



Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 34

The Preciousness of Christ

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 3rd April, 1988 (Easter Sunday)**

Text: *“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious” (1 Peter 2. 7).*

This morning we remember the glorious resurrection of the Son of God. We think of His matchless love, going to Gethsemane, going to Calvary, the sweat of blood, the crown of thorns, the agony, the cruel nails and the spear, the hiding of His Father's face, the load of imputed guilt laid upon Him, the burdens that He bore. And we think of how at last He bowed His head and died, not before with a loud voice He had cried, “It is finished!” The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. We think of those loving hands which laid His sacred body in the grave.

“Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids His rise;
Christ has opened paradise.”

So we preach Christ crucified. This is the glory of the gospel. But we do not preach a dead Christ. We preach a Christ who rose triumphant, who dies no more, who ever lives. We worship a Christ who says, “Fear not; I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”

The subject before us today is the preciousness of Christ, and we have this very clear statement: “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” That means that wherever there is true faith, the Lord Jesus will be precious. That means wherever there is a true believer, Christ will be precious. I understand the original bears this sense: He is highly esteemed. Wherever there is a work of grace in a sinner's heart, wherever the new birth takes place, wherever faith is given, whatever stage of experience it might be, then Christ will be highly esteemed. And of course it works both ways. We sometimes sing,

“Sinners are high in His esteem,
And sinners highly value Him” –

and only those who are taught that they are sinners, because by nature there is no beauty in Christ that we should desire Him. By nature we do not highly esteem Him. So to us by nature Christ is not precious. Rather is He as a root out of a dry ground, despised and rejected of men. But beloved friends, wherever the new birth takes place, there is always this change. You will see a beauty in Christ that you shall desire Him. Why, you have an eternity to be prepared for, and only Christ can do it. You have sins to be washed away, and only Christ's precious blood can do it. You need a righteousness in which to stand before divine justice, and only the righteousness of Christ will avail. So, "unto you therefore which believe He is precious."

This is one of the well-known texts of the New Testament, and one of the most attractive texts of the New Testament. But there is one point that we often forget, and that is that it is one of the most solemn texts in the New Testament. You say, "What do you mean?" "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious," *and* only unto you which believe; *but* only unto you which believe. The verse goes on to speak of those to whom Christ is not precious. It speaks of them as being disobedient. I want to say this in all love and affection and tenderness. I fear that there are some here this morning and it does not matter to you whether Christ ever died and whether He rose again. I solemnly fear that there are some here this morning and it does not even matter to you whether Christ ever existed. But "unto you therefore which believe He is precious."

So we have this awful, solemn separation. "But unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (the latter part of the verse). Really the figure is this. Here is a stone by the wayside. To many a pilgrim, to many a traveller it affords a welcome resting place. But there are some who in their heedlessness and in their blindness stumble over it to their injury, even to their death. That is the solemn figure here – the same stone. Or alternatively, here is a great stone out at sea. A skilful captain delights to see it. It is such a clear landmark to him. When he sees it, he knows that he is in the right way to his destined port. But then there is a foolish mariner who heedlessly steers the ship so that it is wrecked against that very rock. Now Christ is either our foundation or He is a stone of

stumbling and a rock of offence to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient. Either we feel our need of Christ or we do not. Either we have been taught the vanity of the world or we love the vanity of the world. Either we tremble because we have a never-dying soul or we are hard and unconcerned about it. And this awful scripture divides the congregation. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: *but* unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.”

Really there are two things in this word I have brought before you: a believer and a precious Christ. Only He who created the world can make a believer. It is not just to believe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, not just to believe that He lived and died and rose again and is exalted at God’s right hand, not only to believe that He died to make atonement for sin. You see, the devils believe this and tremble (Jas. 2. 19). The devils have clearer beliefs in the death and resurrection of the Son of God than most people here on earth. But it does not do them a bit of good. They do not feel their need of Him. They do not want Him. They do not pray to Him. They do not cast their care on Him. They do not ask Him to forgive their sins. They do not seek an interest in His precious blood. But you do if you are a real believer. We want a faith better than that of devils.

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” How vital it is that you and I should be believers! Of course, in our churches over the years this expression has come into being, *a true believer*. In a sense, we should not use this expression, because it is not an expression used in Scripture. But we know how the expression has come about, *a true believer* – to distinguish from just an outward believer, just a nominal believer. Why is it vital that you and I should be true believers? Well, to answer that in the simplest way that is possible, because the Word of God says that he that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life. In other words, the true believer is the man, the woman, the girl, the boy, who one day will be in heaven. But there are some very solemn things written in the gospels concerning him that believeth not. This is the point which you and I need to discern. Are you, am I, true believers on the Son of God?

