sermon on the same text was published last month.)