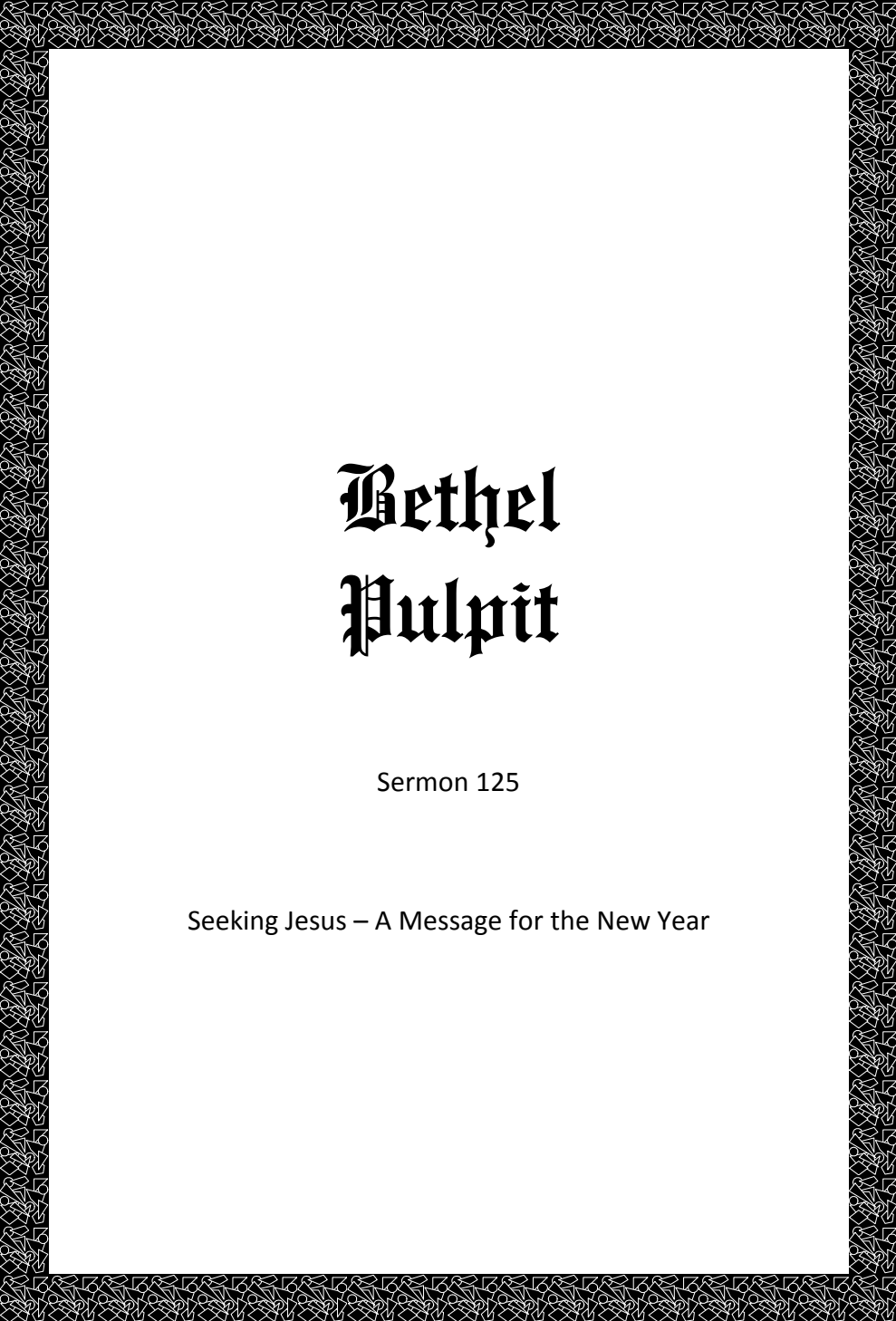




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 125

Seeking Jesus – A Message for the New Year

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 1st January, 1995**

Text: *"Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" (Song of Solomon 3. 3.)*

This is the opening day of the new year and we are favoured that this year new year's day comes on the Lord's day. I always feel the new year is a very solemn time. It is really a reminder of how quickly time is passing away, a reminder of how our lives are hastening on. We think of the past year and we think of the word of Moses to Israel: "Ye shall henceforth return no more that way." The last year with its joys and sorrows, its mercies and its sins, drops back like a drop of the ocean into that eternity from which it came. So this is a time to stand still and to ponder the path of our feet, and to consider our ways, and especially the vital point: am I ready for eternity?

