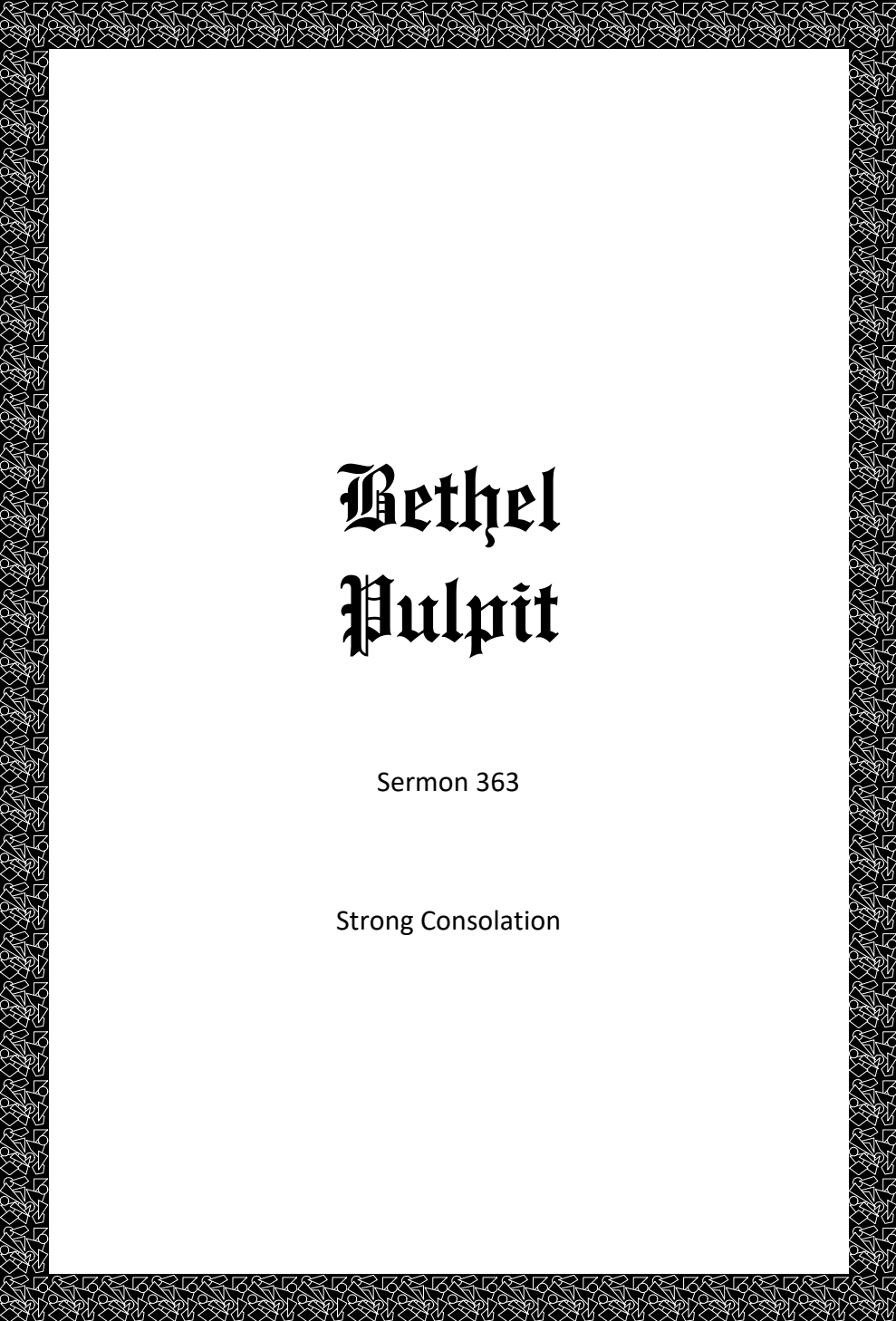




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 363

Strong Consolation

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 30th August, 2015**

Text: *“That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, 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” (Hebrews 6. 18-20).*

The subject here is *strong consolation*. But as we read through the first part of this chapter, it seems the opposite. There is not much consolation of any sort in these opening verses – these terrible warnings against apostasy, these solemn things about professing the Lord's name and then coming short.

