

Bethel

Pulpit

The Saviour's Love

Sermon Number 458

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 18th June, 2017**

Text: *“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12. 2).*

This is a short, solemn, sacred statement of the work of Christ in salvation, the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the reason for it, that His poor, unworthy people might be “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” Beloved friends, the emphasis here is on the Saviour’s love, the greatness of His love, in laying down His life for poor, unworthy sinners. There are three things especially here that emphasise the greatness of the Saviour’s love. We read, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Now the first thing is this: that in dying for sinners, it was “for the joy that was set before Him.” Now that is the love of Christ. What joy is there in being despised and rejected of men? What joy is there in that cruel mocking and scourging and spitting? What joy in Gethsemane? What joy in those agonies on the cross? It was “for the joy that was set before Him” that He so gladly and willingly endured these things.

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly;
But love to sinners fills His heart,
And makes Him choose to die.”

“For the joy that was set before Him.” What joy? The joy of having His poor, unworthy, sinful people like you and me with Him in heaven to all eternity. That is the measure of the love of Christ to sinners. We read of it prophetically: “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” Those agonies He endured – the cross, the nails, the spear, the crown of thorns, the wrath of God, the hiding of His Father’s face – now as

He looks back, He is satisfied. He does not regret it. He is satisfied as one by one He sees poor, unworthy sinners coming to His feet, confessing their need and their sin, and making Him there All in all. In the last great day when all the redeemed are safely gathered in, “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” Do you think you are worth it? Poor, unworthy as you are, so often disappointed with yourself, but the Lord Jesus is not disappointed with you. He sees of the travail of His soul and He is satisfied, now and eternally. It was for this joy that was set before Him. Now what a display there of the love of Christ to unworthy sinners! “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The second thing here in which there is such a wonderful display of Christ’s love: He “*endured* the cross.” It was not just that He died. He “*endured* the cross.” Perhaps some of you enter into that:

“What He endured no tongue can tell,
To save our souls from death and hell.”

That is the measure of His love. When you think who this Person is – you say, It says Jesus here. That is the Saviour – yes, but the Son of God from all eternity. You think of His essential grandeur and glory. Well, He was willing to endure the cross. Sometimes we are sentimental about the cross of Christ – there is a beauty in it; it is our only hope – but it was a place of agonies, a place of shame. “He was numbered with the transgressors,” and willingly, gladly, “He endured the cross,” and not only endured the cross, but He was willing to die the death of the cross. Now this is the measure of the love of Christ to sinners.

And the third thing that so wonderfully displays the love of Christ: He despised the shame. Now there was some terrible shame for this glorious Person, the Son of God from all eternity, the Creator of all worlds, the King of kings, Lord of lords. There was a shame. There was a shame in His birth. There was a shame in His life. He was “despised and rejected of men.” But the shame of it. And in the judgment hall, that mocking, and that spitting, and that buffeting, and all the taunting there was – the shame,

the bitter shame and sorrow. At Calvary, the mocking there was. There heaven and earth were bearing witness. The sun was darkened, the earth shook, and the dead came out of their graves – and there it was man, mortal man who stood alone with head erect – mocking his Maker. The Lord Jesus despised this shame. He was willing to bear it. It was not too much. He did not seek to escape. When Pilate said, “I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee,” He said, “Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above” – despising the shame.

Now you look at it, beloved friends. There are some people and they can stand all kinds of things. They can stand pain; they can stand suffering; they can stand persecution; but they cannot stand shame. Many a young person at school or at work or with colleagues, they are able to stand so much, but when people have begun to despise them and smile at them and laugh at them, they cannot stand that. O how many otherwise good people have fallen under shame. None of us likes shame. Now our Lord Jesus despised the shame.

