

Bethel

Pulpit

The Joy Set Before Him

**Address given at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Monday, 26th March, 2018**

Text: *“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12. 2).*

The question might rightly be asked, Why are we gathered here this evening? Now the Word of God does not give a clear answer for a gathering like this, but it does give a clear answer for why the Lord’s people gather at the Lord’s table. Really that is the divinely-appointed remembrance in the Lord’s supper – not just once a year, but month by month. But the answer there is clear and simple: to “shew the Lord’s death till He come” – to show forth what it was that the Saviour suffered; to show forth who this glorious Person is, the Son of God eternally who suffered as a Man of sorrows; to show forth the glorious accomplishments of His death. So really this evening, we meet to remember the great work of redemption, and rightly so.

“Well He remembers Calvary,
Nor let His saints forget.”

We have here the suffering Saviour, and we are told that this great work of redemption was *set before Him*. His eternal Father in the plan of salvation set before His own beloved Son what He had to suffer in order that sinners might be saved. This work was set before Him. It was set before Him as He graciously undertook to be the Surety for His people. You all know what a surety is. If there is a debt to be paid, or a punishment to be endured, and you have promised to be surety for another, if he cannot fulfil it himself, then you are the one who has to suffer. That is why the wise man said, “He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it.” In its literal meaning there, it is a solemn warning to young people, to older people, never to become surety for a stranger. It is dangerous. You do not know what you might have to suffer. You do not know what you might have to endure. It is different for a friend, but never become surety for a stranger.

The Lord Jesus in love and mercy became Surety for strangers, and He smarted for it. And all this was set before Him. We have that wonderful word prophetically, seeing the Lord Jesus coming into this world of sin and sorrow: “His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.” O what a work

there was before Him, to make an end of sin, to bring in an everlasting righteousness! This is what His Father set before Him. This is what His Father's will was: the whole work of redemption, and those awful sufferings the Saviour was to endure, and death itself.

When the Lord Jesus came, He knew it. In our little lives, sometimes we have things before us, but they are wisely hidden from us. O what sorrows people would have had if they had realised some of the things that were going to happen to them. But these things are wisely hidden from us.

“What gloomy lines are writ for us,
Or what bright scenes may rise.”

But this was set before our Lord Jesus, and He knew it.

Now beloved friends, if you know that something is set before you, something you know is going to take place, you know it is going to cost you a lot, you know that it is going to grieve you and wound you, you know it is going to cause you to suffer, then you shrink from it. What do you make of a word like this: “The *joy* that was set before Him”? You might think there was a mistake, that it should say, *the sorrow* that was set before Him. But it does not. It says, “The joy that was set before Him.” A word like that almost makes you tremble.

“The joy that was set before Him.” In its awful yet beautiful simplicity it means this: that He loved His poor, sinful, unworthy people so dearly that though He had to endure these agonies even unto death, it was a joy to Him, a joy of delivering His people from the pit, His joy in preparing them for heaven, His joy seeing He would have them in heaven at last for ever and ever. You have the depth of the Saviour's love here with those agonies on the cross, the crown of thorns, the cruel spear and the nails, because He loved His people so dearly, He counted it nothing but joy. There is hardly a word any-where like this in the whole of Scripture.

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.” I believe as the Lord Jesus hung bleeding, dying on the cross, when at last the work was complete and He cried with a loud voice, “It is finished,” He had a view of the whole church of God through His death saved with an everlasting salvation. And you here personally this evening who belong to Christ, who trust in Christ, He saw you personally as if you were the only one for whom

He was suffering those agonies. Can you receive it? It was a joy to Him. That is the love of Christ to sinners.

“He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” They say that travail is different to almost any other kind of sorrow, because most other kinds of sorrow are unto death, but travail is unto life. “The travail of His soul,” and He is satisfied with it. He is satisfied with that cross that He endured. He does not count it too great a price. He is satisfied with you who believe on His name. You are not satisfied with yourself, are you? You feel the very opposite. O but to think, the Saviour is satisfied with you! “When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.”

