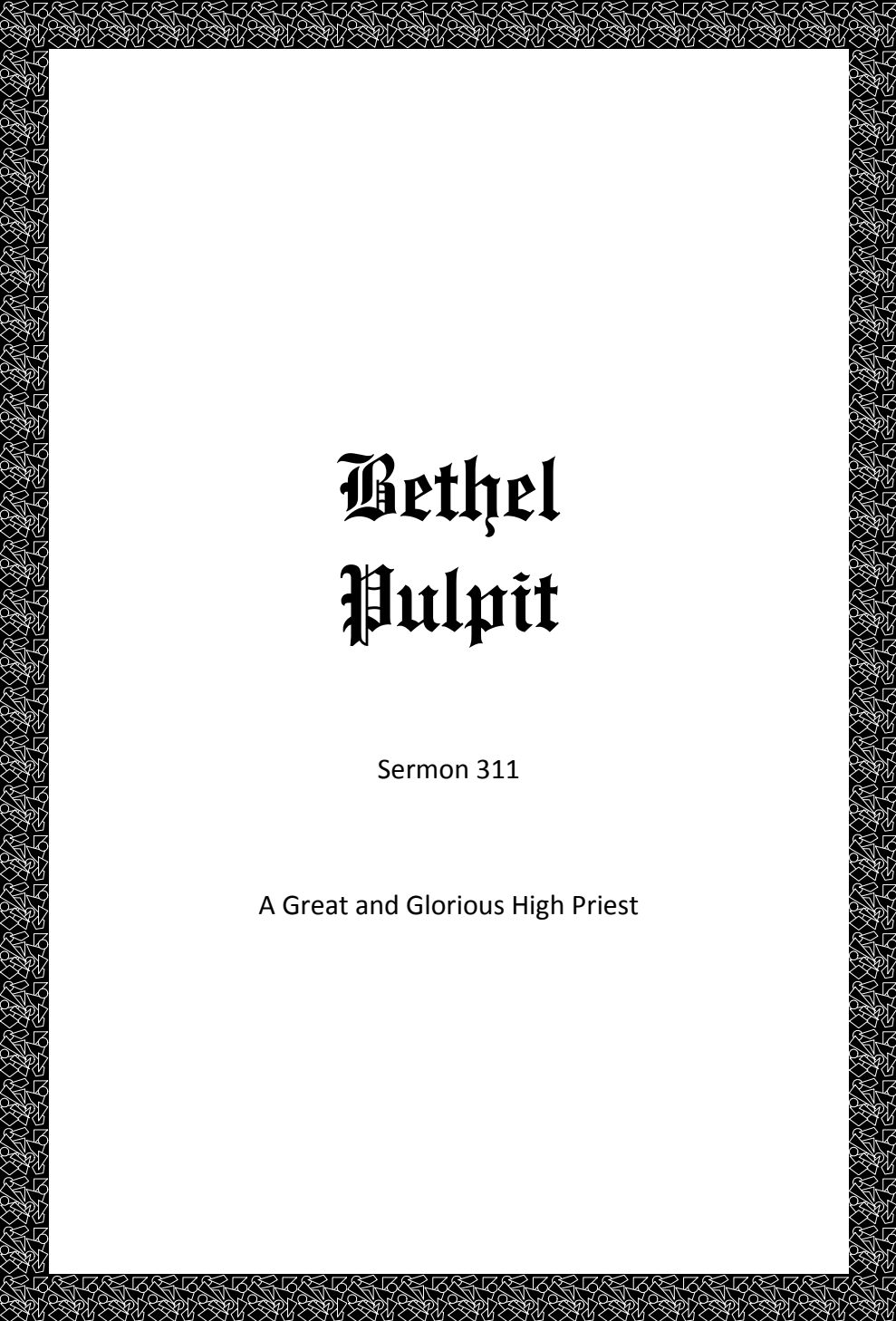




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 311

A Great and Glorious High Priest

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 29th May, 2011**

Text: *"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8. 1).*

The apostle looks back. He looks back over all those precious, glorious things he has been saying about the Lord Jesus. He does not want those to whom he writes to forget them. They need to be reminded of them.

"The things which we have spoken." Well, what are these glorious things that the apostle has spoken? Well, he starts with a Person, and he makes it clear that that Person is the Son of God from everlasting, that He is almighty. That is where he begins. And then he continues, that this glorious Person, the eternal Son of God, became a real Man. He became a real Man that He might suffer, bleed and die. He proceeds to show how great this glorious Man was – greater than Moses, greater than Aaron, greater than Joshua, greater than all the priests of the Levitical dispensation. And he speaks of how this glorious Man is the true and great and almighty High Priest to the household of God. But above all, the death of this Man, the death of this High Priest, the sacrifice that He offered, a sacrifice that atoned. O how we sang of it:

"Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.

