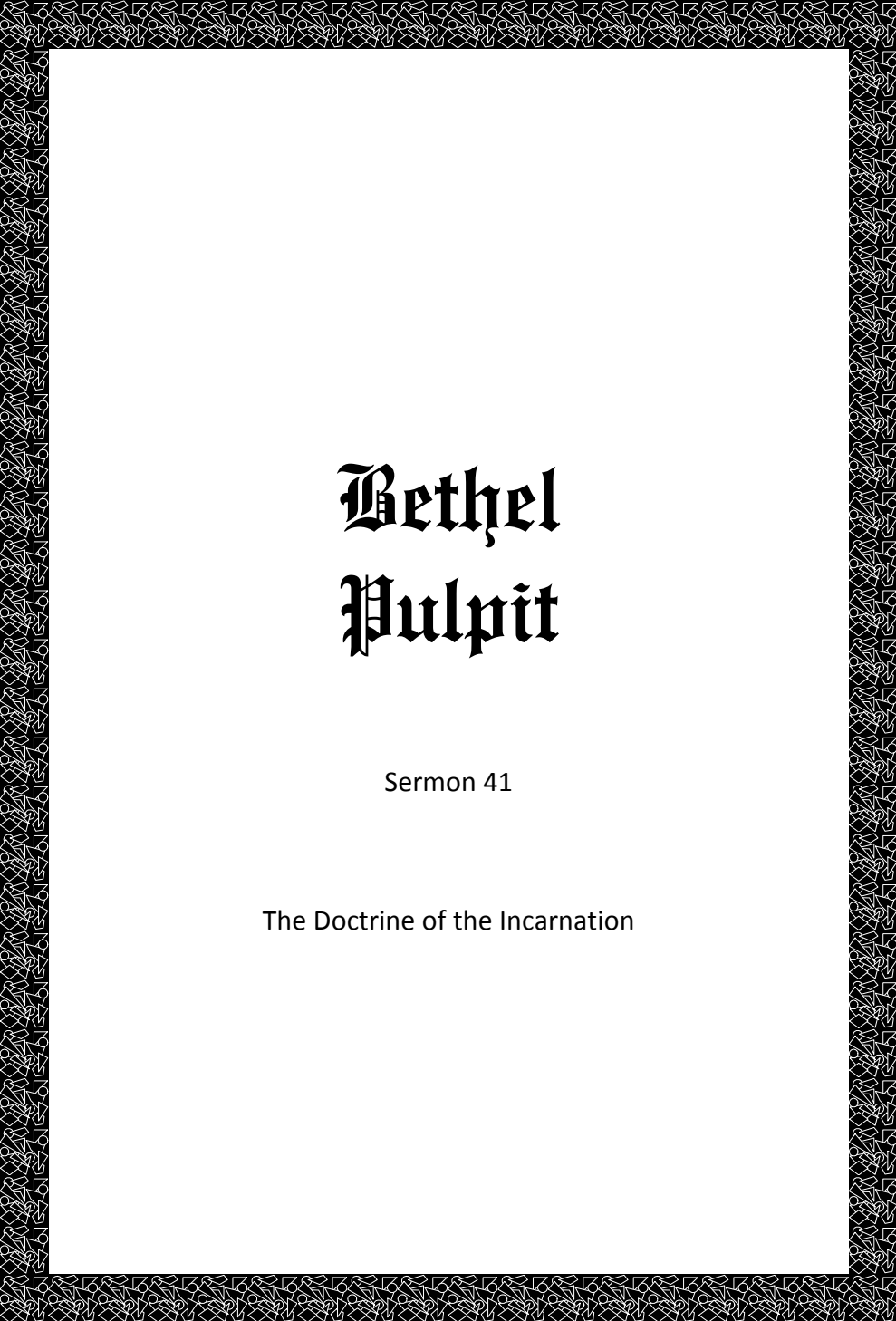




# Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 41

The Doctrine of the Incarnation

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,  
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,  
on Lord's day evening, 18th December, 1988**

**Text:** *“Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2. 17, 18).*

You will notice that in the Word of God we have two things that always go together: the fact and the doctrine; the fact of what happened, what took place, and the doctrine built upon it. Now let me explain myself. In Genesis 3 we have the fact, the account of how the serpent tempted Eve and how she and her husband Adam partook of the fruit which was forbidden. There we have the fact of what took place. Then throughout Scripture we have the doctrine of it, the doctrine of the Fall. For instance: “Sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned.”