I realise it was thirty years ago this morning I preached that sermon which has been referred to on so many occasions: "I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron." Well, there have been many crooked places since that day. Yet as we look back, we see the Lord has made those crooked places straight one by one, and we have a sweet hope, because He is faithful, because He is unchanging, that He will still do that during this year.

Perhaps some of you feel that the text is not altogether a suitable word for new year's day. Well, the burden on my spirit really is this: whatever things are wrong in the nation, whatever things are wrong in the church of God, whatever things are wrong in our denomination, whatever things are wrong at Bethel, whatever things are wrong in our families, it all begins personally. It is our souls and God. It is how we stand. It is what our relationship is. Now this is my burden this morning. And I do want to say to you children and young people, the vital, all-important thing is a personal relationship with the Saviour. We are plagued with formality. We come and we go and we go and we come, and we meet and we go home and we sing hymns and listen to preaching, yet "one thing is needful." May it be well engraven on our hearts. It is a solemn thing to go

all through your life and never possess the one thing needful. O it is to have a personal relationship through faith in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If that is lacking, then everything is lacking.

So along with this chapter (Song of Solomon chapter 3) this morning I read Philippians chapter 3. “That I may know Him.” This is the vital point as we come to another year. Am I blessed with that vital, personal, saving knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? “That I may know Him” – not just know of Him; not just know about Him. “That I may know *Him*, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.” I wonder how many of us have ever been brought here: “I know whom I have believed.” Many things I do not know; many things I wish I did know; but “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” Now beloved friends, it is this vital, personal relationship with Christ, and either we have it or we do not have it.

But there is something else, and on my spirit there are these two things which seem to be blended together, though separate and distinct. One is seeking Christ and finding Him and for the first time entering into this vital, personal relationship with Him, and the other concerns those of us who have professed the name of Christ for many years. What of our state spiritually? What of love to the Saviour? What of nearness to Him? What of a soft heart? What of repentance? What of tenderness in His fear? It is a mercy if we are kept from backsliding outwardly, but there is a lot of inward backsliding. It is a wonderful thing if when the new year comes we feel something like this hovering about our spirit:

“Weary of wandering from the Lord,
And now made willing to return,
I hear, and bow me to the rod;
For now, not without hope, I mourn;
There is an Advocate above,
A Friend before the throne of love.

“O Jesus! full of truth and grace,
More full of grace than I of sin.”

It is these real, vital things. So as we come to the subject this morning, although I will not make this strict distinction as we go along, perhaps it will be resting upon your minds, the two cases: those who are seeking the Saviour for the first time; and those who long have known Him and professed His name, and now again feel how far off you are and how inwardly you have backslidden and how poor your spiritual life is, seeking His face again.

So here we have a sinner seeking the Saviour. O I do hope there are many here and this describes you: a sinner seeking the Saviour, seeking the Saviour because you are a sinner, seeking the Saviour because you want Him to save you, to forgive you, to wash away your sins in His precious blood, to bless you, to reveal His love to you, to make you right, to prepare you for heaven. A sinner seeking the Saviour. One thing is very clear in Scripture, that no sinner ever yet sought the Lord in vain.

Yet one point comes out very clearly here, that it is not something automatic. Many preach as if it is something automatic: you are concerned; you trust the Saviour; that is the end of it. Yet you have a sinner here seeking the Saviour but not finding Him at first. She did find Him, and every true, seeking soul will find the Saviour, but she did not find Him immediately, not at first. And that perhaps fits in with the burden and exercise of some of you. Another new year's day dawns and this is still your testimony: "I found Him not." In your heart of hearts you are not really satisfied. In your heart of hearts you have never really found what you are seeking. In your heart of hearts there is still that aching void which the world can never fill. The Lord Jesus has kindly said that they that seek shall find. The Holy Spirit never awakens a sinner, shows him his need, reveals the beauty and suitability of the Saviour, causes that sinner to go after the Saviour, and then dashes his hopes and disappoints him. The Lord does not leave any work unfinished. The Lord will never tantalise you.

