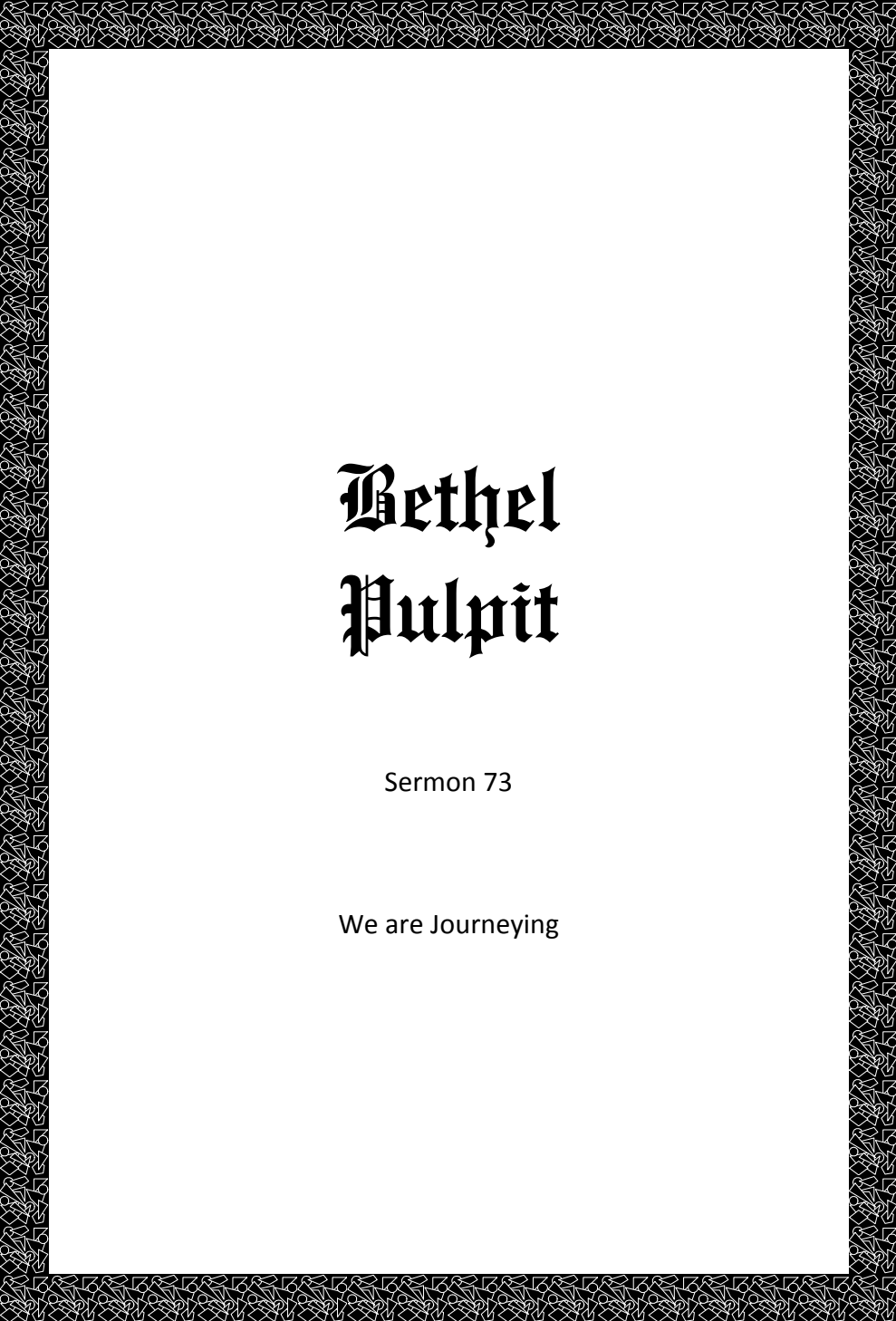




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 73

We are Journeying

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 30th June, 1991**

Text: *“And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel” (Numbers 10. 29).*

One of the most familiar comparisons we have is that of life to a journey. Again and again it appears, right through the Bible, our life, your life, my life, compared to a journey. In literature, whether it is religious or not, you have this thought over and over again. You have it in poetry, whether it is religious poetry or secular poetry. Especially you have it in dozens of our hymns: our life compared to a journey. Of course, in the Bible there is all the imagery of the desert, the wilderness, the tents, the way not clearly marked out, the need for provision, the need for water, the need for a good guide. It is one of the great themes of Scripture, our life compared to a journey.

