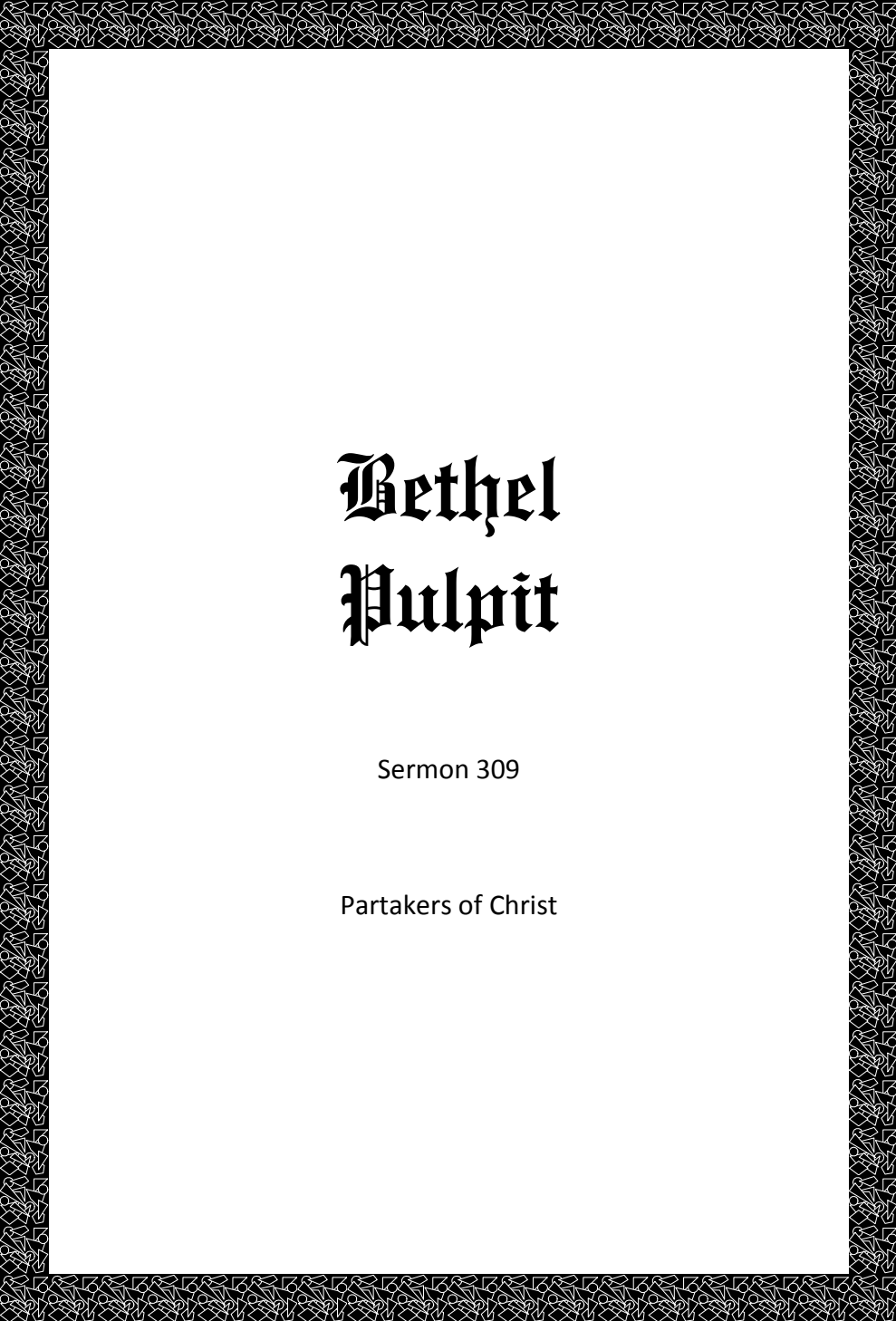




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 309

Partakers of Christ

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 3rd April, 2011**

Text: *"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3. 14).*

This is the vital point in real religion: to be a partaker of Christ. O beloved friends, we want to be partakers in His great salvation. We do not want to be left out. We do not want to be passed by. O to be a partaker of Christ, a partaker of the eternal inheritance, not just a spectator, not just an onlooker, not just a bystander – to be a partaker!

It is a solemn point; it is a beautiful point; it is such a simple point. The point is to have an interest in it. There are those there hearing a will read, and there are some, O they receive so much. There are others, they are witnesses: they hear it, they see it, but they do not receive anything. O you see the difference and you see the disappointment. A beautiful banquet, those who are partaking, there are others who are there – there are those serving, there are those even who have prepared it. O but the difference, to be a partaker! Even you little children know the difference: if there are other children playing games and you are watching them and you are not allowed to take part, you are sad; the disappointment. It is a vital point. It is a very beautiful point. It is a very simple point. Even the great apostle on one occasion said, "If I by grace be a partaker" – the one thing that mattered for him, and really it is the one thing that matters with us. "If I by grace be a partaker."

