

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 266

Beds to Rest In

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 17th June, 2007**

Text: *"He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness" (Isaiah 57. 2).*

The subject in this chapter is the dreadful state of Israel, and of course the same dreadful state prevails in England and in Luton today. The prophet's complaint is this: that "no man layeth it to heart" (verse 1). There never was a truer word spoken concerning the state of our country today: "No man layeth it to heart." But there is a scripture which says this: "The living *will* lay it to his heart." And they will. This state of unconcern about the evil, the violence, the immorality, sin, God, eternity, heaven, hell, our own condition – "no man layeth it to heart." This indifference, this unconcern. But, says the wise man in Ecclesiastes, "The living will lay it to his heart." And surely there are a few of us here this morning, and we go back to our early days when we did not lay these things to heart. But there came a time and we wondered what was happening. We *were* laying these things to heart. It is only the Holy Spirit can make a sinner lay these things to heart. And beloved friends, as I seek to preach to you the everlasting gospel week by week, I can preach, but may the Holy Spirit cause you to lay these things to heart, and then what an effect they will have in your life!

One solemn point that the prophet takes up here, which people are not laying to heart, is the way in which the Lord is removing the godly from this world; godly men, godly women are being taken from this world. It was so then; it is so now, and they are often not replaced. "The righteous perisheth," saith the prophet, "and no man layeth it to heart." Of course, there is a wonderful, glorious sense in which the righteous do not perish. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should *not perish*, but have everlasting life." So there is that blessed sense in which the righteous never perish. But we know what the prophet means: taken from this world by the hand of death. One of the marks of night-time coming in the world and in the church of God: the shadows begin to fall, the wild beasts of the forest creep forth, and the labourers are taken home to their rest.

“The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away.” So the simple point here is this: that if a man is a righteous man, he will also be merciful. If you find a person who is not merciful, there is no mark of being found among the righteous. “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.” That is sometimes why a godly person dies young. That is sometimes why useful lives are taken away in love and mercy, so that they shall never see the evil that is to come. It was so with the godly young King Josiah. He was only young, and if ever there was an Old Testament king who sought the honour and glory of his God, it was young Josiah, but then in awful circumstances he was slain in battle and the whole of Israel mourned in the valley of Megiddo. There was never any mourning like it before or since. Israel was saying, Why? And the godly were saying, Why? And the Lord revealed that it was so that Josiah would never live to see the evils that were to come: the desecration of the temple, God’s people taken away to Babylon.

So there are two things when the righteous are taken away. One is the terrible loss to the church of God. They were pillars. We have that expression in the New Testament: “who seemed to be pillars” (Gal. 2. 9). And these pillars are a wonderful blessing in the church of God. You know what a pillar is. It has two uses in a building. One is for ornament, and one is to help to bear the weight of the building – pillars. And the important thing is that they must be completely upright. A pillar is of no use if it is not. “Each one walking in his uprightness.” The Lord places these pillars, and then He uses them, and then He removes them, and the church of God is so much the weaker when these godly pillars are removed. O how much weaker the church is by the loss of godly pillars! But they are not the foundation. That is our mercy. “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure.” May the Lord raise up these godly pillars. You girls and boys, may the Lord enable you to lay these things to heart and may you prove through the Holy Spirit’s work to be pillars in the church of God.

So the church is weaker. O but the everlasting blessedness of these who are taken from the evil to come! “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. *He*” – the righteous – “*He*” – the merciful man – “*He* shall enter into peace: they shall rest in

their beds.” So here you have the eternal blessedness of the people of God. “They shall rest in their beds.” We sometimes sing,

“Now, the grave’s a downy bed,
Embroidered round with blood;
Say not the believer’s dead,
He only rests in God.”

And John said, “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” The blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord. “He shall enter into peace.” There is a solemn opposite with which the chapter ends: “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” Now may we be amongst the living who lay these things to heart. “He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds.” The eternal blessedness of those who die in the Lord.