The more you think of it, the more you realise what an apt comparison it is. This journey begins the moment you and I are born. Immediately, from the day of our birth, we are on a journey. So it can be said of every one of us here this morning, “We are journeying.” Some have got a long way in their journey. Some are only at the beginning of their journey. But if you take the smallest infant here this morning, and you take the most aged of the old people, it is true of us each. “We are journeying.” We cannot stand still. Every night when we go to bed, we are a day's march further on in our journey. With some, it is a long journey; with others it is a short journey. With some, the journey ends peaceably; with some the journey ends violently, suddenly. But with each of us, we are journeying.

All of us are journeying towards eternity. We are not here for ever. God has put each one of us here on this earth He has made for a little time, some longer, some shorter. He has put us here for a purpose. He has put us here for an end. He has set our feet in this journey, the journey of life. There cannot be any standing still. There cannot be any turning back. We

are continually going on towards the end of our journey. The older we get, the more we realise how short our time is, that we are only here for a little while, and then that great, that vast eternity.

Some of us can go back to the time when suddenly we realised this, that we were on a journey, that we were not here for ever. Some of us had to realise the vastness of that eternity before us. I go back to those days when I was about eighteen or nineteen, and eternity did become a tremendous sound. It seemed to cast a gloom, a shadow over everything. I remember when days came round which I used to enjoy, and O there seemed to be a gloom and a shadow over everything. Then those things I used to enjoy, the pleasures I used to love, did not satisfy any more. O this truth, “We are journeying”!

But then it comes to this, that when the journey ends, there are just two different destinations: there is heaven, there is hell. The one thing which really matters this morning is: if you and I are journeying, and most certainly we are, then *where* are we journeying? How many people here with a clear conscience before God can say, “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you”? That is, the Promised Land. That is, the heavenly Canaan.

By nature, when we set out, we are all journeying in the wrong direction, every one of us, whether religious or irreligious, whether we go to chapel or do not go to chapel. We are all journeying towards hell; and unless grace intervenes, unless we are blessed with repentance, unless the Holy Ghost stops us, unless we are completely turned round, unless there is a different direction to our life, the place to which we are journeying will be the place where to all eternity we will dwell. One point I have realised for many years: we shall never get to heaven unless we journey heavenwards. What about the dying thief? It was at the eleventh hour, almost at the twelfth hour, that his feet were turned round. But those last moments in his life, he was journeying in the right direction. He was journeying heavenwards. He was journeying towards “the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you.” And the Lord Jesus *did* say, I will give it you. He said, “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” The dying thief did turn round. He made great headway heavenwards in his dying moments. “Lord, remember me.”

“We are journeying.” I think the point on which more than anything else we need to be concerned is this: has there ever been a change in direction? That is really what conversion is. It is a change in your direction. It may come suddenly, abruptly, or it may come very gradually. But has there been a change in your direction? “We are journeying.” The godly people years ago used to like this (you do not hear it so much today):

“‘For ever with the Lord!’

Amen, so let it be!

Life from the dead is in that word,

’Tis immortality.

Here in the body pent,

Absent from Thee I roam,

But daily pitch my moving tent

A day’s march nearer home.”

Well, when we pitch our moving tent tonight, will it be a day’s march nearer heaven or a day’s march nearer hell?

Let us be clear, salvation is entirely of grace. Salvation is entirely through the infinite merits, the righteousness, the precious blood of the dear Redeemer. But with all those who are the Lord’s chosen, all those who are saved by grace, all those who are redeemed by precious blood, the time comes in their journey when they realise, “We are journeying.” And there is a change of direction. That is really what repentance is. That is what faith is. When you get home, read through Philippians 3. Paul there tells us of his journey. He was journeying in one direction. He thought it was the right direction. He thought he was going to heaven. Suddenly, the Lord showed him he was going the wrong way. He cut him down and turned his feet round completely to go the opposite way. And Paul gives us an account of it.

I am sure some of you have had this experience. You have been travelling, perhaps all alone, and you have not had anyone to “navigate” in the car. You suddenly realise you must be travelling in the wrong direction. Perhaps the sun is going down in the sky and you are going towards it, and you realise if you are travelling towards the setting sun, you must be travelling due west. You realise that is not the way you should be going. You have to stop, and look at the map, and retrace your steps. I believe those three things spiritually you find in repentance. You suddenly

have to stop, and look at your map, the holy Word of God, and then you have to retrace your steps. Perhaps you have to ask to make sure you are in the right way. “They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.”