Let me just give you another illustration. In the closing chapters of each of the gospels we have the fact of the death of the Lord Jesus. We have it clearly set out by the four evangelists exactly what took place, the way He was arrested and tried, brought before Herod, before Pilate, taken to Calvary and there crucified. There we have the fact, and all through the epistles we have the doctrine of it. Things like this: “Christ died for our sins”; “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” The fact, what took place, what happened, and then the doctrine of it. And of course we could multiply examples of it.

Now at this time of year we think of the fact of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. In the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke we have a very clear, beautiful account of the historical fact, how Joseph and Mary had to go up to Bethlehem, the city of David, and how whilst they were there Mary gave birth to her firstborn Son. His name was called Jesus. He was laid in the manger because there was no room for them in the inn. He was

visited, worshipped, by the shepherds to whom the angels had appeared in the sky. There is the fact, the historical fact. And then we have the doctrine, the doctrine of the incarnation, the doctrine of Christ's coming. We have it in many places in Scripture, but nowhere more clearly set forth than in the closing words of Hebrews 2.

So if you will, this is the doctrine, the wonderful doctrine of the incarnation. And if it enters your heart, you will know what Martin Luther meant when he said that "doctrine is heaven." Well, the Lord Himself says, "My doctrine shall drop as the rain, My speech shall distil as the dew." Now may the doctrine of Christ's incarnation sweetly fall as the rain in many a heart, distil there as the dew, softening, satisfying, reviving. The wonderful doctrine of the incarnation.

"He left His radiant throne on high!  
Left the bright realms of bliss!  
And came to earth to bleed and die!  
Was ever love like this?"

The reason the apostle is insisting on the doctrine of the incarnation here is because he is going to speak of the glories of Christ as our great High Priest, a Priest who once atoned, who now for ever intercedes. Now if you and I are graciously, divinely taught, as sinners in all our ruin and guilt we shall feel our need of a priest, a priest to stand between, to atone, to intercede. So we are going to have opened up before us the wonders and the glories and the suitability of this great High Priest we so much need, we must have, we cannot do without. How many of you here tonight see a beauty in the priesthood of Christ, feel you must know it, must have an interest in it, if ever you are going to be saved, if ever you are going to get to heaven?

Well, a priest is essentially a mediator. A mediator is a person who stands between if two people have a dispute, a quarrel, and he brings those two together, he reconciles them. So he must be a person who has a right standing with both the people in the dispute, both the people who are looking for reconciliation. In chapter 1 the apostle establishes that the Lord Jesus is true, almighty God, and in chapter 2 he establishes that He is a real Man. That is the way the doctrine of the incarnation comes in, His birth at Bethlehem. You and I, as we are brought to feel our need, need a Saviour. We need a High Priest who is fully God and yet fully Man. He

must be both - Man to suffer, God to save; Man that He might bleed, Man that He might die, God that there might be merit, there might be efficacy in His precious blood, in His death. So chapter 1, Jesus true, eternal God; chapter 2, Jesus, true, eternal God, Jesus, real Man.

I do not know anywhere in the whole Bible that so clearly, indisputably, without any doubt sets forth that Jesus is truly God as Hebrews chapter 1. I do not want to linger long here, but just one or two things. This is God the eternal Father speaking to His own dear Son: “Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” I do not know of anything clearer than that, the Father speaking to the Lord Jesus and addressing Him as God. And then that wonderful quotation from Psalm 102. If ever a passage in the Old Testament speaks of the greatness of God, of His power as the Creator, of His eternity, His unchangeability, it is this passage in Psalm 102. Now the apostle says this is spoken of the Lord Jesus. “Thou Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands: they shall perish; but Thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail.” Now do you believe it, that the Lord Jesus is true, almighty God?

And then in chapter 2 we have that He is a real Man. If the Lord Jesus is just true, almighty God, how can this be any help, any encouragement for a guilty, dying sinner?