So there you have briefly a wonderful, three-fold description of the love of God to sinners. It was “for the joy that was set before Him” that He endured the cross, He despised the shame. So this is all set before us – the suffering and death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Those sufferings on the cross, the hiding of His Father’s face, the sin laid upon Him, not His own, for He was pure and holy, and the agony, spiritually, bodily, in soul and in body. And then at last death, that separation. He is now “set down at the right hand of the throne of God,” which I take to mean *the place of honour*.

He is there on two grounds, and He is there for ever. The one is because it is His by everlasting right as the Son of God, equal with His Father. And then the other, as His Father’s reward for all He suffered, for all He endured. Have you ever entered into this experience a little? Your heart has been somewhat softened and touched and melted as you have contemplated the sufferings of Christ, and haven’t you rejoiced in the resurrection morning, the empty grave, and those appearances to those disciples, and then the Mount of Olives. “Him hath God exalted ... to be a Prince and a Saviour.”

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Now beloved friends, there was a reason for all this. It was not just a martyr’s death; it was not just an example. It was according to divine, eternal covenant purposes. It was the will of His Father. His Father sent Him to suffer, bleed and die. Now the world generally just cannot understand this, what connection there is between the death of a Man on a cross and the salvation from sin, death and hell of a multitude no man can number. Now the world could not understand it then.

This was what Paul preached. He said, “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” But they were important men. They were philosophers. No, he said. I am determined to know nothing among you save the cross of Christ. So he set up the standard of the cross. He said, “We preach Christ crucified.” To the world it was nothing. They could not understand it. To the Greeks it was foolishness. Let us face it: we have clever people in the world today, very clever people, but those ancient Greeks are generally counted some of the most clever people that ever lived. Now the preaching that Christ died, it was foolishness to them. What about the Jews? They were different. They were religious people, but they could not receive it either. They expected Messiah to come. They knew He would come. They thought He would come in great glory to restore the kingdom to Israel. They could not understand a suffering Messiah, a dying Messiah. It was a stumblingblock to them. And not only the world today, and the religious world; our girls and boys and young people are brought up in our chapels and hear the preaching of the cross, and perhaps sometimes they wonder, What has this really got to do with my problems and difficulties, and my life, and things going on in the world? Yes, I have an end to my life. I have a death to die. Yes, I am not perfect; I have come short. Is this the answer?

So when you come to the Epistles, Paul and Peter set out clearly the reason for it: that God is holy. Man has sinned. God gave a holy, righteous law. God created man perfect. Every one of us has sinned against Him. We have broken His law. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way,” whether we know it, whether we believe it or not. But one day we have to give an account. Heaven is that holy, holy,

holy place. Nothing that defileth can enter in. What hope is there of a sinner being forgiven, of a sinner entering heaven? God must be just in punishing sin, otherwise His holy law is a mockery. So Jesus comes and lives and dies, “the Just for the unjust” – that is, the Just in the place of the unjust – “that He might bring us to God.” There is no other way.

So all this we are speaking of – enduring the cross, despising the shame – it was because He was suffering in His people’s place what they deserved. It was because their sin was laid on His sacred head, and He was punished for them that they should never be punished. So as His precious blood flowed on the cross, it was as a fountain washing away, taking away for ever the sins of all His people, a fountain for sin and for uncleanness. It was why the Saviour, the Son of God, had to become Man, that He might be a Saviour. “Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.” This is why He had to suffer, bleed and die. Also, this is why He had to rise again and be “set down at the right hand of the throne of God” – the Father’s open evidence that He is pleased with all His beloved Son has done. “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” He has exalted Him because He is completely satisfied with what He has done. Nothing more can be done; nothing more can be added to it. He has set Him down at His right hand because His work is finished. Redemption’s glorious work is done. This is the glorious gospel of the grace of God set forth in the Word, preached to unworthy sinners, the reason for Christ’s coming, His willingness to die that sinners might live, the way of salvation, the only way, no other way.