Of course, there is another side which is perhaps uppermost in our thoughts just at the moment¹ concerning the qualification for baptism as given in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The eunuch said, “See, here water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” And this is the apostolic answer: “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.” So if ever you and I are to get to heaven, we must be true believers – no more, no less, and if ever you and I are to have a scriptural qualification for baptism, we must be true believers – no more, no less. But what is it to be a believer? “Unto you therefore which believe.” A true believer is one who feels his need of Christ and who ventures on Christ for salvation. A true believer is one who feels he has nothing and yet he must still come to Christ.

“Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy cross I cling.”

A true believer is one who has been well taught his unworthiness and his sinfulness and his weakness, who as a sinner has to cast his all upon Christ.

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

Now beloved friends, that is a true believer, a Holy Ghost believer, one who has been blessed with faith by the Holy Ghost.

So the New Testament speaks of faith as a coming. “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me.” Why this *shall*? Well, first of all because of an eternal decree in the covenant of grace. “They *shall* come.” But then because of sheer necessity, because of vital experience. I cannot do without Him. I must have Him. I need His precious blood. I need His mercy. I need forgiveness. “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.”

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” This believing is spoken of in the New Testament as a looking. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” It is

¹ The ordinance of believers’ baptism was to be administered the following Thursday.

a threefold lifting up: on the cross to die; in His glorious resurrection and ascension and exaltation; and in the preaching of the gospel. “Even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” So this believing is looking and this looking is believing. The allusion is to the time when the Israelites were bitten by serpents. There was no cure. There was no remedy. They were dying.

“Vain was bandage, oil, or plaster;
Rankling venom killed the faster;
Till the serpent Moses took.”

And then we see this strange remedy. Moses, by divine direction, was to make a serpent of brass. It had the appearance, but was completely without the venom. It represented Christ made sin for His people. It was a strange remedy, wasn't it, for dying sinners – a serpent of brass to be lifted up on a pole? A strange remedy, but it was a divinely-appointed remedy, it was God's remedy, it was the only remedy and it availed. As many as looked lived. And the Lord Jesus Himself takes this as an example of what true faith is, what a true believer is. It was not just a look of curiosity or a look of interest. It was a matter of life and death. They were not just looking *at* the serpent. They were looking to the serpent, to the divinely-appointed remedy. They were looking for life. There were looking for healing.

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

As many as looked lived. It was a look for help, a look for mercy. It was a look of dependence. Those who despised the serpent lifted up perished in their sin. Some on the outskirts of the camp must have been hardly able to discern the form of the serpent, but as many as looked lived. Some close by must have seen the engraving on it, but as many as looked lived. Some poor, dying souls must have been so blinded with their pain and with their affliction that they could hardly lift their heads, that they could hardly see anything at all, but as many as looked lived.

“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.”

“Unto you therefore which believe.” O how precious was the serpent lifted up in the wilderness to those who looked and lived!

But you know, the Word of God especially speaks of this element in true faith, in a true believer: that is, trusting in the Lord Jesus, depending on Him, hanging upon Him, resting the whole weight of your immortal soul upon Him. “Unto you therefore which believe.” I have always felt that in Leviticus 1 there is such a beautiful illustration of the nature of true faith, the Israelite who brought his lamb as a burnt offering. The lamb was slain in his place, the innocent lamb died that he, the sinner, might live. But what was he to do? By divine commandment, not just to look on as if it were a matter of no concern, as if he were not involved, not just to look on with interest or with sympathy. He was to lay his hand upon the head of that dying lamb. Now that is what faith is. It was a resting. It was a leaning. And I believe many a godly Israelite by faith looked right down the ages, beyond the shadows to the dear Lamb of God dying at Calvary and then rising again. But he was to put his hand upon the head of the sacrifice. He was to be identified. He was to see that lamb as a substitute in his place. He was to confess his sin over the head of that dying lamb, seeking that his sin might be removed in the atonement. O but it was the hand of identification, the hand of dependence, the hand that leaned entirely on the lamb – as if he said, “This is my only hope; apart from it I must perish.” How precious that lamb was to him as he confessed his sin! How precious as he had something of the witness within of sin forgiven, of acceptance found, of atonement made! Now is there a believer here this morning like that?