Perhaps there is no chapter in Scripture that has a greater contrast between the first half of the chapter and the second, but beloved friends, we do need these warnings. God's ancient people did. These godly Jews who had been wrought upon by the Spirit of God were under dreadful temptation to go back. They were persecuted. They were disowned by their own families. But the point was pressed on them that the ceremonial law had been given by God Himself on Mount Sinai. How, then, could they turn their backs on it, reject it, relinquish it? So these solemn warnings, and then the Lord very sweetly speaks of “strong consolation.” There had been strong warnings, and the Lord's people felt they had strong sins, and they knew that Satan was a strong adversary, and some of them knew strong trouble. But amidst it all, this strong consolation.

They had to learn the question that we have in the Book of Job: “Are the consolations of God small?” And they were conscious where their consolation lay. It was in a Person, a glorious Person, Jesus the Son of God, what He had done and what He had accomplished, where He is now, ever living, ever interceding, almighty to save, and this was the ground of their hope. Not so much their hope of whether they were right or wrong, but their hope of reaching heaven, their hope of coming through and conquering at last, being victorious at last. There was strong consolation for them, and the strong consolation was because of the

ground of their hope. It was in solid things. It was in immutable things. It was in things that could never change.

You know what this word *immutable* means. It does not just mean unchanging. It does mean that, but it means more than that. It means these things *cannot* change; they will not change; it is impossible they can change. “Immutable things.” There are two words there: “strong consolation”; “immutable things.” And they belong together. It is because of these immutable things in an immutable God and Saviour that any poor, lost, ruined, guilty sinner can ever know strong consolation now or eternally.

What a word is that to the Thessalonians: He “hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,” and the two go together. “Everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” You say, Good hope through grace – is there such a thing as a bad hope? There are many bad hopes, and by nature we all possess these bad hopes: taking things for granted, thinking there is plenty of time, resting on the good opinion of other people – all these things; resting on other people’s prayers, thinking we are right because we go to chapel, and all these things. Really, everything short of Christ and Him crucified is a bad hope.

He “hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” So beloved friends, we have a beautiful subject here this evening, but the point is this: we want to enter into it by faith, as led by the Spirit of God, and we want these truths to enter into our hearts. We want them to dwell richly there.

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath.” Now here you have the glorious gospel of the grace of God, and you have this promise that runs through it, this promise of mercy for sinners, this promise of forgiveness for those who are led to confess their sin, this promise of salvation, this sure and certain promise, made to Abraham and then opened up in the prophets and gloriously confirmed in the gospel. This promise – but it is the certainty of it; it is the sureness of it.

So we have a remarkable thing here: Almighty God confirming the promise, the gospel, by an oath. He swore by Himself. But the apostle here uses a very simple argument. If you have two people in the world and

they have an argument, and one says to the other, Are you willing to swear to it? Are you willing to state this on an oath? that is the end of it.

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly.” God who cannot lie, God who is eternally true, that His people might be blessed with strong consolation, knowing what strong fears they have, and coming right down to them. There is compassion here. “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things” – God’s promise, God’s oath – “in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation,” and that strong consolation is in Christ.

And then, the consolation of being loved with an everlasting love. It is the consolation of being in union with Christ. It is the consolation of not being out of the secret. It is the consolation of being delivered from divine wrath, from eternal punishment. In a word it is the consolation of eternal life. It is the consolation of heaven at last.

That “we might have strong consolation.” And of course the great point personally: who is this *we*? Who are these who have an interest? Who are these who are going to be blessed with this strong consolation now and eternally? “We ... who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” And let me make one thing abundantly clear. When the word *hope* is used here, it is referring to the Person of Christ. Now this is the hope set before us. Do not be deceived on that point. This is the hope set before us in the gospel, Christ and Him crucified, because there is no other hope. “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” And it is that *we* might have a strong consolation. “We ... who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” That is what living faith is and what living faith does. It flees for refuge to Christ.

Those of you who know John Berridge’s grave and the remarkable epitaph on it in Everton churchyard, he gives the date he realised his fallen state, the date he became vicar of Everton, and then after that, the date he fled for refuge alone to Christ.