“What shall the dying sinner do,  
That seeks relief from all his woe?”

What can you and I do unless we see God in human flesh, God in our nature? This is it:

“He took the dying traitor’s place,  
And suffered in his stead;  
For man (O miracle of grace!)  
For man the Saviour bled.”

Chapter 2 not only sets Him out as a real Man - that shows it was needful if He is to be a Saviour, to bleed and die, if He is to be a High Priest, not just to represent God to the people but the people to God - it not only sets Him out as a real Man, but it sets out how He became a real Man,

the way in which it took place. So we have the wonderful birth at Bethlehem, and we have the doctrine: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same" (verse 14). Now this is the incarnation. This is the coming of the Son of God. This is His mysterious conception and then His birth at Bethlehem. He has just been speaking of the children, the children that God gave His dear Son in the covenant of grace. And the point is so simple: that if all these who were given to Christ to save, all these children, if they were human beings, partakers of flesh and blood, real men, real women, then it was necessary, needful, that the Lord Jesus in just the same way should become a partaker of flesh and blood, not just an imaginary man, not just assuming some human form, but as truly flesh and blood as anyone in this chapel tonight. That is the wonder of the incarnation, and that is the doctrine of it.

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death" - you see, this joins the cross to the manger, it joins Calvary to Bethlehem. He was born that He might die. The reason that the Son of God took upon Him flesh and blood was in order that He might die, because there could be no eternal life for sinners apart from the Saviour's death. "That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil." Solemn point that, isn't it, that there is one who had the power of death, natural death, eternal death - the devil, the inveterate foe of Christ and His people? Christ came to Bethlehem that He might destroy the devil. That, beloved friends, is the reason why, as soon as the Lord Jesus was born, the devil sought to destroy him. That is why Herod massacred all those children under two years of age.

He came "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." You may say, "But Satan is not destroyed!" Well, I understand that the word here means "to make void," or "to disarm," or "to take the power from him." This is a big subject. There is not time to go into it tonight. But you find a lot of places where the word *destroy* is used in Scripture, but it does not mean to annihilate. Just one: "Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help."

"I sing my Saviour's wondrous death,  
He conquered when He fell.

‘Tis finished!’ said His dying breath,  
And shook the gates of hell.”

“That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” That is the doctrine of His death, His incarnation. He came that He might die, and He died that He might destroy him that had the power of death.

“And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (verse 15). O may that be a word in season to many of you here tonight. The purpose of His coming was as an almighty Deliverer, to deliver from sinking into hell, to deliver from sin and from Satan, and to deliver from fear. “To deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily He took not on Himself the nature of angels” (verse 16). Now angels had sinned just like men had sinned. Angels had fallen just like Adam had fallen. Angels were cast out of paradise just as man was cast out of paradise. But God never made any provision for the redemption, the salvation of those angels who fell, who kept not their first estate. Now He passed by the nature of angels. The nature of angels is a higher nature than that of human beings, but He passed it by. You see the mysterious sovereignty of God here. A lot of people argue about election not being fair. They say, “Why should this one be chosen and that one passed by?” But how often do you hear this: “Why was it that human beings were chosen and angels passed by?” There is no provision for angels that fell. He never came to die for angels, to atone for angels’ sins, for those angels who had fallen. We used to sing it years ago, but not so much today:

“From heaven the sinning angels fell,  
And wrath and darkness chained them down;  
But man, vile man, forsook his bliss,  
And mercy lifts him to a crown.”

Now that is the mystery of divine sovereignty. “He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham.” That is, He took upon Himself human nature, not the nature of angels. I suppose if you and I had been writing it, we would say, “He took on Him the seed of Adam.” Well, of course, that is true: He did take upon Him the seed of Adam. But He says, “The seed of Abraham” here. I take that to mean that His purpose in coming was to save His chosen, not to save all.

All are the children of Adam, but spiritually only God's people are the children of Abraham. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." "He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham." Angels left heaven to announce His birth, but He passed by the nature of angels and He took on Him the seed of Abraham.