This last clause: “Each one walking in his uprightness,” suggests that this is not only speaking of eternity; it is speaking of what is happening in time, the sanctifying effect of the work of grace in the hearts of the righteous, the merciful, so that they will always walk uprightly. That is how you can tell them: they will always walk uprightly. They will always walk in the tender fear of God. Now perhaps there are some of you here this morning, and you feel in this sense you cannot really walk uprightly. You say, Why? Well, you are like that poor woman in the gospels. She was so bowed down, she could not walk uprightly. She could only stagger. She could hardly lift up her head. She was bowed down. When the Lord spoke to her, do you know what it says? “Immediately she was made straight.” You will find those two things when the Lord in love and mercy deals with you. You may be bowed down with all the concerns of your never-dying soul and you cannot lift up your head. When the Lord says, “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity,” you will be able to lift up your head. And it will affect the way you walk. “Let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.”

“He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.” Well really what I have been saying is an introduction to the subject – perhaps you think this morning a rather lengthy introduction – but I have always felt that a gospel minister should set what he wishes to speak from in the context as the Holy Ghost has

placed it in the Word of God. The point which has specially been on my mind, which somewhat arrested me, was this: "They shall rest in their beds." I want first of all to speak of this completely in a natural sense: "They shall rest in their beds." One of the greatest blessings that God has given to His creatures in providence is the gift of sleep. How many a way-worn soul has gone to bed and slept heavily and for a few hours it is all forgotten. That one is oblivious to it. Even from a natural point of view sleep is one of God's blessings to mankind, and I do not think we are sufficiently thankful for it. "They shall rest in their beds." Because, beloved friends, we read of a few in Scripture who did not rest in their beds, who could not rest in their beds, and I want to mention two or three to you. They had comfortable beds. I think some of them had what the Word of God calls "beds of ivory." They could not have better.

The first one is Pharaoh. One night he did not sleep much. He did not rest on his bed, because he had had those remarkable dreams. A great man, the greatest ruler on earth, and his bed must have been comfortable, but he could not rest on it. If the Lord wishes to keep a man awake in judgment or in mercy, then that man cannot rest on his bed.

Of course, there is the story of one of the godly Puritan divines. One night he just could not rest on his bed, and in the end he said to his wife, "I am getting up and going to see old Mr. So-and-so." She reproved him, and said it was foolish. He said, "I cannot rest tonight. I cannot stop thinking about this poor man." She did everything she could to stop him; she thought it was so foolish. He got up and hurried to the house of this man. He was a godly man, but he was under the snare of Satan and was just about to take his life, just about to commit suicide, and the pastor's coming broke the snare. Sometimes the Lord has a purpose of love and mercy when a child of God cannot rest on his bed.

Perhaps some of you look back to those days when you woke up. You could not rest on your bed. You were frightened of going to sleep and waking up in hell. More than one of you have told that little tale before the church. "The living will lay it to his heart." Sometimes there is love and mercy in it. And there is the other way round, because some cannot rest on their bed and they have the sweetest meditation on the sin-atoning sufferings and the death of Jesus and their interest in it that they have ever had in their lives.

But Pharaoh could not rest on his bed because the Lord had a purpose of love and mercy, not so much to Pharaoh, but to Joseph in prison and to Jacob and to the whole Israel of God. Pharaoh cannot sleep, cannot rest. The magicians cannot interpret his dream. Joseph is sent for, and with God's enabling he does interpret. Pharaoh honours him. He is made chief of the land of Egypt. There is a wonderful supply of corn and in that way he is made a blessing to the Old Testament church of God, to Jacob and his sons. "They shall rest in their beds," but Pharaoh could not.

And no more could Ahasuerus. "On that night could not the king sleep." Just on one night, and he must have had as comfortable a bed as Pharaoh, but just that one night he could not sleep. Why? Because of a cruel enemy of the church of God, and he was designing the destruction of all God's people. He was going to begin with hanging godly Mordecai on the gallows, and it was early next morning the request was going to be made for Mordecai's death. So the king could not rest on his bed; he could not sleep. It was all in the Lord's hands. "His providence unfolds the book." Israel is going to be delivered. The hearts of all men are in the Lord's hand. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water." And if the king has not to sleep, the Lord will stop him from sleeping. So he decides on some diversion. I suppose he must have had dozens, but he decided on the Chronicles of the kings of Israel. He opened on a certain page. Mordecai had saved his life. Who is this Mordecai? Has he been honoured? He must be honoured immediately. And the next morning there is this wicked Haman who has come to demand the life of godly Mordecai. "They shall rest in their beds," but sometimes they cannot.