But let me put that point to you very lovingly. Have you, or have you not, fled for refuge to Christ? It is by faith. It is in prayer. It is on mercy’s ground. It is to Him who has promised, “I will in no wise cast out.” O but this fleeing for refuge. The whole point speaks of urgency.

The reference is to the cities of refuge when the avenger of blood was after the man who shed the blood, and he could not run fast enough, seeking to run to one of those cities of refuge where he might be safe. What a wonderful thing that there is a refuge provided for sinners in the gospel!

Really you have this beautiful point about the refuge in so many ways. You have the ark, Noah's dove seeking to enter the ark, but hardly able to get there. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." And Noah reached out his arm and pulled the helpless dove into the ark. That is,

"The refuge for sinners the gospel makes known;
'Tis found in the merits of Jesus alone."

That refuge on the Passover night under the shed blood, the sprinkled blood, safety there and nowhere else; safety there and there alone. You have this opened up in so many ways. There are a lot of beautiful passages in Isaiah about the refuge. And then you come to the New Testament. I think this is the only place where it mentions this word *refuge*, but the gospel is full of it, and apart from this refuge, there could be no hope for us – a refuge from the wrath of God, a refuge now, a refuge in the great day, a refuge when we come to the end, a refuge before the judgment seat of Christ.

"That by two immutable things" – God's promise and the confirmation of it by an oath – "by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, which have fled for refuge to lay hold" – that is what living faith does; it lays hold on Christ; it lays hold on the hope set before us.

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul." Now let us be clear, the word *hope* in these two verses is used in two different senses. "To lay hold on the hope set before us" – that is the object of hope, Christ. "Which hope we have" – that is the grace of hope which is given us in our hearts. There is no contradiction between the two, but the word is used in a different sense. "Which hope we have." Now have you got this hope? It is a wonderful thing if we *have* something which we did not have when we came into this world, something the Lord has given us; a wonderful thing if He has given us a living hope. O what about that word:

“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.”

“Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul.” Well, you would think the subject changes rather here. It seems peace, and comfort, and strong consolation, and then an anchor. What do you need that for? When there is a stormy sea. What do you need that for? When it is dark at night. It speaks of God’s people on their heavenly voyage as they “leave this world’s deceitful shore, and leave it to return no more,” as they set sail heavenwards. So there are many things different from these immutable things on a stormy ocean. O but this anchor hope! There is a lot of good divinity in the little old hymn:

“We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour’s love.”

That is good divinity, and that is good and gracious experience.

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul.” The point about the anchor is this. There must be two things: there must be some good ground on which to cast the anchor where it will not drift, but where it will firm remain; and the anchor itself, the cables must not break on it when the sea swells and the sea rages. Some years ago I preached along with Mr. Raymond Oakley at the opening of the new chapel, Hope Chapel, Arcal Street, Sedgley. If I remember right, he spoke in the afternoon and I spoke in the evening. He took the name of the chapel, Hope, and he took this as his text. Coming from the Black Country district, he spoke quite a bit about anchor making. His father used to work in a factory where they made anchors, and the care that was taken, and how it must be made sure that they cannot split or break, and how they must be tested. Well, the anchor and the anchor ground.

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul.” Now have you got a soul? There is a lot of ignorance about spiritual things. In the days of the Evangelical Revival, one of the Wesleys spoke to a man concerning

his soul, and ludicrous as it must seem, when the Wesleys pressed him as to what was meant by his soul, he thought it was a small bone in his back.

Now have you realised that you have a never-dying soul? But has that soul got an anchor? The point about the anchor is that it fastens on to something, it fixes on something. If hope is your anchor firm and strong, it is not cast into anything here below. It is certainly not cast into your feelings and it is not cast into your best experience of divine things. It is cast “within the veil.” That is a lovely expression for heaven: “within the veil.” It is a reference to the tabernacle and then the temple, that thick veil that separated the most holy place from the rest of the tabernacle or the temple where the high priest only went in once a year, and that not without blood. How when the Lord Jesus died, when He cried, “It is finished,” on the cross, that thick veil was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. Sinners now by faith can enter in.

