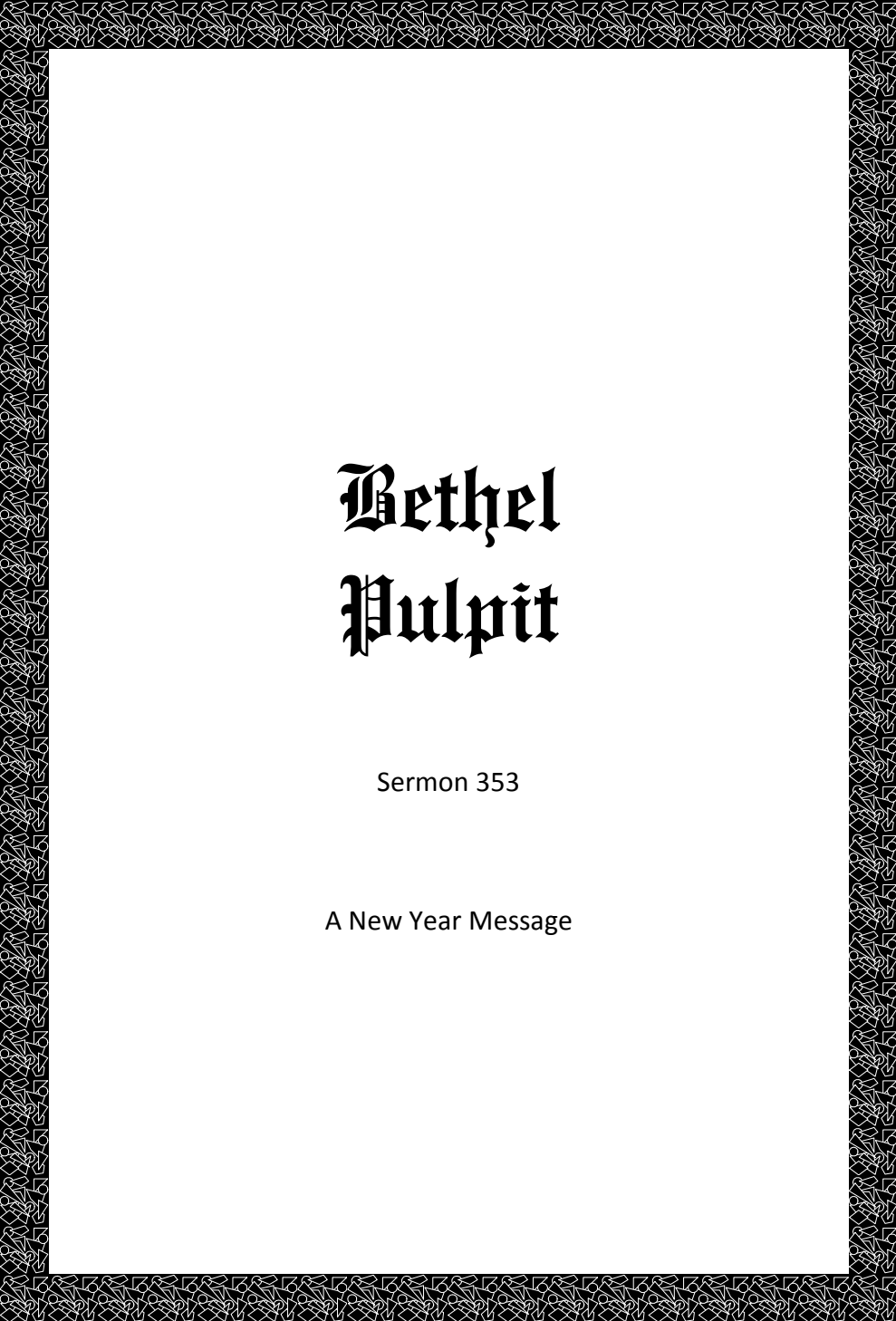




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 353

A New Year Message

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 5th January, 2014**

Text: *"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1. 13).*

When we pass from year to year, when a new year begins, we are reminded that we are journeying; every one of us, we are journeying. And the vital point: where are we journeying to? Do you know where you are journeying to, whether it is to heaven, or whether it is to hell? Many people in our chapels say, "Well, I don't know." Whatever would we think if we met a friend unexpectedly, and we said, "Where are you going to?" and he said, "Well, I don't know"? Beloved friends, it is *the vital point*. We are journeying, each one to eternity, and through grace may we be able to say, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you." And do not forget what follows: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Well, we are reminded with the coming of the new year that we are on a journey.