"For we are made partakers of Christ," which very simply, clearly means this: that by nature in our flesh, in our lost, ruined condition, we are *not* partakers of Christ. As we are born in sin, as we grow up with our carnal nature, we are not partakers of Christ. But if we are ever going to get to heaven at last, we must be partakers of Christ. When there is the great judgment day, the solemn separation, we do not just want to be those who are onlookers when the redeemed go into glory. So we need to be "*made* partakers of Christ."

Of course, there are two aspects of this. You cannot really separate them, though they are distinct. There is the glorious work of Christ in redemption and there is the work of the Holy Spirit in making it known. "We are *made* partakers of Christ." So we have that beautiful word, He

“hath made us meet to be partakers” – He has made us meet – that is, He has made us fit – “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” – that glorious inheritance in heaven where the redeemed sing God’s praises eternally, that inheritance all of grace.

Now, “We are *made* partakers of Christ.” So the vital necessity of the work of redemption, that a lost, ruined, guilty sinner might be made right, prepared, made meet to be a partaker. So the Saviour must live a holy, spotless life that His righteousness might be imputed, and He must die that sin-atonement death that our sin and guilt might be washed away, that we might be *made meet* to be partakers of that eternal inheritance – for certainly we are not meet, we are not fit, we are not prepared by nature. But this is the Holy Spirit’s work, and He teaches us this in our heart and in our conscience. We know that we are not partakers by nature. We are brought into that solemn concern. We must die. We must meet our Maker. We must give an account. We must receive the solemn and dreadful judgment. We are not right. We are not prepared. We are not meet. We cannot make ourselves meet. So we have to pray that prayer that the Lord in His love and mercy will make us meet, that He will prepare us for the great day, that He will forgive our sins, that He will wash us in the blood of Christ, that we might be ready, that we might be right, that it might be “well when Jesus calls.” Have you got a sweet hope that the Lord in His mercy has made you meet to be a partaker of the eternal inheritance? Or is it your longing desire that He will? Is it your prayer?

“For we are made partakers of Christ, *if we hold the beginning of our confidence.*” So then if we are being made partakers, delivered from being outsiders, spectators, if we are being brought in, then there will be a beginning. We cannot hold our beginning steadfast if there has never been a beginning! Now there is a beginning in the things of God, and if you and I have never begun, then we can never end. There is the beginning of a work of grace in our hearts. “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” There will be the beginning of a concern. There will be the beginning of prayer, the beginning of faith. There will be the beginnings, the first springing up of hope and desire, the first fleings for refuge to Jesus. There will be a beginning, a setting out on our heavenly pilgrimage. We will not reach heaven unless we travel heavenwards. So if we are made partakers of Christ, there will be this beginning, this beginning which is God’s work, this beginning which is

through God's grace. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me," which simply means He will finish what He has begun. There are no unfinished works with God. Everywhere you go today, you see something that is left unfinished. It is a day in which people do not do things properly and they do not finish them properly. There are no unfinished works with the Lord. "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me."

"Thou, Lord, wilt carry on,
And perfectly perform,
The work Thou hast begun
In me, a sinful worm."

"The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me." He will finish what He has begun. "Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of Thine own hands."

"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold *the beginning* of our confidence stedfast." So there must be a beginning and essentially the beginning is this: "Marvel not that I said unto thee, *Ye must* be born again." It is a call by grace, Holy Ghost conversion, something different, something new. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The beginning. "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence." So really, beloved friends, you have the three things here, if you and I are going to be partakers of Christ and partakers of His great salvation. We shall be *made* partakers – God's work. There will be *a beginning*. And then the third thing is this: there will be this *confidence*. We cannot hold our confidence stedfast to the end if we have never had any confidence.

Let me be very clear here. I do not take this word *confidence* in the Old Testament usually to mean a person feeling confident. I take it to mean a person blessed with God-given, living faith. You see, it is this confidence. This is the vital point. This is the emphasis. It is not a sinner *feeling* extremely confident. It is a blessed thing if he does, but it is this: the Person he trusts, the Person in whom he confides. "In Christ, and Him alone, confide." Now that is the confidence you have to hold fast, not your feeling of being confident. Peter felt very confident, and so did David, and so did many more.

“In Christ, and Him alone, confide;
Still at the throne of grace abide;
Eternal victory thou shalt gain,
Nor shalt thou seek His face in vain.”

Now this is the confidence and that is the vital point this morning, if you and I are ever to be partakers of the eternal inheritance and partakers in Christ now and His great salvation, it is this: to be blessed with this sweet, humble confidence in the Saviour. It is confidence in Him. It is trusting in Him.

