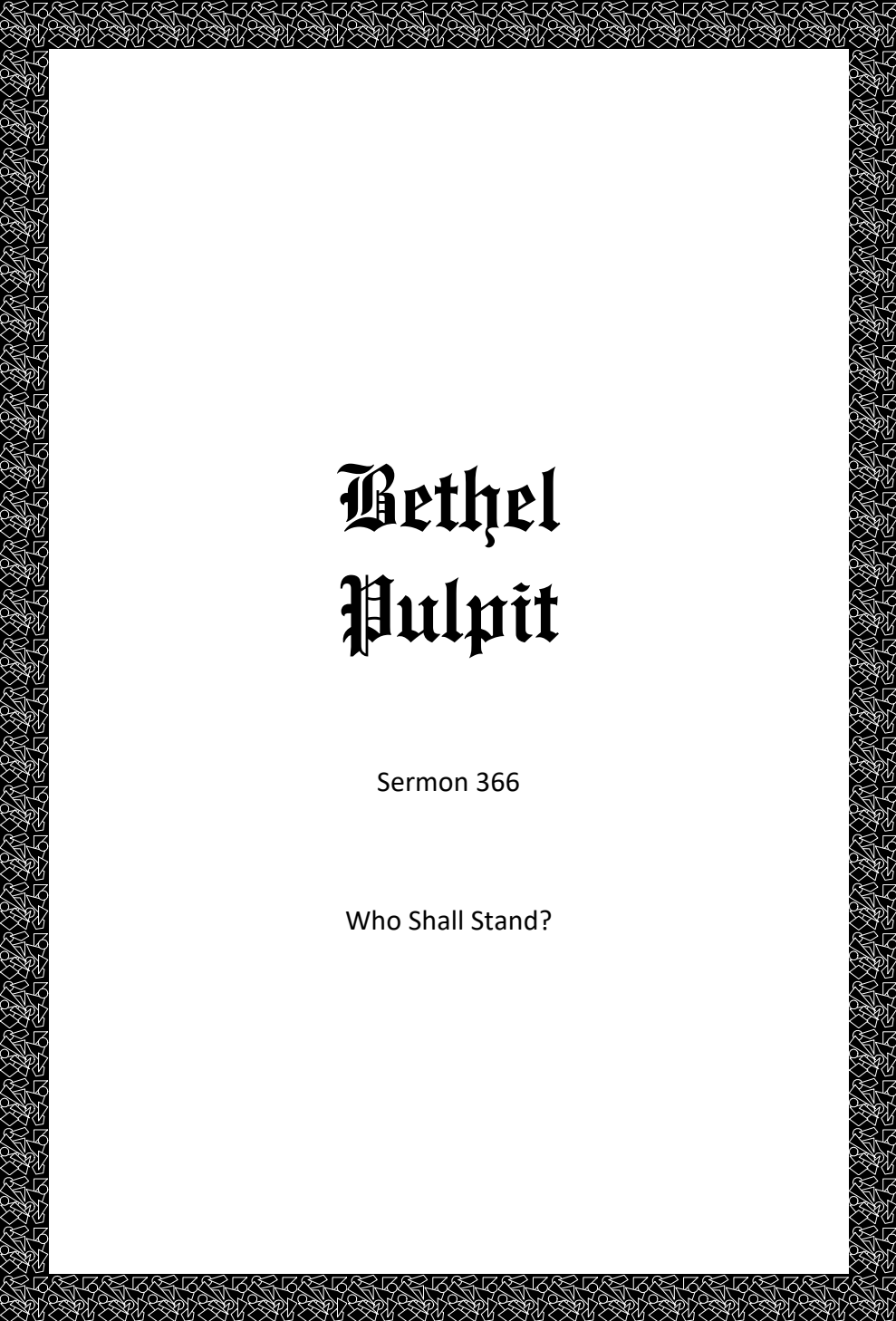




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 366

Who Shall Stand?