Now this is it: "Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren." O what a fulness there is here! We can only really touch the fringe of it. First of all, those wretched, ruined sinners that He came to save, that He should call them "His brethren"! You remember how when He rose from the dead He said, "Go and tell My brethren." And earlier in this chapter we have this: "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." If you look at the nobility of our land, some of them have a person who belongs to the family and has absolutely disgraced it. They are ashamed of him. They do not like to own him, to acknowledge him. Perhaps some of you have known families and there has been one member of that family who has disgraced the family. Generally speaking, that family does not want to know him, ostracises him. They cut him off. The Lord Jesus is not ashamed to call poor, wretched, ruined sinners "His brethren." It is no wonder, is it, that we sing at our baptisms,

"And O may this my glory be,  
That Christ is not ashamed of me"?

"Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren." Now the point here is this doctrine of His birth, the doctrine of His incarnation. By His birth He was to be made a real Man, a true Man, and so it was necessary that He should be born. It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, in all things a real, true Man - in all things apart from two.

The first is this: He is unlike His brethren in that as well as being a real Man, He is true, almighty God. In that point He is unlike His brethren. He never ceased to be God. He was as much God in the manger as He was on the throne.

"This wondrous Man of whom we tell,  
Is true, almighty God."

So the first thing in which He is unlike His brethren is that He is God as well as Man. The second thing in which He is unlike His brethren is that He is completely free from sin, original sin, actual sin. He is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” That, of course, is where the wonders of the virgin birth come in, how it was possible He should be truly born and yet without any taint of original sin.

But apart from these two points in which He is unlike His brethren - that as well as Man He is true almighty God, and that although a real Man, He is entirely free from sin - in all other things it “behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” You see, He was weary, He was grieved, He was sad, He wept, He rejoiced, He could suffer, He could bleed, He died. I realise it was not through any essential thing in His Being, any necessity that He died; He voluntarily laid down His life. But He was a real Man in that He could die. “A Man there is, a real Man.” And it was necessary He should be a real Man, that He might stand in our place.

“Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” Now I like this word *behoved*. It is an old word that we do not really use today. It comes twice in Scripture, the other place being in Luke 24. The Lord Jesus on the day of His resurrection, how He spoke: “It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead.” And here: “It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” What does it mean? It means it was needful. It was necessary. It was something that *must* take place if He is to die, if He is to suffer, if He is to be a great High Priest.

“Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” You can see that written across the stable at Bethlehem (may you view it by faith!): “Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.”

“That He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” You see the great point with a priest is that he must offer a sacrifice. And this Man must have a human body that He might offer it in death, precious blood that He might shed it, a life that He might lay it down. Now “it behoved Him” so that He might make reconciliation for the sins of the people, in other words that the words of the hymn might be fulfilled: “God and sinners reconciled.” Why? Because through His death on the cross -



and He was born that He might die - because through that death there was to be a complete removing of the enmity, that sin which separated between a sinner and God. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." There is nothing between a guilty sinner, saved by grace, and his God - no sin to condemn, no sin to separate.

"To make reconciliation for the sins of the people." You know, reconciliation is our great need. As sinners we are alienated from God by wicked works, by original sin and by practice. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." There is a distance made, and without reconciliation it will be eternal. It will be for ever and ever. Dying sinner, your great need is reconciliation. It is a wonderful thing if we know anything of it. It is to be found in Christ and Him alone, in this real Man who is true, almighty God, in His wonderful birth and in His wonderful death - reconciliation. Doesn't the apostle Paul delight to speak of it? "You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in His sight."

"Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!"

That is the doctrine of the incarnation. If you get that in your heart then you will "enjoy a gospel day and heaven begun below."

"To make reconciliation for the sins of the people." It is in Christ and there alone, and it was through His death. In the middle ages, the scholastic writers used to over-emphasise the incarnation. There is a terrible danger of it generally today, isn't there? Most worldly people make a lot more of Christmas than Easter. I suppose the doctrine in the middle ages was something like this. God comes down from heaven to earth. He is incarnate at Bethlehem, and there is the reconciliation. Heaven and earth are brought together in the birth of Christ. Well, there is a measure of truth in it, wonderful truth in it. But the fulness, the reality of it is that reconciliation was accomplished by the shedding of His precious blood on the cross. Now may we feel something of the blessing of reconciliation in our hearts.