"But Christ, the heavenly Lamb" – These are the glorious
things which have been spoken – "But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they."

O the wonders of this Man, this great High Priest, the sacrifice He offered, the wonderful effects of it! And what a beautiful, solemn, sacred summary of the work of Jesus that word is – may it touch our hearts tonight; may it enter in, and may we feel a personal interest in it: "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." "His own self" – not

Aaron offering the sacrifices of lambs and bulls and goats, nor all his descendants. “Who His own self bare our sins” – the dreadful weight, and in bearing them He for ever bore them away. “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body.”

“See! from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

That is what it means: “In His own body” – the sufferings the Saviour endured.

“Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” Often in the New Testament the cross of Christ is spoken of as *the tree*, and the reason for that is this: under the Mosaic law, a curse was pronounced: “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” Now when that curse was first pronounced under the law, the cruel death of crucifixion had not yet been used. But the Lord knew. “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” And so the Lord Jesus our great High Priest in offering His one sacrifice, in bearing our sins in His own body, it was on the accursed tree, because He was under the curse.

By nature you and I are under the curse. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” That cuts the whole human race off and the whole of this congregation off, the curse of a broken law which every one of us has broken in thought and word and deed. “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” And then Christ in His sin-atonement sufferings, “who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.” And that wonderful Scripture fulfilled: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” The only way you and I can ever be delivered from the curse of a broken law is if the Holy Spirit leads us in our helplessness and sin and need to the foot of the cross where Christ was made a curse that guilty sinners might be blessed. O what did we sing?

“Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove.”

O may the Holy Spirit make you and me true believers, true believers in Christ made a curse that sinners might be blessed, true believers in the one sacrifice, true believers at the foot of the cross, true believers hanging our everlasting all on that sacred, solemn word: “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.”

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum.” So the apostle gives a summary of everything he has been saying, and that is just what I have been trying to do: to give you a summary of all those things which were spoken. And they are blessed things. I wonder if some of you said,

“Holy Ghost, repeat these words,
Full salvation’s in them.”

They are blessed words which were spoken. “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum” – what the apostle has been saying by inspiration, and what I have been trying to say.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest.” Well, of course, very simply it means we have such an High Priest as the apostle has been writing about in these first seven chapters. We have such an High Priest as I have been trying to speak about. But surely, beloved friends, it is more than that. When the apostle says, “We have *such* an High Priest,” it is something like when John Kent says,

“On *such* love, my soul, still ponder,
Love so great, so rich, so free;
Say, whilst lost in holy wonder,
Why, O Lord, such love to me?”

“We have *such an High Priest*.” So I take it to be not just saying such an High Priest as we have been speaking of, but a *word of admiration*. In the Thessalonians we have that expression: “When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.” I believe in the hearts of sinners saved by grace there is a spirit of admiration for the dear Saviour of sinners.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have *such an High Priest*.” I believe that when the apostle here says, “This is the sum,” it does not just mean, Well, I am seeking to summarise these things; I am seeking to remind you of them. I believe it goes further than

that, much deeper than that, as if the apostle is saying, Now of the things which we have spoken this, beloved friends, is *the very sum and substance of the gospel*. There would not be any gospel without it. This is the sum and substance of it. This is the foundation of it. This is the sum and substance of what Christ has done. In other words, this is the point that matters above everything else; this is the thing that is vital. This is the thing which is more important than anything else. This is the sum and substance of it all. We have an High Priest.

Perhaps some of you will say, “Look, we always thought that the sum and substance of the gospel was this, that the most important thing in salvation is to have a Saviour; and this says just to have a High Priest.” Beloved friends, if Christ had never become a High Priest, He could never have been a Saviour! It is only because He is a High Priest, because of what He accomplished as a High Priest, that He is a Saviour. Well, you have it so clearly put: “This Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost.” It comes towards the end of the preceding chapter. The ground on which Christ is able to save sinners to the uttermost is on this ground, this foundation: because He has an unchangeable priesthood; because He hath an unchangeable priesthood, He is able to save.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum.” It is the one thing that matters. “We have such an High Priest.” Now then, beloved friends, when you read of a priest, it always has relationship to you and me as sinners. When Adam was created in the Garden of Eden unfallen, he did not need any priest. There was no such thing. The name had never been spoken of. There is no mention of any priest. Adam in his innocence could have direct communication with a holy, heart-searching God. He could go to Him in his spotless innocence. They could walk together in the cool of the evening in the beautiful Garden of Eden. But when sin entered and death by sin and man became a fallen creature, man could have no direct access to a holy God.