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 8th November, 2015**

Text: *"For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6. 17).*

In the chapter before this (chapter 5) we have a glorious picture of the Lamb exalted, the strong angel crying, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" this being the book of divine providence. And John wept much because no-one was found in heaven or in earth worthy to open the book. And then you see the Lamb approaching the throne, the Lamb as it had been slain, and that wonderful word: "Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." This means that the whole of providence, every event that takes place, is in the hands of Christ as the Lamb of God. And the chapter closes with all heaven singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Now in this chapter (chapter 5) the Lamb opens the seals one by one. Six of them are opened in this chapter, foretelling things that are going to take place. This is the sixth seal, and it is a terrible seal. Really, it tells us what is going to take place at the end of the world when the great day of God's wrath is come. Now beloved friends, it shall surely come, and every one of us in this chapel will surely be there, and that will be a solemn day, a terrible day. Do you ever think about it? We need to stop at times and to pause and to consider. This world at present – everyone so busy, life hastening on, time passing away. But the Apostle Paul in one of his epistles is speaking of a lot of solemn things. He suddenly stops. He says, "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." We do need to stop and pause and consider. That is why here and there all through the Psalms we have that little word, "Selah." Do not go rushing on. It was a pause in the music, in the singing. It usually comes when something important has been said. Stop, pause, consider. John Newton says,

“Stop, poor sinner! stop and think
Before you farther go!
Will you sport upon the brink
Of everlasting woe?”

“For the great day of His wrath is come.” It has come at last, the end of all things, the great judgment day, the eternal separation. O but the emphasis here, the terror of the wicked.

“I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal.” Now what a frightening day! “There was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Now here you see the effect. You know, beloved friends, when I read these words through and when I think about them, I have a job to read them. They make me tremble. I hope none of us will be embraced in these terrible words, and it includes the high and the mighty, the low, the rich, the poor. “The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains.” And it did them no good whatsoever. I hope none of us in that great day will be looking round for a hiding place in the rocks and in the mountains, because they shall all be destroyed.

But they were praying, and many of them, most of them had never prayed before, but they were praying now. But they were praying to the mountains and the rocks. Let us be clear of one thing: they were not praying to be delivered from the earthquake, and the stars falling, and all these things. They were praying to be delivered from the wrath of God and of the Lamb. They “said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” Now how does that affect you? Does it make any of you cry out,

“Then O my God prepare
My soul for that great day;
O wash *me* in Thy precious blood,
And take my sins away”?

It is the last judgment. It is where everyone shall give an account. It is where all of us by nature are sinful, lost, ruined, guilty. It is where our only hope is if we have found a hiding place in the Person and work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” It is God’s anger against sin, a holy, righteous, sovereign God. He must punish sin. Divine vengeance must fall. This is the consummation of all things. “For the great day of His wrath is come; and *who* shall be able to stand?” I dread the thought of any of my family, my congregation, my hearers being found amongst these dreadful words. There are no more dreadful words in Scripture, these dreadful words at the end of Revelation chapter 6. “For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” *And there it is left.*

So I read to you this morning the second Epistle of Peter chapter 3. Let us be clear, Peter is writing as an old man. He knows that soon he is about to die, and it was a cruel death he was going to die, but his thoughts in love and mercy are for his hearers, those he is concerned about, and he speaks of these very same things. In a sense, he gives a little commentary on “The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” Well, Peter in love explains what our attitude should be, what we should feel, how we should think in the light of these things.

You know what many people say today, beloved friends: it is wrong to frighten people; there is no place for frightening people in the preaching. There was a well-known American preacher and he had that accusation, and he said, “Just across the road from our house there is a field, and it is known that in that field there are a lot of poisonous snakes.” They had never been able to get rid of them. They were viciously-poisonous snakes. One bite from them and the person is dead before the day is out. “Do you think it was an unkind thing,” he said, “when our little children were small, to make them afraid of going in that field? Wasn’t it a mark of love?” You can think of it in many ways: for instance, a loving mother making her children frightened of stepping out in the road.

Well, Peter takes this same point up. Really, when the sixth seal is opened, it is left abruptly for us to think about. “The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” Peter introduces it like

this: there are a lot of scoffers about. I hope there are no scoffers in this chapel, but we all have this unbelief which scoffs in our hearts. This is what the scoffers were saying, and this is what people are thinking now (if they are not saying it): “Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” People say, You talk about the end of the world; you talk about the second coming, how the Son of God will come in great power and glory, that this will usher in the end of the world. We do not see any sign of it. Things are going on as usual. People are more comfortable. People are making more money. Fewer and fewer people are believing these things. Scoffers shall arise. You girls and boys, at school and at college and when you go out to work, you have met these scoffers. “Where is the promise of His coming?” These things are going on for ever and ever. Where is the sign of it?