There is so much on this point in the Word of God. What a lovely word that is: “The Lord shall be thy confidence”! I mentioned that word in prayer: “Be not afraid of sudden fear.” Well, it is coming everywhere today in the world – in Libya, in Japan, in the Middle East, everywhere, things in our country – sudden fear coming. “Be not afraid,” says Almighty God, “of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked.” Whether you take that to be the desolations the wicked cause – and they are causing a lot today – or whether it is the desolations that fall on the wicked. “Be not afraid ... for the Lord shall be thy confidence.” And we think especially of that last great day, the judgment seat of Christ. There will be a lot of desolations of the wicked then. There will be a lot of sudden fear coming. O but dear child of God hoping in the Saviour, the Lord shall be thy confidence. He who is your Judge is your Saviour, and He who is your Judge will never be able to say to you, “I never knew you.” You will be able to say, “Lord, Thou hast. Thou hast known my soul in adversity.”

It is a beautiful word: “The Lord shall be thy confidence.” And what follows? “And shall keep thy foot from being taken.” That is what we are afraid of: sliding and slipping. He will not allow thy foot to be taken. There is the loving, watchful care. “The Lord shall be thy confidence.”

Well, there is a question in the Word of God and it is a very important one: “What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?” That word was spoken in a very scornful way by that ungodly Rabshakeh who was the emissary of Senacherib when the Assyrians surrounded Jerusalem. It was spoken in mockery and scorn to King Hezekiah. “What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?” Hezekiah knew the answer. He did not tell Rabshakeh; he told his God. “What confidence is this wherein thou

trustest?" There was that great army, one- hundred-and-eighty-five thousand round the walls of Jerusalem. It was an impossible case. It was death and destruction. Hezekiah, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" It was not a vain confidence. He did not trust in the Lord in vain. The next day there were all those dead bodies surrounding the walls of Jerusalem. "So let all Thine enemies perish."

But we are not putting the question to Hezekiah this morning. We are putting the question to you. Hezekiah did not tell Rabshakeh and I do not want you to tell me, but you must answer in the sight of God. You have a never-dying soul. You are a sinner. You must meet your Maker. You must give an account. There will be the judgment, the eternal separation. "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest?" You know what our hymnwriter says:

"If my hope on Christ is stayèd,
Let Him come when He thinks best;
O my soul! be not dismayèd,
Lean upon His loving breast."

The hope of every sinner saved by grace is in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "In Him, and Him alone, confide." This is the place where those who are partakers of Christ are brought. They are brought as sinners in all their helplessness and need to look to Him alone, to trust in Him alone, to rest on Him alone. Their hope shall not be ashamed.

So we have that word, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." That is the strength of a believer against sin, Satan and the world, his strength in this evil day, this quiet, humble confidence in the Saviour. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." And then we have the exhortation: "Cast not away therefore your confidence." Satan will tempt you to. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."

"Does Satan tempt you to give up,
And call no more on Jesus' name?
Cast not away your little hope;
Come hither, and *behold the Lamb.*"

O that is where our confidence is, in beholding the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, in beholding the Lamb slain at Calvary, in beholding the Lamb exalted.

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” So we have this vital point: a partaker of Christ, and how he is made a partaker of Christ, and how he is brought to confide in Christ and in Christ alone.

Well then, we have a warning here and an exhortation, and perhaps at first it sounds very strangely on our ears, but it is necessary; it is important. “We are made partakers of Christ, *if*.” You say, Surely we are not going to get an *if* here. “*If* we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” Let me be very clear: it does not mean that holding our confidence stedfast to the end makes us a partaker of Christ! It does not mean that at all. But it means this is the way that our being partakers of Christ is proved. The final way in which your standing in Christ, your being a partaker in Christ is proved, is as through grace you endure to the end. “He that endureth to the end,” says the Saviour, “shall be saved.” And only he that endures to the end. Now every partaker of Christ, each one without exception, *will*, must hold fast the beginning of his confidence stedfast to the end, but it is only as they do hold fast the beginning of their confidence stedfast to the end that they prove that they are partakers of Christ. Many appear to be partakers of Christ. Judas Iscariot did. Simon Magus did. Demas did. But they did not hold fast the beginning of their confidence stedfast to the end, and so they proved it was a false confidence and a wrong beginning.