“We are journeying.” Of course in the Old Testament, when you have this comparison of life to a journey, it is usually the tent and crossing the desert, crossing the wilderness. There is the hope you will come across some oasis, some supply of water. Travellers in the east in desert countries have again and again spoken of that strange phenomenon they meet with there, how often the burning sand on an especially hot day gives the impression of a pool of water. How many travellers have been heartened by it and have hurried on, hastened on! They have seen this water shimmering in the sun. When they have arrived there, they find it is only the burning sand. Our life is really like that. Girls and boys and young people as they grow up see all kinds of things as they journey on, and think it is wonderful. This will give me happiness, peace, contentment, joy, satisfaction. They hasten after it. When they get there, it is just a mirage. It is just burning sand. “These can never satisfy.”

“We are journeying” through this wilderness. It is a wonderful mercy if we can say, “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you.” Every time you have a birthday, this should be a reminder: “We are journeying.” You are another year further on in the journey. Every time the Sabbath comes, there should be this reminder: “We are journeying.” It is one Sabbath more, one Sabbath less. Every time the year comes to an end, we should think again: “We are journeying” – another year towards the end of our journey. Well, may the Holy Spirit in love and mercy write these three words upon our hearts this morning, each one of us: “WE ARE JOURNEYING.”

Then may there be this that follows; can I go on in the verse, “Unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you”? Here with Moses it was to Caanan, the Promised Land. God had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God had clearly promised, “I will give it you.” So on the strength of that promise, they were journeying there. 1 Corinthians 10 very clearly tells us we are to think of the journey of Israel through the wilderness in a spiritual sense. What has God said to all His people? This: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe

also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Heaven is the place of which the Lord has said to all His people, "I will give it you." You cannot deserve it. You cannot earn it. You cannot win it. But through free grace, through sovereign mercy, God says to all His people, "I will give it you." So although the journey through the wilderness is dangerous, it is safe. You have the Lord for your Guide. You lean on His almighty arm. You have His promise of divine supply. If your beginning is right, the way is sure. For,

"He'll lead them on fair Zion's road,
Though weary, weak, and faint;
For O! they ne'er shall lose their God,
Or God e'er lose a saint."

"We are journeying." But what evidence have you to say, "To that place of which the Lord said, I will give it you"? The evidence is that He has stopped you in your way, that He has showed you you are travelling in the wrong direction. He has brought you to pray with sorrow and real repentance. He has turned your feet Christwards, salvationwards, heavenwards.

"We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good." Moses spoke this word to Hobab. This is one of the difficult verses of the Old Testament because we read in Exodus that Moses' father-in-law was called Jethro, and in another place we read that he was called Reuel. Here we read of Hobab and of Raguel. It seems that Raguel was the same as Jethro, so Hobab would be the brother of Moses' wife Zipporah. This Hobab had been going along with them for some time. He had a family connection. He was a relation. He was going along with them so long as he did not get too far from his old home. Now the journey goes a bit further. There is going to be separation. Moses speaks so kindly to his brother-in-law. He says, "We are journeying." It is not going to be an easy journey. It is going to be difficult. "We are journeying." It is going to be through the wilderness. "We are journeying." There are going to be enemies, there is going to be fighting. But it is going to be "the place of

which the Lord has said, I will give it you.” We have God’s promise and God’s presence. “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good.”

Hobab said, “I will not go.” I wonder how many people are saying it in your heart this morning, if you are not saying it with your lips, as you hear of the pilgrimage way which leads to heaven, the heavenly Caanan. You have the encouragement from your friends and loved ones, but in your heart of hearts you say, “I will not go.” So long as it did not mean going too far from his home, any separation from his old haunts, his old ways, Hobab was content to go with the people of God. There was a mixed multitude which came up from Egypt, and they plagued Moses the whole way. That mixed multitude has never left the church of God. They are not true Israelites. Either they want the leeks and the garlic and the melons and the cucumbers of Egypt, or they are like Hobab: they will go so far, but they do not want to leave their home and their haunts. “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel. And he said unto him, I will not go: but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.” There are some who go so far with the people of God. They are quite happy for the sake of peace to come to the Sunday services, but if anyone says on the prayer meeting evening, “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel,” they say, “I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.” That is the mark that you are never a true Israelite and you are not on your way to the land of promise.