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.” Now there was some bitter shame in the cross. The cross was really a mark of the curse. It was a cruel death. It was a shameful death. There are some people and they can bear suffering, but they cannot bear shame. They cannot bear being despised, cannot bear being mocked. He despised the shame, and “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.” The old hymn puts it rightly: “An old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame.” There is a lot of sentimentality about the cross of Christ. There was nothing sentimental when the Lord came there. It was “an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame.” And how can we ever really speak of what the Saviour endured?

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

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.” There is such a thing as joy in the cross of Christ for a sinner. He sees the sorrow of it and he feels the sorrow. “They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him.” John Newton rightly says, though solemnly:

“A bleeding Saviour seen by faith,
A sense of pardoning love,
A hope that triumphs over death
Give joys like those above.”

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.” That is why the apostle says, “We also joy in God through our

Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” It is a wonderful word. There is a great depth in it. “By whom we have now received the atonement.”

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.” Now in the previous chapter, the long chapter (Hebrews 11), we have so many of the saints of God set before us. They are set before us as our example. Now when chapter 12 begins, yes, you say, the dear Lord Jesus is our Example. But it is not just that. It says, “Looking unto Jesus” – that look of faith, that look of confession, that look of hope, that look of complete dependence. There is salvation in it. Now all those worthies, we are called to follow them – they are an example – but we are not to look to *them*. We are to look to the dear Lord Jesus, the Saviour of sinners.

The old Puritans always had an application. Sometimes they had a lot of applications. But the Holy Ghost application is this: this glorious truth, this solemn truth, there is salvation in it, there is heaven in it. The sufferings, the death and then the glorious resurrection of Christ set down at the right hand of God, but the application: it is the place where sinners are led, sinners born again of the Holy Spirit, feeling their need. Where can they look? I notice that people like Dr. Owen, who really understood the original Greek, said that this word was quite difficult to translate: “Looking unto Jesus.” It does mean that, but he said the sense of it really is looking away from everyone and from everything else to Jesus. Well, that is what real faith is. It is looking away from sin and self and people, looking away from everyone and everything else to Jesus.

We cannot help but think of the application of our Lord Jesus Himself: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” You and I by nature are perishing sinners, and apart from this glorious work here, we must perish to all eternity.

“Death’s within thee, all about thee;
But the remedy’s without thee;
See it in thy Saviour’s blood.”

Beloved friends, in all your various needs, may you be sweetly enabled even this evening by the Holy Spirit to look to a once-crucified, now risen, exalted Saviour, for we read that as many as looked, lived, however feeble

the look. They were dying; their sight, some of them, may not have been very good. The camp of Israel was a vast camp. But O that serpent lifted up!

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

Some of you have tasted of this. Some of you are seeking it, longing for it. But what a glorious revelation there is in the gospel of the grace of God for unworthy, wretched sinners who do not deserve it! The wonderful value of the blood of Christ, the amazing love of the Saviour in shedding it. O to be sweetly enabled to look away as a sinner from everything else and rest our eternal hope on what the Lord Jesus did here!

So it is “looking unto Jesus ... who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.”

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Jesus, thus for sinners smitten,
Wounded, bruised, serpent-bitten,
To His cross directs their faith.
Why should I, then, poison cherish?
Why despair of cure, and perish?
Look, my soul, though stung to death.

Thine's alas! a lost condition;
Works cannot work thee remission,
Nor thy goodness do thee good.
Death's within thee, all about thee;
But the remedy's without thee;
See it in thy Saviour's blood.

See the Lord of glory dying!
See Him gasping! Hear Him crying!
See His burdened bosom heave!
Look, ye sinners, ye that hung Him;
Look how deep your sins have stung Him;
Dying sinners, look and live.

J. Hart