“My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”

Now that is a sinner who will get to heaven. That is a true believer.

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” Of course, Peter knew all this by solemn, sacred experience. When he wrote these

words, “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious,” he could have answered a few questions, couldn’t he? Peter, have you ever felt the Lord Jesus to be precious? Can you tell us how the Lord Jesus became precious to you? And Peter would tell how he was in his boat and he saw this glorious Stranger and heard Him say, “Follow Me.” Made willing in the day of divine power, following the sweet contrainings of love divine, he left all that he might follow Christ. Peter would also tell you of that sacred spot, Caesarea Philippi, when that question was put to all the disciples: “Whom say ye that I am?” And that honourable confession came from Peter’s lips: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.” And Peter would have told you of that time when the Lord was preaching and so many who were not true believers, only outward, only nominal believers, walked no more with Him. And the Lord Jesus put that question which pierced them to their heart, pierced Peter to the heart: “Will ye also go away?” He still says that this morning. “Will ye also go away?” Peter never forget those words that came from his lips because they came from his heart: “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

“Depart from Thee? – ‘tis death – ‘tis more;
‘Tis endless ruin, deep despair.”

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” Peter could have given a good testimony of how the Lord Jesus was made precious to him. He could have told you how he once did what no man did before. He walked upon the sea. But then he began to sink. He saw the wind and the waves boisterous and he had to cry, “Lord, save me.” And that almighty arm reached out and held him fast. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” Peter could have told you how that very same day this same Jesus said, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” I am sure Peter would have told you with tears of how he denied his Lord and Master, with tears of how the Lord Jesus had said to him, “I have prayed for thee,” how in the judgment hall the Lord Jesus looked upon him, that look of condemnation, that look of forgiveness, that second look. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” Peter could have told you about those wonderful words that the Lord Jesus spoke in the upper room,

that wonderful prayer that he prayed in John 17. And what might Peter have said about that appearance after the resurrection? “Go and tell my disciples *and Peter.*” And that appearance by the side of the lake. “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?”

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” Peter could have given a most gracious account, couldn’t he, of the preciousness of Christ, how Christ was made precious to him? Now not all God’s people can do that, and yet they are still true believers, because the mark that is given here of a true believer is this: “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” Some of God’s little ones find it hard to crystalize everything down into an experience which they could speak. But if you were to ask them a few questions concerning the preciousness of Christ, they would give you very satisfactory answers which proves them to be true believers. If you were to ask them, “Can you manage without the Lord Jesus?” or, “Do you really need Him?” or, “What does His sin-atonement blood mean to you?” or, “What does His wonderful love mean to you, that ‘having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end’?” they would be able to witness clearly to you, first of all, how precious Christ is in their felt want of Him. That aching void the world can never fill, and how precious Christ is in their desires after Him, and how precious Christ is in the attraction they see in Him. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” And they are all taught to pray that prayer in the spirit of it:

“Be precious to us; all beside is as dross,
Compared with Thy love and the blood of Thy cross.”

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” Of course, in the context what brings Peter to speak these wonderful words is this. He has just been quoting out of Isaiah 28. Didn’t he love the Old Testament! “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation.” He has been speaking of the preciousness of Christ as the foundation on which the church is built, the only foundation. So he quotes from Isaiah 28. As so often in the New Testament, the quotation is slightly changed. “Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.” I wonder why concerning the preciousness of Christ, this point was uppermost in Peter’s thoughts? Shall I tell you? Because it was to Peter that the Lord Jesus once said, referring to Himself, “Upon this

Rock” – the Rock Christ Jesus – “upon this Rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Now Peter never forgot that, so he describes the believer in this sense. “To whom coming.” You will never stop coming as long as you are here on earth. It will be a constant coming, a daily coming, a continual coming. Is this you, or is it not? Can you bear witness that this is your experience or is it not your experience? “To whom coming.” Of necessity you come; in your emptiness, your weakness, your guilt, you come. “To whom coming as unto a living stone.” He died, He rose again, He ever lives. And how do they come? How do you come? How do I come? Like this:

“Lo! glad I come; and Thou, blest Lamb,
O take me to Thee as I am;
Nothing but sin I Thee can give;
Nothing but love may I receive.”

Now this is a true believer. This is one who will get to heaven. “To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.” “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”