“We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you.” We would speak lovingly and affectionately to all our young people here this morning. We do not promise them an easy way. The way is rough. It means leaving the world. It means giving up your idols. It means giving up your sinful pleasures. You may be despised by the world. But it will be heaven at last. Or there is the other way. You have your lusts, your pleasures, your sins, your desires. You have a good time and enjoy yourself, and then you have the eternal reckoning. Still this call rings down the years, “Come thou with us.” We have been where you are. You have never been where we are. We know the difference. We can make the comparison.

“And, though the world may think it strange,
We would not with the world exchange.”

We would rather have the lot of the people of God. We would rather have the wilderness with all its sorrows, with all its grief, than all this world can call good and great. We can say, “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” The world will never do you any good. Sin will never do you any good. Satan will never do you any good. We know the difference. We once thought we knew true peace, true happiness in the world. But the Lord stirred up our nest. He brought us forth, He put us in this pilgrim way, this way of separation. “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” We had this burnt in our hearts, and we said it, and though we have been tried on it over the years, we trust we can still say it:

“Not health, nor wealth, nor sounding fame,
Nor earth’s deceitful, empty name,
With all its pomp and all its glare,
Can with a precious Christ compare.”

We know we have something better than the world can ever give. We also know that the best is still to come. Bunyan said, “The milk and honey are beyond the wilderness.”

“We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” There are some of our young people, through grace, blessed with repentance; they have had to leave the world, they have had to separate. They have had to give up their former pleasures and sins. Are they sorry they have done this? Why, they are the happiest ones in the chapel. They possess something the world can never give. They know that peace the world can never give, never take away. They possess that true happiness only to be found in the Lord Jesus. It is not the world that is happy. It is not the world’s pleasures that can give joy and peace. “We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good.” We have no desire to come with you and give up our gospel privileges and go back to the world with its idols and lusts and pleasures.

“Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” I think most of you realise that over the years, whenever I receive a person into church membership, I always read

this verse at the beginning. I have never followed any tradition in this. I go back to my early days in preaching, the first time I ever had to receive anyone into church membership, and as I prayed about it, this rested on my spirit. So I repeat it every time. “We are journeying” – the church here – “we are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us and we will do thee good.” Beloved church members, may we seek grace to walk it out. It is a terrible thing if we do harm to new members. We say to them, “Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” So this morning, to all those who are without, who have been born again of the Holy Spirit, whose hearts have been touched by the love of Christ, who have been brought as true believers on the Son of God, those who can rightly answer the question, “What think ye of Christ?” those to whom the Lord Jesus has been made truly precious, we can still say this with a loving, honest heart: “We are journeying” – still journeying; we have not yet attained – “we are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.”

Well, beloved friends, He *has* spoken good concerning Israel, hasn't He? The Lord has said such blessed things about His people, His poor, sinful, unworthy people. He has chosen them for Himself, for His peculiar treasure. He has never spoken any evil concerning them. Have you ever thought of that? He hates their sins, but they are put away in the blood of Christ; and when they sin against Him, and grieve Him, He chastises them; but He never speaks evil concerning them. “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?”

May we each see what a blessed people God's people are and some of those blessed things He has said concerning them. The Lord has said concerning Israel, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” “The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” The Lord has spoken this concerning Israel, despite all her sin, and ruin, and guilt: “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” “The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” He spoke good to them, good concerning them when He was here on earth, concerning their sin and shame and weariness. He said, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.” When He hung bleeding, dying on

the cross, didn't He speak good concerning Israel? "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

"Hark! how He prays, (the charming sound
Dwells on His dying lips,) 'Forgive!'
And every groan and gaping wound
Cries, 'Father, let the rebels live!'"

"The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." What about before He bowed His head and died, when He cried with a loud voice, "It is finished" – the one sacrifice for sin, the opening of the fountain in His precious blood, divine justice satisfied, sin forgiven, the way opened up to heaven itself? "It is finished." "The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." He said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He said, "My presence shall go with thee," right through the pilgrimage, right through the wilderness, "and I will give thee rest." He has spoken good concerning Israel, despite all their sin, all their guilt. He never beheld iniquity in Jacob or perverseness in Israel as He viewed them eternally complete in Christ.

"The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." He has spoken good concerning the land of promise to which He brings them. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." "The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory."

"The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Beloved friends, may you this morning view something of the glory and everlasting blessedness of the people of God in Christ, now and to all eternity. "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."