Just to mention one more: Nebuchadnezzar and that wonderful dream he had, that great image. Why could he not sleep? Because Daniel has to be exalted, Daniel has to be honoured. There must be the sleepless night. There must be the dream. It must be Daniel who alone can interpret this dream. There is a word: "So He giveth His beloved sleep," and He can do the opposite. Sometimes He does, and sometimes it is in wrath and sometimes it is in mercy.

"They shall rest in their beds." As this subject has been with me, I want to speak of some opposites, three opposites. "They shall rest in their beds." And they were strange beds they rested on. O but they did rest on them! They were not comfortable beds like the beds of these mighty

monarchs; they were not comfortable beds like we have; but didn't they rest on them! Of course, the first one was Jacob. You know what his bed was. He had a stone for his pillow, and he was just lying on the bare ground. But Jacob never had a better night in all his life. John Newton says,

“Kings are often waking kept,
Racked with care on beds of state;
Never king like Jacob slept,
For he lay at heaven's gate.”

He had that wonderful revelation, Christ the Mediator, the ladder between heaven and earth, the way of access, the way of communication, and he had a promise: “Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”

“They shall rest in their beds.” And then Elijah, and he had an uncomfortable bed in a desert under a juniper tree. If his bed was uncomfortable, his mind was more uncomfortable. He was in the depths of sorrow and he was running away from it, and he got under a juniper tree. We are told that the Lord sent an angel from heaven. O what a wonderful commentary on that beautiful little word: “He careth for you”! “Dispatched from heaven an angel stood,” and that angel caused him to sleep. There poor Elijah slept on his bed, though it was not a comfortable one. And then the angel awoke him, and there was a cake that was baked for him on the coals. You think, rather than that a poor, distressed, despondent servant of God should perish, an angel comes down from heaven to bake a cake for him. And then the angel touched him and caused him to sleep again, and the next time when he was awakened he was fed with heavenly food, and he went in the strength of it many days.

“They shall rest in their beds.” And the third one – I do not know whether you noticed it; it was the reading from God's word this morning and I have often thought it is one of the most remarkable scriptures in the whole Bible – the third psalm, and over the top it says, “A psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.” I do not think any father ever had a greater sorrow than poor David did when that son whom he loved so dearly not only tried to depose him from the kingdom, but to slay him, to take his life. And David wrote this psalm, the third psalm, “when he fled from Absalom his son.” It must have seemed the end of everything to David.

What does he say in this psalm? He says, “I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me.” If ever there was a child of God in the furnace of affliction, it was David, but the Lord so mercifully helped him that he had confusion all around him, but he had “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” in his heart. “I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me.” And then he repeats it. He says, “I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.” What a miracle of love and mercy!

“They shall rest in their beds.” Now I want to pass on and I want to speak of it in a vital, spiritual sense: the righteous, the merciful, “they shall rest in their beds.” There is only one bed on which a lost, ruined, guilty sinner can lie down and rest, and that is the bed of Christ’s righteousness. Some of you know that; some of you have proved it. It is a blessed bed to lie down on. You can rest on it; you can sleep on it; you can find peace on it. It is a comfortable bed. It is not a bed that will give way and let you down. It is a bed that will bear your weight. O what thousands of sinners there have been who could find no rest, “still seeking rest, and finding none,” but led by the Spirit of God they have been sweetly enabled to lie down on the bed of Christ’s righteousness and they have found peace there.

“They shall rest in their beds.” This same prophet, Isaiah, speaks of some other beds; it is a rather unusual scripture. He says, “The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it.” I do not know whether any of you have ever had the experience of having to sleep in a bed that is too short for you. Some of us ministers, when we were supplies, used to sleep in all kinds of beds. I have known what it is to try and sleep in a bed that is too short. I will tell you one thing: you cannot rest in it; you cannot get comfortable; you keep waking up; you do not have a very good night; you do not have any peace. I am sure if some of you have not had to sleep in a bed that is too short for you, you have known something of what it is like trying to go to sleep, trying to rest on an aeroplane where there is not much leg-room.