“Having ... boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil.” It is a lovely expression for heaven, and we have it in so many of our hymns. “Give me the wings of faith to rise *within the veil*.” So many of our hymns speak of it, and that is where the believer’s anchor is cast. That is where you cast your little hope when you have fled for refuge to Jesus.

“Which entereth into that within the veil.” What an expression and what a wonderful fulness here: “*That* within the veil.” What is there within the veil? What was there within the veil naturally? There was a mercy seat. There were the cherubims of glory. There was the sprinkled blood. There was the high priest. O but what is there within the veil? Because this is where our anchor must be cast. It is solid ground, and the reason it is solid ground is because it is in a Person.

“Whither the Forerunner is for us entered.” I am sure some of you like this little bit: “Even Jesus.” He has entered there within the veil on your behalf. He is your Forerunner. He has gone before. “Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus” – Jesus who lived and loved and died and rose again. I used to like singing this in my early days:

“He passed within the vail,
Did on His bosom bear

The worthless names that did prevail
With Him to enter there.”

He has those unworthy names engraven on His heart, because we are told that He appears there as a High Priest. He has three glorious titles here. He is the sinners’ Refuge, and He is their Forerunner, and He is their great High Priest. Now,

“What more can He say than to you He has said,
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?”

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul.” It is solid ground. The anchor is securely fixed there; it is securely fastened there. As sure as your hope is there, so surely one day you shall be there. O this solid ground, “within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered.” We are told it is not just the anchor ground, but it is the anchor itself. It is steadfast and sure. It means that it cannot snap; it cannot be broken. It means it is always there; it is always the same. It means the waters of the ocean do not corrode it or weaken it. It is God’s work and it will stand.

O if only you realised that your little hope, which to you seems so weak and so poor, is steadfast and sure, and the reason: because it is not in you or your estimation of it, or even your exercise of it. That little hope, however weak it seems, is cast on this solid ground, and so it stands in union with Christ, and so it cannot be destroyed and cannot be broken. These are the immutable things of the gospel. This is the glorious gospel we have to proclaim. This sinner, weak, unworthy, on a heavenly voyage, tempest tossed, often dark, but,

“Thy anchor, once in Jesus cast,
Shall hold thy soul, till thou at last
Him face to face shalt see.”

“Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.” The hope is, and the anchor ground of the hope is sure and steadfast. It is one of the only sure and steadfast things there are in this poor, perishing world.

“Sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.” Because real hope, a good hope through grace, penetrates, and it is outside like the ship’s anchor was outside. But it is very secure in Christ. The old preachers used to speak, “In His wounded side.”

“Whither the Forerunner is for us entered.” And the whole point of the Forerunner is this: as He has reached heaven, so surely all His people shall one day be with Him where He is and where their hope is. Like old Rowland Hill used to sing when he was dying and they could not get any other sense out of him:

“But this I do find,
We too are so joined,
He can’t be in glory
And leave me behind.”

Do you believe that, the eternal union between the sinner and Christ in bonds of grace made known in the sinner’s life by the Holy Spirit’s teaching by faith, by hope, confirmed and led by love, a union, a sacred tie which can never be broken?

“Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” This seems to confirm it all, and if you want a commentary on the closing words, you have the whole following chapter. It tells you about the glories of Christ, a High Priest for ever – not like those priests who could not continue by reason of death. “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.... For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” So there are two things: His sacrifice, His sweet, atoning sacrifice, the precious blood He shed, the atonement He made, and then His all-prevailing intercession. “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us,” with our unworthy names upon His heart. And the hope of a child of God anchors in Christ Himself as the sinner’s Forerunner, and as the sinner’s great and glorious High Priest. And He is made that High Priest for ever, which means His love is endless, and His precious blood can never lose its power.

Well, what a subject this is, and it ends where it began: strong consolation. And if a sinner cannot find strong consolation here, I am sure he cannot find it anywhere else. O but to be led by the Spirit. We do want to enter into these things. We do not want to leave them behind. We want them to enter into our very hearts, unworthy, sinful, with our fears. We want to be confirmed here. There is a union here. There is a good hope

through grace and that everlasting consolation which is inseparably bound to it. O may the Lord lead us to know and experience these thing.

“That ... we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered” – a once crucified, risen, exalted Saviour – “even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”