So we have so many of these solemn warnings in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Let me just linger here a moment, because it is important. Some of us absolutely love the Epistle to the Hebrews. We have the sacred, glorious truth of the everlasting priesthood of the Son of God and all these reminders of this Man, this glorious Man, the beauty and suitability and preciousness of Christ. But there are other things we do not like just as much. The Epistle to the Hebrews abounds with warnings like the one in this verse. No book in the New Testament has so many awful warnings. There was a reason for it. What was the reason? These Jewish Christians, these Hebrew Christians, had been blessed with faith in the Lord Jesus, but they were suffering dreadful persecution. I mean loving children being rejected by their parents, wives being cast off by their husbands. It was very, very hard for them and there was always this temptation to give up their religion and go back. But there was something that came even closer than this. The Jews they had been separated from said, Yes, but our religion was given by Almighty God, given on Mount Sinai; the

priesthood, the sacrifices – all these were appointed by God. You cannot deny it. You are not only rejecting your own faith, but you are rejecting God Himself, rejecting what God has given. So you have the two things in the Epistle to the Hebrews side by side: the solemn warnings about going back, the solemn warnings about the need to continue, and then on the other hand this beautiful opening up – yes, God did give the ceremonial law, the priesthood, the animal sacrifices, the blood, but all this is fulfilled in Christ, all this is now abolished. “By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” But we do need these warnings concerning this turning back, this going away.

“We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” You have already had it once before in this chapter. This is a repetition. You have it in verse 6. “Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” So right through this Epistle and right through the New Testament we have this exhortation coming again and again *to hold fast*. Let me give you an example that comes just before the canon of Scripture ends: “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” Some people cannot understand this. We truly, lovingly and blessedly sing,

“Once in Him, in Him for ever;
Thus the eternal covenant stands.”

But I understand in the world today, especially in the United States, there is a most appalling perversion of that blessed truth. The old divines used to say that if you get a truth out of context, you make it into an error. Because people are saved with an everlasting salvation, they shall never perish – we believe in the everlasting safety and security of the people of God – but it is *as* they endure to the end, it is *as* they hold fast their profession, it is *as* they hold fast the beginning of their confidence. So really these warnings and these solemn exhortations to beware of turning back and to hold fast.

“We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” Well then, if we have this exhortation to hold fast unto the end, and if we are so weak and helpless and sinful, how *can* we hold fast our confidence right to the end? The suggestion is we are going to be opposed, we are going to be assailed, we are going to be tempted. There is indwelling sin; there is our weakness; there is Satan;

there is the world, either persecuting or alluring. We are to hold fast.

Well, just a few things. First of all, beloved friends, the only way you and I can ever hold fast our confidence to the end is if our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ holds us fast to the end, and through His mercy He will. The only way you and I can hold fast is as the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ holds us fast. So John Newton says,

“Ah! Lord, with such a heart as mine,
Unless Thou hold me fast,
I feel I must, I shall decline,
And prove like them at last.”

“Unless Thou hold me fast.” But there is divine certainty here. There is a gracious God here. There is an almighty arm here. This is why the believer endures to the end. The godly Puritans said when the Lord in the beginning of a work of grace put His grace in your heart, one element of it is enduring grace.

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” But then there is the walking of it out. In the following chapter we are bidden to *hold fast our profession*. But how does the apostle introduce it? In a very beautiful way. “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” As if he says, Here is the secret. You are here on earth. You have a profession. You have to hold it fast. You cannot. You are too weak. You are too helpless. You fear you are going to decline. But you will hold fast. Why? In heaven you have a great and glorious High Priest, and He helps you, and He is almighty, and He is watching over you, and He is guarding you, and He is keeping you, and in Him is everything you need to help you hold fast your profession to the end. That is the secret of it.

“We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” And then the apostle speaks of His loving, tender sympathy. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He understands our weakness. He will not break the bruised reed. He will not quench the smoking flax. He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

What building is erected on this foundation? What glorious consequence does the apostle bring? This: “Let us therefore” – because of this glorious truth, this glorious Man in heaven – “let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace.” That is the ground on which you are going to hold fast your profession when you are tempted, when you feel your weakness. There is a throne of grace and there is an almighty Saviour there, a great and glorious High Priest. There is everything you need. He is greater than Satan, greater than your temptations, greater than your sin. That is the ground on which you are going to hold fast to the end. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy.” That is just what we need. “And find grace to help in time of need.” That is just what we need.

“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence *stedfast* unto the end.” O but in a word it is this – how shall I put it? – holding fast your confidence stedfast to the end? At the close of John chapter 6 we read that many of the Lord’s *disciples*, His *disciples* walked no more with Him. So they did not hold fast their confidence to the end, and so they proved they never were real disciples. “Many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.” And the Lord Jesus turned to His immediate followers and He put this close question: “Will ye also go away.” Will ye? That is the point that comes to you and me this morning. When grace prevails and living faith prevails, you are on just the same ground as Peter. Whatever would happen if we did go away? We cannot go away; we dare not go away; we must not go away.

“Depart from Thee? – ’tis death – ’tis more;
'Tis endless ruin, deep despair!”

“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” Now that is the ground, that is the blessed foundation on which you and I in all our weakness and helplessness and sin and need will hold fast the beginning of our confidence stedfast to the end, and so prove that in the beginning we were made partakers of Christ.