Well, it is a very striking figure: a bed too short to lie down on. But anything short of Christ’s glorious righteousness imputed to a guilty sinner is a bed that is too short to lie down on. When the Lord begins to deal with you, you painfully feel you have no righteousness of your own. “Your best is stained and dyed with sin; your all is nothing worth.” You

have no righteousness with which you can appear before a holy God and you cannot find rest. Wherever you try to find rest, it is like trying to go to sleep, to lie down, on that bed that is too short for you. You will prove all that you can do, even your best, is a bed too short. All your repentance, all your vows, all your tears, are a bed too short. You will find that all your religious duties, your take-it-for-granted religion, your resting on what other people think about you, the prayers of other people, it is “still seeking rest, but finding none.” Do some of you know this experience, and I am talking about under the teaching, the leading of the Holy Spirit? You want to be right for eternity. You want to be prepared for heaven. You want to stand in the great day. But you cannot find that bed to lie down on, that bed to rest on, wherever you go, wherever you fly. Your bed is too short for you to rest upon.

“In vain the trembling conscience seeks
Some solid ground to rest upon;
With long despair the spirit breaks,
Till made to rest on Christ alone.”

And then, beloved friends, you shall rest on your bed. It will not be a bed of carnal security; it will not be a bed that will let you down; it will not be a bed that is uncomfortable. A lost, ruined, guilty sinner with no righteousness at all of his own, lying down and finding rest on the bed of Christ’s righteousness. Now this is the gospel of the grace of God as I understand it. “There remaineth therefore” – in Christ – “a rest to the people of God.” He brought in an everlasting righteousness by His holy obedience to His Father’s law, when He fulfilled every jot and tittle, when He magnified the law and made it honourable. He brought in an everlasting righteousness, not for Himself, but to reckon it, lawfully reckon it to the account of guilty sinners who have no righteousness of their own.

But beloved friends, you will have to deny your own righteousness, or in the analogy here, you will have to flee from that bed. You will have to stop trying to settle down on that bed that is too short for you. You will have to flee from your own righteousness to this glorious righteousness of Christ which is “unto all and upon all them that believe.” And by faith we enter into rest. It is an eternal rest. O but this glorious righteousness that, “As by one man’s disobedience” – Adam – “many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One” – Christ, the last Adam – “shall many be made righteous.” And it is fleeing for refuge to this bed you can rest upon, like

the apostle: “That I” – a sinner like I – “that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.” O this is the bed on which the righteous lie down and find rest. This is the rest of which the Saviour speaks: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “They shall rest in their beds.” It is a yea and amen covenant promise sealed with blood, if you are dissatisfied with your own righteousness, if you are fleeing from the bed that is too short for you. “They shall rest in their beds.” It is one of “Jehovah’s *shalls* and *wills*, firm as the everlasting hills.”

“They shall rest in their beds.” There are a few of these beds you might like to meditate on this afternoon. The promises – they are good beds to rest on. A young man said to a godly minister outside the chapel, I love the promises; I love to hang on them. O, he said, don’t hang on them; you seek to lie down on them. The promises are like beds. Sometimes the will of God is like a bed. You have all kinds of things confusing you, troubling you, bothering you in your life. You cannot find any bed to rest on until you see the will of God. Like the old German poet said, “Thou sweet, beloved will of God.”

“They shall rest in their beds.” I am coming round now almost to where we began: the blessed death of the righteous, the eternal peace the righteous enjoy in heaven, the rest that remains eternally for the people of God. “He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds.” But it is only those who by experience have been brought to find a resting place in Christ, only those who have been led by the Spirit to rest on Christ’s righteousness and Christ’s righteousness alone, who in the great day shall enter into peace and who shall rest in their beds eternally in heaven. Now may this be our blessed portion. “They shall rest in their beds.”