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Now that is a wonderful truth, but the Word of God does not end there. The gospel does not end there. It is not just that was once done and that is the end. Here (verse 3) it talks about considering these things – considering the Lord Jesus, considering His sorrows – and it is not just considering the reason. It is considering what it has to do with you and me this evening. “For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” So there is an application. It is what it means to you and me. There is a considering these things. There is a considering of the Saviour. “What think ye of Christ?”

It also speaks of looking to Him (verse 2). “Looking unto Jesus,” who in love and mercy did all these things for sinners. Now this looking. The world looks at many things today, and you and I look at many things today. The world, if it looks at the Lord Jesus, it is perhaps with scorn. It does not want to know about Him, but it does look at Him, a passing glance. It hears of Him. The world cannot help looking at all these tragedies and sorrows that have been happening recently, but the world does not have any answer to it. But the world looks on everything – pleasure, lust, riches – all these things. These are the things the world looks at.

You and I look at the cross of Christ, and the Word says, “Consider Him.” “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger.” Do you consider these things? Do you consider whether they have anything to do with you? Do you consider whether you need an interest in these things? Do you consider whether you have an interest in these things?

There is that looking back at what the Saviour did, but this comes closer, and I want to emphasise it to you. It does not say, Looking *at* Jesus. It says, “Looking *unto* Jesus.” Now when you are going home from chapel tonight, you will look *at* a lot of people. You cannot help it. You will look *at* a lot of people. But there may be somebody and you are looking *to* them. Perhaps it is a friend. You want them to do something for you. You want to arrange a meeting with them, or you need them to help. Do you see the point? There is all the difference in the world between looking *at* someone and looking *to* them. If you look *to* them, it is in hope. Even naturally, you want them to do something for you.

Now, “Looking unto Jesus,” this glorious Person, Jesus, who has done all these things, “Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” It is looking to Him in expectation. It is looking to Him in hope. Let us be clear, these verses follow that wonderful Hebrews chapter 11. The great point is faith. What is it? Well, this is what faith is. It is “looking unto Jesus” in hope, in expectation.

So considering, contemplating all these things, the great question is, where are you looking? Where are you looking tonight? What are you looking for? Is it *only* to get out of trouble? There is nothing wrong with that, but is it *only* to get out of trouble? Is it looking for some pleasure in this coming summer? If it is lawful pleasure, there is nothing wrong with it, but it is sad if it is only that. The world is looking for all kinds of things, but what are we looking for? And it is this: where are we looking? How many of you can say,

“To *Thee* we look, to *Thee* we bow,
To *Thee* for help we call”?

Now where are you looking? There is a looking within. The Holy Spirit will bring us to look within, to see that we are not fit, not prepared to die; we are not ready. There is eternity before us. We will have to look within. And there will be some looking around, because with our eyes opened, the Holy Spirit will show us the vanity of the world. We cannot look *to* them for true happiness. And the people of God – we are not to look *to* them. This chapter begins with a wonderful account of the great cloud of witnesses. Now we have to remember them, honour them respect them, follow them, but not look to them.

Look to Jesus. This is where we will be brought: “Looking unto Jesus,” looking to Jesus only, that singleness of eye, looking to Him to help us and to forgive us and to save us. But it is on the ground of these glorious truths here, enduring the cross, despising the shame, for the joy that was set before Him. It is on this ground that poor, unworthy sinners are sweetly encouraged in the gospel to look unto Jesus. It is not just in hope, not just in expectation. It is in dependence, complete dependence, looking to Jesus, resting on Him, depending on Him alone, and depending on Him, not just as a good example, or His teaching, but as revealed here in the gospel, as crucified, the Saviour of sinners by His death.

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Now this looking to Him in complete dependence, it is looking to Him in hope, looking to Jesus as the one and only foundation of our hope, and what He accomplished on the cross. Really this is what faith is, real faith. It is

not just believing what happened. There are many people who believe that Jesus came and lived and died and rose again. Well, the devil believes that. There are people who believe it was “for the joy that was set before Him” He “endured the cross, despising the shame” and He is now “set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” But true, living faith has an element of trust. It is looking to Him in complete dependance. It is Christ our only foundation. It is resting on Him, His perfect work. It is looking to Him alone. That is what living faith is, being brought by God-given faith, led by the Spirit, feeling our need, to look to Christ alone, to rest on Him alone.