“That He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest.” You see His wonderful mercy as a High Priest in laying down His life a sacrifice, that His people might be reconciled to God, that it might be this: “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” That is reconciliation. O you see the wonderful mercy in it, mercy through blood. Also His faithfulness, faithfulness to His dear Father who sent Him, faithfulness to His people that He loved with an everlasting love, faithful even unto death. “That He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest.” And not just when here on earth, but now exalted in heaven. In the concluding verse, we go beyond the manger, beyond the cross, beyond the tomb, to the sky, to the eternal throne, and there we see this same Jesus born at Bethlehem, this same Jesus, crucified at Calvary, now for ever crowned with glory and honour in heaven.

“Not in that poor lowly stable,  
With the oxen standing by,  
We shall see Him; but in heaven.”

“For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.” This is the other part of His Priesthood. One part of it was to die, to lay down His life a sacrifice. The other part of it is, risen and exalted, “to succour them that are tempted.” What does it mean to succour? Well, it means to help them, to uphold them, to defend them, to support them, to strengthen them. There is so much bound up in it. This is one of those wonderful *He is able*’s of the New Testament. There are quite a lot of them. Now can you meditate on them, the various places where it says, “He is able”? Well, beloved friends, He is. He “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.” Whatever your case, whatever your problem is tonight, beloved, *He is able*. You and I have to learn our utter helplessness, but *He is able*. And here: “He is able to succour them that are tempted.” Is there anyone here tonight tempted, tempted by Satan, tempted by your own unbelieving heart? It may be about things in your soul. It may be about the day of your death and eternity. Sore temptations, bitter temptations. You fear you may fall. It may be about tomorrow, the unknown way, next year. It may be about things in your home, your family, your life, your circumstances, the church of God. “He is able to succour them that are tempted.” And He so simply and sweetly explains how. As true, almighty God, of course, He is able to do anything, able to everything.

But, you see, one reason He came to Bethlehem, one reason He came to this earth, one reason He became a Child, was in order that He might be able to sympathise with you and me in our troubles and our difficulties and our sorrows and our temptations. That is why He came in lowliness. That is why He came as a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. That is why He was poor. “In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.”

“Sons of God, in tribulation,  
Let your eyes the Saviour view.  
He’s the Rock of our salvation.  
He was tried and tempted too;  
All to succour  
Every tempted, burdened son.”

“For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.” We have it in chapter 4, on the throne of grace: “We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” O how the Lord Jesus suffered in the early days when Mary and Joseph must flee into the land of Egypt! How He suffered when Herod sought the young Child’s life to destroy it! We think especially of His temptation in the wilderness. There is a depth here none of us can ever fathom. “He suffered being tempted.” It was so bitter, so acute, so sharp. “He suffered being tempted.” “When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them.” There is not a step, dear child of God, where you have to tread, but your Saviour has trodden it before, that He might know, that He might understand, by solemn experience. What took place in the garden of Gethsemane, what took place on the cross at Calvary, we can never really know. I mean the deep sorrows, the awful sufferings, the bitter temptations, as He was harassed by Satan. “All to succour every tempted, burdened Son.”

O we see the purpose of the Lord’s coming. We see His wonderful love, and we see that wonderful tenderness, that wonderful sympathy, that now risen, exalted, for ever glorified, our great High Priest in heaven, He well remembers His sorrows, well remembers the garden and the cross. That loving, sympathising heart He still retains. He will never break the bruised reed, never quench the smoking flax. Who dare

say which is the greater, His loving, tender compassion or His divine, almighty power?

Well, beloved friends, this is the doctrine of the incarnation. This is the doctrine of His birth. This is why He came, that He might be that wonderful High Priest. And the two parts of it: the making atonement for sin, that we might be reconciled, and then that suffering that He might understand our suffering, that sorrow that He might understand our sorrow, that He might know, that He might understand, that He might sympathise. Then the application of it is this. With all your sin and all your need and all your sorrow and all your distresses and all your hard cases, it is to venture on Him, to tell Him everything, to open your heart, to lay it bare, to pour out your very soul, realising that He knows, He cares, He understands, He will hear, He will answer, He will deliver. “For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.”