Have you ever thought of this point, that every religion, whatever it is, has a priesthood? Heathen tribes, when they have been discovered, people who have never been known before, people living in the jungle or some of those in those South Sea islands, they always had a priesthood, because the very light of nature, apart from divine revelation, taught them that as fallen, as sinful, as guilty, they could not have direct access to God.

They must go through a mediator. They must go through a priest. They must go through one who could present them to God. They must go through one who was acceptable to God. They must go through one who could offer a sacrifice for them. They must go through one who could forgive their sins. A gospel minister is not a priest. The Roman Catholic priesthood is falsely named, whatever else it is.

O the need for fallen, lost humanity of a priesthood! It must be someone who is acceptable to God in heaven. Where can such an one be found? Also he must be one acceptable among the brethren. Where can he be found – acceptable to man, acceptable to God, identifying with the Godhead, identifying with humanity? And so you have the glorious Person of our great High Priest, God and Man in one glorious Christ. Now He is a Mediator who stands between, through which a guilty sinner can approach a holy God and find mercy and forgiveness and cleansing and salvation in the blood.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum.” It is the sum. “We have such an High Priest.” In meditating on these words, one thing seemed to arrest me. The apostle said, “*We have* such an High Priest.” He could have said, Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: *there is* such an High Priest.” But he did not. He said, “We have.” “We have such an High Priest.” You notice in one or two places the apostle speaks like this. Let me just give you one instance. The sixth chapter speaking of that good hope through grace, that anchor of the soul: “Which hope *we have*.” It does not say, *There is* an anchor. “Which hope *we have* as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Now, “This is the sum: We have such an High Priest.” I want to hold you on this for a moment or two. There is all the difference in the world between a *there is* religion and a *we have* religion. There is all the difference between heaven and hell. Now what kind of religion have you got? I hope everyone in this chapel has a *there is* religion. I hope everyone in this chapel believes *there is* “a great High Priest ... Jesus the Son of God.” I hope everyone can say *there is* such an High Priest. O but you need a religion to go further than that, beloved friends. Not just that there is such an High Priest, but for grace to bring you here, for the Holy Spirit’s teaching to bring you here, as a sinner to come here: “*We have*

such an High Priest.” Not just to know *there is* a Saviour, but to have that sweet hope, *we have* a Saviour. Not just to know *there is* a good hope through grace, but to be able to say, “Which hope *we have* as an anchor of the soul.” We did not always have these things. We were not born with them. But O to be in the possession of them through grace, through the Holy Spirit’s teaching, these things that through mercy we possess and these things which are ours and these things which can never be taken away from us.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” As our great High Priest, He offered the sacrifice at Calvary. He offered the sacrifice on the cross, the sacrifice of Himself. But though He was buried, He rose again triumphant. He led His disciples forth as far as Bethany and He ascended into heaven, and, “Him hath God exalted ... to be a Prince and a Saviour.” And there He “is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”

Now we have this word three times in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We have it in the opening words in the first chapter: “When He had by Himself purged our sins, [He] sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High.” And then we have it in chapter 10: “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.” And then the third place is here: “Who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” Now under the law, under the old dispensation, once a year Israel’s high priest, having offered the sacrifice, passed through the veil, not without blood, into the holiest of all, and this was a type of Christ our great High Priest entering into heaven. But that high priest in the Old Testament did not sit down there. He had to go out. He had to do the same again the following year. He could not sit down. His work was never finished. Those priests, we are told, stood “offering oftentimes the same sacrifices” for sin. They stood. Their work was never finished.

O but our great High Priest, having offered the great sacrifice for the sins of His people, sat down in heaven. It is the mark of a finished work. Nothing can ever be added to it. Nothing can ever be taken from it. This is the ground, the foundation of our hope, that a guilty sinner with nothing to plead can rest his everlasting all upon the finished work of Christ. He does not need anything else. It is sufficient to take him to

heaven. And all the multitudes who are now in heaven have all come to heaven on that same ground, as sinners saved by grace, and their only hope in the finished work of Christ. O to see Him as He is sat down in heaven.