There was a godly minister some years ago who was asked if he would give a definition of what truth faith is, and this is what he replied. He said,

“A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall;
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my All.”

Now that is living faith and that is “looking unto Jesus.” Never forget this, you young ones, when you read about the great missionary, William Carey. He said, “I do not want anything on my gravestone, apart from my initials, the date of my death, and then, my only hope: ‘A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, on Thy kind arms I fall.’”

“Looking unto Jesus ... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” So I could not help but read John chapter 3 this evening, the serpent in the wilderness. What a commentary that is, a commentary of the Lord Jesus Himself, what it is, what it means to look to Him – that reference to Israel in the wilderness, bitten by serpents, dying, no human cure, and Moses prayed to God, and God revealed a cure: to make a serpent, a snake, out of brass, lift it up on the pole, bid the dying look to it, and as many as looked lived.

“Jesus, thus for sinners smitten,
Wounded, bruised, serpent-bitten,
To His cross directs their faith.”

Now it was a strange remedy, but it was God's remedy, and it was the only remedy, and it availed. If there were those who despised it, who thought it was foolish, and they would not look, they perished in their sin. But as many as looked lived. We have often said it: we do not want to be fanciful, but the camp of Israel stretched a tremendous distance. There must have been those who were close to Moses who could see everything – the engraving on the snake – and there must have been those at the edge of the camp who could hardly see anything, especially if they were dying. As many as looked lived. Little faith, if it is real, will take you to heaven as much as great faith. The only thing is, great faith honours the Lord more. Great faith brings more comfort. O but that look of a dying sinner to Calvary! I take the whole point of the brasen serpent: it represents Christ made sin for His people, everything in this verse before us. That serpent had all the appearance, but there was no venom. It represents Christ made sin – “He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

Now this is the way of salvation, and it is God's work. It is the Holy Spirit's work. Christ has done it all in this wonderful revelation here, His death and resurrection, but the Holy Spirit's work in your heart will bring you to see the beauty of it, the necessity of it, your personal need of it, and as a sinner you will have to venture in hope, but in complete dependence, no other hope, no other sacrifice, no other Saviour, no other blood, but we need no other, and to be brought like this: “Dying sinner, look and live.”

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

* * *

O the pangs by Christians felt,
When their eyes are open;
When they see the gulfs of guilt
They must wade and grope in;
When the hell appears within,
Causing bitter anguish,

And the loathsome stench of sin
Makes the spirit languish.

Now the heart disclosed, betrays
All its hid disorders,
Enmity to God's right ways,
Blasphemies and murders;
Malice, envy, lust, and pride,
Thoughts obscene and filthy;
Sores corrupt and putrefied,
No part sound or healthy.

All things to promote our fall
Show a mighty fitness;
Satan will accuse withal,
And the conscience witness;
Foes within, and foes without,
Wrath, and law, and terrors,
Rash presumption, timid doubt,
Coldness, deadness, errors.

Brethren, in a state so sad,
When temptations seize us,
When our hearts we feel thus bad,
Let us look to Jesus.
He that hung upon the cross,
For His people bleeding,
Now in heaven sits, for us
Always interceding.

Vengeance, when the Saviour died,
Quitted the believer;
Justice cried, "I'm satisfied,
Now, henceforth, for ever."
"It is finished," said the Lord,
In His dying minute;
Holy Ghost, repeat the word,
Full salvation's in it.

Leprous soul, press through the crowd
In thy foul condition;
Struggle hard, and call aloud
On the great Physician.
Wait till thy disease He cleanse,
Begging, trusting, cleaving;
When, and where, and by what means,
To His wisdom leaving.

J. Hart