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind." In ancient times, in Bible days, whenever a person set out on a journey, they had to gird up their loins. I think most of you understand the figure here, but let me just for a moment explain it. They used to wear long, flowing garments, but if there was anything of importance, if there was to be a struggle or a fight, especially if they were setting out on a journey, they had to fasten up those long, flowing garments that they wore. They had to tie them up, otherwise they would never get to the end of their journey, or otherwise they would have a great difficulty in getting to the end of their journey. They would be entangled; they would trip up very easily; they could fall; they would have to go very slowly; they could not make any headway.

Well, we have it so often in Scripture even in a literal way. Let me just give you an instance. I think the first time we read of the girding up of the loins, the time of the Passover. The blood had been shed, the blood had been sprinkled, and it was time for Israel to depart on that long journey, and they were told that they had to eat the Passover with their

loins girded and with their staff in their hand. They were on a journey. They must not have any encumbrance. They must not have any entanglement. You have it again and again right through the Old Testament. There is a war or there is a struggle or there is a journey, and we read that they girded up their loins.

This is not the only place where this word is used spiritually. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself used this expression in a spiritual sense (Luke 12. 35).

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” Beloved friends, we need to be reminded of this vital point at the beginning of this year especially, that we are on a journey. This is not our rest; it is polluted. We are strangers and pilgrims. We are journeying through a wilderness, and not only are we journeying, but at times there is going to be a conflict, there is going to be a problem, there is going to be a fight, and it is vital that our loins should be girt up.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” By nature we have so much – those carnal things, those desires – and they hang down and they trail in the earth and they trail in the dust and they trail in the mire. That is not very honouring to the Lord, and it is not a very good profession, and it is not much help to us in making progress heavenwards.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind” – those things that would stumble you, those things that hinder your progress, those things that hang down in the mire. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” Really it is just the very same truth as this: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” It means being prepared. When you go on a journey, especially if it is a long journey, or even if you are going on holiday in the summer, there is quite a bit of preparation, getting ready. You do not just wait for the day and then go. This is a preparation for the journey. It *is* a journey, and at times it is a difficult journey, and we have not yet arrived, and there will be enough hindrances from without and from the world, from Satan, without these hindrances coming from ourselves.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” Again it means this: seek to avoid, seek to be delivered from *anything* that will hinder you in your heavenly pilgrimage, even if it is a lawful thing. You say, That comes close. “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside *every weight*” – they are not wrong things, but they do not help you in your journey – “*every weight*, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.”

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” Not just to be delivered from wrong things, sinful things, carnal things, but to be delivered from everything, however right, however lawful it is in itself, if it does not help you in your Christian pilgrimage. Now let me illustrate here with a simple illustration. I read of it only recently. There was one of our best surgeons; he was a wonderful surgeon and he had to be so careful and so skilful with his hands, because the slightest deviation could cause disaster. He had a hobby he dearly loved – I am not certain what it was, but it might even have been gardening – but he found it was making his hands a little bit hard and a little bit tough, and he found that when he was going to operate, his fingers were not just as pliable and as dextrous as they used to be, and as he would have liked them to be, so what did he do? He gave up that hobby that he loved so dearly. That is just a simple illustration of something in itself which is perfectly right, but it would be better to be without it.

“Gird up the loins of your mind.” Of course, the question comes, how do we do it? And really the answer is given in the Word of God. In Ephesians chapter 6 the Apostle Paul is speaking not so much of the Christian life as a pilgrimage, but as a fight, and of course he speaks about the fight – it is so important to have your loins girt up. And he says this: “Having your loins girt about with truth.” Well, the truth as it is in Jesus, the Lord Jesus Himself who says, “I am the Truth”; the truth of His Word, the truth of His promises, the truth of the riches of His grace, the truth of His help, the truth of His ability to answer prayer, the truth of His precious, sin-atonement blood. So we might go on. “Having your loins girt about with truth.” Because we feel we cannot really do it ourselves, but it is that divine enabling we need, and it is that divine enabling that we are

promised. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” “Having your loins girt about with truth.” Joseph Hart says it:

“Bind thy golden girdle round thee,
Truth to keep thee firm and tight.”

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” So this is a gospel exhortation and it is a gospel commandment, or as they so often used to call it, a gospel precept. And the apostle says, “Brethren, suffer the word of exhortation.”

Well, at the beginning of this new year, this is my new year’s message to you, which I believe has been laid on my spirit by the Lord; I did not seek it. How we need this and we need to be reminded of it, that we are on a journey and it is a difficult journey, and we will have opposition in our journey. If you see a person going for a long walk, he carries as little with him as he possibly can. O but this girding up our loins, this mortification of the flesh, as we have it in so many of the epistles and as Dr. Owen opens it up. It is the subduing of sin.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” So there is an exhortation and it is an exhortation that comes to each one of you, every one of you who are travelling on this heavenly journey, on this pilgrimage towards the heavenly Canaan. It is one of your great needs and it is something which is vital, something which is essential, otherwise you are going to make very slow progress; otherwise you are going to trip yourself up, you are going to stumble; otherwise you wonder whether you will ever get there. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” And may the Lord in love and infinite mercy kindly help us to do it.