I notice this word is just a little different from the other two. It does not say, He sat down; it says, He “is set on the right hand of the throne,” which to me, if words mean anything, seems a little stronger. If the Lord Jesus is set there in heaven, it means He is there for ever. It means that He can never be removed. “*Set* on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”

Well, it is the place of honour. When Solomon wanted to honour his mother, he brought her and caused her to sit down on his right hand. So it is the place of honour. It is His by eternal right and it is His by merit, through the work of redemption. And He is set there “on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”

So we have the answer to one great question, where has the High Priest gone, where is our great High Priest? And the other great question is this, and it intimately concerns us: what is He doing there? What is our great and glorious High Priest doing there in heaven, even this evening, on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens? Well, just two or three answers to that momentous question.

First of all, He is *appearing in heaven on behalf of His people*. “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself.” Why? “Now to appear in the presence of God for us.” And dear child of God, you may have many, many things against you, but,

“Ye children of Zion, now dry up your tears;
For you the Redeemer in glory appears.”

He appears there; He is accepted by His Father, and the whole of His finished work is accepted by His Father, and all His blood-bought people are accepted by His Father, and there on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens there is Someone in your nature, your Saviour, your Friend, your Representative, your Advocate. And if Israel’s high priest under the law appeared with all the names of the tribes of Israel engraven on his breastplate of precious stones, our great High Priest there appears with all the names of His people, not on a breastplate of precious stones, but deeply engraven on His heart. O the beauty of it! John Newton says,

“I read my name upon His breast,
And see the Father smile.”

That is heaven on earth.

“I read my name upon His breast” – my unworthy name –
“And see the Father smile.”

Perhaps you do not go as high as that. Perhaps you say in the language of Scripture, “Set me as a seal upon Thine heart, as a seal upon Thine arm.”

“O let my name engraven stand
Both on Thy heart and on Thy hand;
Seal me upon Thy arm, and wear
That pledge of love for ever there.”

There “to appear in the presence of God for us.” This is the One through whom our prayers ascend to heaven. That is why we pray “for Jesus’ sake.” This is the One through whom we are permitted to venture, to draw nigh. This is the One in whom as lost and guilty sinners we find acceptance. There “to appear in the presence of God for us.”

“We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” And then secondly, what is our great and glorious High Priest doing in heaven? He appears for His people, but *He intercedes for them.*”

“For all that come to God by Him,
Salvation He demands;
Points to their names upon His breast,
And spreads His wounded hands.”

And His intercession must prevail. Well, it did whilst He was on earth for Peter. Didn’t Peter sin! Didn’t he deny his Lord and Master! Wasn’t he guilty! “But I have prayed for thee.” And that prayer availed. Sometimes you feel guilty and sometimes your heart is hard and sometimes you cannot pray for yourself, and you hear a whisper from heaven: “But I have prayed for thee.” O this all-prevailing intercession of our great High Priest! “He ever liveth to make intercession” – now who does it say for? All “that come unto God by Him.” Now can you slip in there? Can you creep in there? Are you one of them? These are the ones who have an interest in His everlasting priesthood. These are the ones for whom He intercedes. All “that come unto God by Him.” There is no other way you and I can

come unto God. But if born again and led by the Spirit, of necessity we have to come unto God and through this “new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh ... let us draw near.” That is the apostle’s conclusion: “Let us draw near.”

Really the ground on which His intercession must prevail is because He is the Beloved of His Father who delights to answer the prayers of His Son, and secondly on the ground of the accomplishments of that work performed on the cross, on the grounds of that sacrifice. Israel’s high priest on the Day of Atonement went into the holy place and he took the blood of the sacrifice and there he presented it, he sprinkled it, and it was accepted for the whole Israel of God. And the Saviour as He intercedes –

“Our great High Priest, before the throne,
Presents the merits of His blood;
For our acceptance pleads His own,
And proves our cause completely good.”

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.” Now what is He doing there? Appearing for His people, and secondly interceding for them. O but thirdly, *almighty to save*. That is the top stone, if you will, that is the conclusion of it all. “But this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.” There is an unchangeable merit in His precious blood. There is an unchangeable merit in His intercession. There is an unchangeable merit in His appearance in heaven. “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Now, “We have such an High Priest,” who is such a Saviour, an almighty Saviour, and a Saviour for the chief of sinners, and able and willing to save even to the uttermost.

“Yes,” says Gadsby, “the very worst of sinners,
Who upon His grace rely,
Shall of endless bliss be winners.”

Well, what a glorious summary it is that the apostle gives. There is salvation in it; there is heaven in it. And we want the Holy Spirit to take of these precious things of Jesus and glorify the Lord Jesus, but to show these things to us, reveal them to us, show us our personal interest, reveal our

personal interest. What is the conclusion of it? For all those lost and ruined and guilty, all those who have an interest here, the conclusion is this: “Saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.”