“For this they willingly are ignorant of.” Almighty God says they are ignorant. And the answer that Peter gives is this: “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” In other words, the Lord is not in a hurry as we are in a hurry. He is not in a hurry to accomplish these things. He has His set time, His appointed time. It will all happen. It will all come as He said, but “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,” which is a favourite text with Arminians.

I have always understood it like this. The Lord has a people He has chosen. Their names are in the book of life. They must all be born. They must all be born again. But if the Lord had come a hundred years ago, two hundred years ago, what about all those elect who had never been born? Well, the Lord was not willing that any of them should perish, but that all of them should come to repentance.

Now “the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” For, “the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,” which I think you all know what it means. When a thief comes, he does not send you a warning the day before. It is unexpected; it is sudden. “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.” Now then, “The great day of

His wrath is come.” “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” “The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

Well, if Revelation chapter 6 ended suddenly, Peter does not end suddenly. He speaks very simply and very clearly and very solemnly of all these things we have heard, and taking it that we believe all these things we have heard, he tells us what our posture should be, what our thoughts should be, what our attitude should be, thinking of that last great day, the day of God’s wrath. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things” – such terrible things, such things which will surely happen, such things which will surely come. Now how have these things we have brought before you this morning affected you? Are you looking for these things? We should be looking for these things, because they will surely come to pass.

Let me just linger here a moment. I wonder if anyone here is thinking, “Perhaps we will not be alive when the end of the world comes. Perhaps we will die before that.” The day of your death will be the end of the world for you. You will be in eternity. “Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” It will be a glorious day for the people of God. It will be as glorious a day for the people of God as it will be a terrible day for the wicked.

And the Word of God says, “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” The awful thing about our lost condition is that by nature we hear these things and we are not diligent. If I were to ask you young ones, what is the opposite of this word *diligent*, do you know what it is? *Negligent*. And there is a scripture, “My sons, be not now negligent.” There is a scripture that says, “How shall we escape, if we *neglect*” – now that is not being diligent; that is being negligent. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

Robert Murray M’Cheyne, speaking of that word, said he thought he had many of his hearers, and they were not opposed to him; they were not opposed to the truths he believed; they believed every word he said; they honoured him; they honoured the truth. But he said they *neglected* it. They did not deny it, they did not oppose it, they did not fight against it, but he said he thought many of his hearers were perishing, they were neglecting it. That comes close, to sit in a Strict Baptist chapel and neglect

so great salvation. By nature we are not diligent. By nature we neglect. By nature we hear of this great and glorious salvation, and perhaps we admire it, but we neglect. It is only the Holy Spirit can give you this diligence. Beg the Lord that He will give you this diligence. Mr. Frank Gosden said, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” He said, “You will not get to heaven *because* you strive, but you will never get to heaven *unless* you do strive.”

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent.” Some of us look back to those days when we were first concerned, and looking back we wonder – we should have had this, we should have had that, we did not have this, but we certainly were not negligent; we certainly were diligent. We trembled when we thought about a lost eternity, when we thought about ourselves. We *were* diligent. It was the one thing that mattered. Things might have been happening in the world, but we were not concerned about them. One thing was engraved on our heart, and we were diligent. But we did not do it. It was not something we worked up. It was the Holy Spirit’s work. Seek that ye may be diligent, beloved friends, in making your calling and election sure.

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent” – of what? This diligence is not just trying to make yourself right. It is not trying to please God in yourself. It is not trying to work out your own salvation. But there is a kind of diligence in seeking the Lord. There is a diligence in praying to Him. There is a diligence in looking into His holy Word. There is a diligence in listening to the gospel with your neck on the stretch.

“Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent.” Isn’t the world diligent in its mad search after pleasure and fame and honour and wealth? “Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” That is it. “The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” Now let us be clear, everyone in this chapel will be found of Him. You will not be able to escape. You have perhaps read poems like Francis Thompson’s “The Hound of Heaven,” where he fled here and everywhere to escape from God and found he could not. You *will* be found of Him, and if it seems He has never found you now, He will find you then.

O but this is it: “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” “Peace by His cross has Jesus made”; peace between a holy, righteous God and a guilty sinner; peace in your conscience; peace that will stand in that last great day; peace worth seeking for. If only we might find that peace now in Christ. It is not to be found anywhere else. This Man, this glorious Man shall be thy peace. That is where you have to seek it. O but at last, what a mercy if you and I are found of Him in peace! And “be diligent.” It is worth seeking to be diligent in this. It is the one thing that matters. All these other things have to be left behind.

“Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace.” The only way you and I can ever be found *of* Him – that is, of the Saviour, Christ – the only way we can ever be found *of* Him in peace is if through grace we are found *in* Him. Do you know the Apostle’s desire: “That I may ... be found in Him” – I, a lost, ruined, guilty sinner, might be found in Him, an almighty Saviour? This is it: “Not having mine own righteousness” – that will not do; it is stained and dyed with sin; it is nothing worth. “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.”

“Seeing that ye look for such things” – the great day of His wrath being come, and who is able to stand – “be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot” – “Spotless to stand before His throne.” Pondering over this, those two lines have been with me:

“Who, stripped of all merit whereon to rely,
Are taught by the Spirit to Jesus to fly.”

Then you will be able to stand in the great day. It is worth repeating.

“Who, stripped of all merit whereon to rely,
Are taught by the Spirit to Jesus to fly.”

“Without spot.” That is, our spotted, sinful souls washed in the blood of Christ. We had a case, it comes to me (it is so long ago I cannot remember all the details), a girl before our church and she had some kind of illness, and her face was a terrible mess. There were dreadful, glaring, red spots all over it, and the Lord brought it home to her: that is what your soul is like in the sight of a holy God, and she trembled. She said, “Lord,

what shall I do?” And the Lord applied the word: “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” These are real things. O for more times at Bethel like that! But it was at Calvary where the Saviour, the dear Lamb of God, shed His precious blood. What do we read? “That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

Did one thing strike you? The One who is going to be your Judge is the One who is your Saviour. This is the wrath of the Lamb which is falling on the ungodly here, but with some of you when you see His face, the dear Lamb of God will not be a stranger to you. You will say, “‘How then can wrath on me take place’ when Thou hast already borne it on the cross?” O be diligent for these things. They are worth being diligent for.

“Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.” I take that to mean the sanctifying work of the Spirit. You will not be perfect in your life. There will be your faults and failures. But be diligent in this: that if your hope is in Jesus, if your profession is of His holy, worthy name, then that you do not dishonour it. O be diligent to seek grace to be kept to the end, grace to persevere, grace that your conversation might be as becometh the gospel of Christ.

Now Revelation 6 ends abruptly. But Peter does not end abruptly. These are the last things he wrote before he died, and he speaks of some terrible events at the end of the world that were revealed to John in the sixth seal in the Book of Revelation, but he lovingly, kindly tells us what our attitude should be. Now may the grace of God enable us to walk it out. “Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

“For the great day of His wrath is come; and *who shall be able to stand?*” Well, one of our hymns says, “Bold shall I stand in that great day.” You know how I was brought up. When they used to mention that at Haslingden, they used to say, “‘Bold shall I stand’ – *will you?* Will you really? It is a terrible day.” That is how I was brought up. But it is a lovely word. “Bold shall I stand in that great day.” But that amazing man Count Zinzendorf who wrote it gives the answer why he believes he shall stand bold in that great day. He says,

“For who aught to my charge shall lay,
While through Thy blood absolved I am,
From sin’s tremendous curse and shame?”

Now that is the standing ground.

“Who shall be able to stand?” Well, you will not be able to stand if you are on slippery ground, or if you are on sinking sand, or if you have nothing to stand on, but this is the rock foundation: the blood, the righteousness of Jesus. O to be brought there through grace, “stripped of all merit whereon to rely, taught by the Spirit to Jesus to fly,” to have something to stand on. And something else: to have a covering, to have a shelter, and the wonderful thing about the sin-atoning blood of Christ is that it is a foundation to stand on, and it is a refuge to shelter under. Never did our hymnwriter speak a truer word than when he called it *sheltering blood*.

Like Israel on that solemn Passover night. In its measure that was a great day of God’s wrath in the land of Egypt. There was death and destruction, “and who shall be able to stand?” Well, they knew it: only those who were beneath the blood. That story – whether it is true or whether it is a legend – that little boy running out and saying, “Father, did you remember to put the blood on the door?” That might just be a legend. O but to be sheltering beneath the blood, something for your feet to stand on, a refuge, a shelter for you. “And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you.” This is the plague: “The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” “The plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.” It is no wonder that one prayed,

“Blessed Saviour,
Own me in that day for Thine.”

“For the great day of His wrath is come; and *who* shall be able to stand?”