But beloved friends, you notice that this verse begins with the word *wherefore*. I often tell you this, remind you of it: when we have the word *wherefore*, it throws us back to what has been said just before. The Apostle Paul is continually saying, “Wherefore,” and you find his brother in the faith, Peter, does the same. Now what is it? What is the importance of it? Really it is this: that the Lord never gives these solemn exhortations, these solemn warnings, these solemn commandments – He never give them unless He has most beautifully opened up the gospel and free grace of Christ and gospel privileges. He says, “Wherefore.” It is not a legal commandment; it is not something you have to do to merit God’s favour; it

is because of what the Lord has done. Surely I do not need to emphasise this. Some of these opening verses in Peter contain most precious truths. He is not just nakedly telling them that they are on a pilgrimage so, “Gird up the loins of your mind.” No. He tells us a few other things first.

Well, we could be all day trying to expound these verses, but very briefly, he reminds them that they are the Lord’s favoured people; He has chosen them. They are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” And then he tells them they have a saving interest in the blood of Christ, sprinkled by the blood of Christ. And then he tells them that they are those who are favoured to know “abundant mercy.” He tells them they have been born again. He says they have “a lively hope” of reaching heaven through the Saviour’s resurrection. He is telling them of these inestimable privileges.

This epistle is written to God’s people scattered abroad throughout the world, and they were in great trouble and great sorrow, and they are going to meet difficulties. He reminds them of their privileges, that heaven is theirs. “An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” And then he tells them that they are going to be divinely kept. The Lord is watching over them, caring for them. They have difficulties, but they have a God in heaven. They are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Well, these sacred truths, these heavenly blessings, and Peter reminds them that though they are scattered abroad throughout the earth with all these difficulties and these problems, they have a God in heaven, and He loves them, and He has saved them, and He has done all these things for them, and Christ is their Saviour. “Wherefore,” because of this, in two senses: out of love to the Lord who has done so much for you, because He has done so much for you. “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” But also, secondly, “Wherefore,” because you have this great God who loves you, who will not leave you and will not forsake you, who will help you, who will be with you in all your troubles, who will uphold you, who will support you in all your pilgrimage.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, *be sober*.” Now I think that often when we speak of people being sober, we do not mean just what

the Word of God means. We often tend to mean a person who perhaps is very solemn, very serious, and even morose. We say he is sober. But I think you will find when the Word of God speaks of being sober, it is opposing it to drunkenness, being intoxicated, whether it is by drink, or drugs, or fame, or searching after something, or wealth, or pleasure – anything so that a person’s mind is not balanced, so that a person is carried away, so that that person cannot think clearly, so that that person cannot do right. Now there are some people in that general sense who might be morose, but they certainly are not blessed with this quiet, humble judgment in the things of God which causes them to walk carefully and tenderly and uprightly in the fear of the Lord. Now in this sense, “be sober” as the new year comes – not to be carried away with yourselves, and do not be carried away with anything else, and beware of anything that takes you away from the Lord, and beware of anything that draws you aside from a right judgment in divine things.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Now it is not the end yet. We have not reached the end, any one of us. We have not reached the end of the year; we have only just begun it. We have not reached the end of our little lives. We have not reached the end of time itself. What should be our posture until the end comes? What should be our posture throughout this new year, and what should be our posture in our pilgrimage, our journey? “Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Really what he is speaking of – “the revelation of Jesus Christ” – I think the end of time itself, when the Lord in glory and power will reveal Himself eternally, or the end of a believer’s life when he passes from earth to heaven.

“Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Now it is a wonderful word to those who are tried concerning when you come to your end. “How wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” You may be helpless then. “The grace that is to be brought unto you” – in love, not forgotten, but remembered, grace being *brought* to you, and who is going to bring it to you? Your dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself.

“Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” But this is to be our posture as we journey on this year and as we journey on to the end: “hope to the end.” That is, hoping and trusting in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; hoping in Him alone; Christ your only hope; delivered from all hope, all confidence in yourself or anyone else or anything else.

“Hope to the end.” Concerning your sins and your soul and eternity, that hope resting simply, solely, entirely on the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because you know, there is a vain hope. Doesn’t Bunyan warn about it, what happened to Vain Hope when they came to the cold, dark river? We all have these vain hopes, these false hope by nature. I warn you against them, and if the Lord deals in love and mercy, we shall be delivered from our false, vain hopes. I had them when I was young. We know the doctrine and we come to chapel and we think “the appointed time will roll on apace.” Well, will it? We think there is plenty of time, and we think, when we are older, and we think we have people praying for us, and so we go on. Well, to be delivered from these vain hopes, these refuges of lies.

Peter says, “Hope to the end.” Peter well knew that a vain hope was not any good. Peter as a sinner knew there was only one hope.

“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

How he opens it up. “To whom coming, as unto a living stone.” That is your foundation, the ground of your hope. “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.... Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious.” O listen to this; this is the ground of your hope, believer: “He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.” This is a simple word; it is a beautiful word. Did it not arrest you just now? Are there not some of you here, despite all your sins and your fears and how little you really know, yet as you come to another year, in your heart of hearts you know that you really are believing in the Saviour, trusting in Him and trusting nowhere else, trusting to Him alone? And then to read this: “He that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.” Satan will try to confound you and so will your own unbelieving heart, but

“hope to the end,” and then to find this when you come to the very end: *“Not confounded.”*

Well, Peter knew the value of the ground and the foundation of a sinner’s hope as he travels on in his pilgrimage. “Hope to the end.” He says, “Not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” Now may that be your “hope to the end,” the foundation work of Christ. He does not leave it; he does not drop it. He says, “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” May that be the ground and foundation of your hope as your journey on.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end.” But Peter not only knew what it was concerning a soul’s salvation, but concerning him being kept, concerning him being helped, concerning him being upheld. There are two things in Peter’s life. When he wrote this, he could remember how he denied his Lord and Master. O we need to hope to the end for the Lord to uphold us and keep us from falling. And then when Peter walked on the sea, he did what no man had ever done before or since, but then he began to sink, and he cried, “Lord, save me.” Peter well knew that is the prayer we need right down to the end. “Lord, save me.”

“Hope to the end.” May our hope be in His mercy, and our hope be in His power to save, and our hope in Him as a great and glorious High Priest, “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” in all our time of sadness. May our hope be in Him as we think of the unknown way and all those things you have before you. Some have that trying day and the things you fear, and some have that long-drawn-out trial. “Hope to the end.” Why “hope to the end”? Because His love is the same to the end; because He is the same to the end; because “having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end.” Hoping in Him alone, delivered from that false hope, blessed with that good hope through grace which is united with everlasting consolation (2 Thess. 2. 16), that hope which is “as an anchor of the soul,”

and you know the anchor is needed in the night-time, the time of darkness, and in the time of storm. O what a word that is:

“When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every rough and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.”

“Hope thou in God.” How David proved it! “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?” It is strong language. He was in great trouble, but he knew the remedy: “Hope thou in God.” Hope is a wonderful blessing. Hope is a wonderful grace.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and *hope* to the end.” O to be possessed with this God-given hope, this living hope, and to live our lives in hope, to the end of the year, to the end of time, to the end of our life.

Do you remember John Bunyan’s two pilgrims? They left the narrow way which leads to heaven. They saw a way which seemed much simpler, much easier, much clearer, and they left the way the Lord had directed them and climbed over the fence and they got into By-path Meadow, and then onto Enchanted Ground, and they were captured by Giant Despair and shut up in his dungeon, and they could see dead men’s bones everywhere, and they did not know how to get out. Then one of them said, “I think I have a key,” and Bunyan says, the name of that key was *hope*. And they opened the door of the dungeon and they escaped. Well,

“Cast not away your little hope;
Come hither, and behold the Lamb.”

“Cast not away your little hope.”

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end.”

“Prisoners of hope, to Jesus turn;
He’s a Stronghold, ordained for you;
Gird up your loins, and cease to mourn,
And to the Lamb your way pursue.”

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” But that grace which is promised at the end is also promised to these believing souls travelling heavenwards on their pilgrimage as they are seeking to walk by hope, as they are seeking to live by hope, hoping in Jesus only, trusting in Jesus only. And to those who are blessed with this little hope, it is promised that grace shall be brought to them. “Plenteous grace with Him is found” – to cover all your sins, to abound, to reign in your life, to keep you, to uphold you, to help you, to deliver you, to answer your prayers, to bring you through, and all these wonderful blessings promised to these poor pilgrims as they are blessed with this one point, and it may seem a little point, it may seem a simple point, but it is a vital point. They are blessed with hope in Jesus, and they are looking to Him, and they are leaning on Him, and they have no other hope. He is their dependence. He is their All in all, and O these wonderful things promised to those who are walking out their pilgrimage to the end in hope. Really it is leaning upon your Beloved.

And do you know what it all means? It means that these poor pilgrims blessed with this hope are going to be brought safely through. They are going to be safely landed, despite all their weakness and sin. Eternally they are going to prove this: “The grace that is to be brought *unto you*” – you who are walking in hope, you who are hoping to the end – “the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Now this is an exhortation I trust from Almighty God Himself for this new year.