"The soul that with sincere desires
Seeks after Jesus' love,
That soul the Holy Ghost inspires
With breathings from above."

The Lord never said to the seeking seed of Jacob, "Seek ye Me in vain."

Now here you have a seeking sinner. She wants the Saviour. She wants Christ, and she finds Him. But she does not find Him automatically. She does not find Him at first. “By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not” (verse 1). Here is this sinner with true desires after the Lord Jesus. She knows she cannot really be happy without Him. She knows she cannot really be satisfied without Him, and she is seeking Him. But she says, “On my bed I sought Him.” It is half-hearted work. There is not much holy zeal in it. “By night on my bed I sought Him... I sought Him, but I found Him not.” There is a seeking after Christ which is sincere and which is real, but it is only half-hearted. And that half-hearted seeking does not find Him because, though He has His loving eye upon that seeking soul, He withdraws Himself. “Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.”

“By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth.” It was a mercy that during the night she was awake and thinking of the Lord Jesus. Tell me, when you lie in bed at night, do you ever think about the Lord Jesus? Do you ever think about your soul, your sins, eternity to come? Do you ever pray? It is a mercy she had come so far; thousands have not. But this half-heartedness in the things of God! And it seems to be something which plagues the church of God today. I mean, generally there does not seem to be the same reality and the same urgency and the same holy zeal. I know what some of you are going to say: we cannot give it to ourselves. How sadly, solemnly true that is! But ever remember, dear friend, it is not your excuse; it is your condemnation. We cannot do these things ourselves, but it is not any excuse. It is because of our sin. It is our shame.

“By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not.” Now this proves the reality of her religion, because she does not give up and go to sleep. It is a sad thing if you have been seeking the Lord Jesus and then you give up and go to sleep. “I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth” (verse 2). Things are different now. Everything is alive. She is awake. She is no longer on her bed. There is this holy activity.

“I will rise now.” Well, it is new year’s day, when some people make their new year’s resolutions. This was her resolution. She said, “I

will rise now.” She made a resolution, and she kept it. And so did the prodigal son. He made just the same resolution. He said, “I will arise.” “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” It would be a wonderful thing if the Holy Spirit today worked some good, godly, gracious new year’s resolutions in one or two hearts. She made a resolution and she kept it, and the prodigal made a resolution and kept it. She made a resolution because she so badly wanted the Saviour, she could not find Him, and she was condemned for her sleepiness, her slothfulness. And the prodigal made his resolution because he realised he was in a far country, and there was bread enough and to spare in his father’s house, and he could not be satisfied with the husks the swine did eat.

“I will rise now.” Whenever we read this word *rise* (I do not know about you, but whenever I hear this word *rise* in Scripture), it takes me to an empty tomb and the first day of the week and the glories of the resurrection.

“Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell.”

It is the same power of His blessed resurrection which will enable you to rise from your sleepy, slothful condition and enable the poor prodigal to arise from amidst the husks that the swine did eat. O may we together today sweetly experience something of the power of the risen Saviour, the power of His resurrection. It is still the same now as it was nearly two thousand years ago when He rose from the dead. And it can be known; it can be experienced. “I will rise now.” There is a difference. Those of you who have been seeking the Lord and not finding Him, may you know the difference between a sleepy seeking after Him and this active, urgent seeking after Him. “I will rise now.” It would be a wonderful thing if we experienced the power of His resurrection amongst us today.

“I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.” You may say, What are we to understand by the city and the streets and the broad ways? I am not certain that we are really to understand anything. The whole point of this is a picture of an active soul, a soul going forth, a soul who will not

stop at anything, a soul with this holy determination to find the Saviour. But if you really do want to spiritualise it, I think you will find most of the godly divines have taken this city to be the true Jerusalem, the mother of us all, the church of God in her solemn assemblies.

“I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him.” Well, He is to be sought in prayer, in His holy Word, in the house of God, in the preaching of the gospel. These are places where He has promised that He dwells, promised that He may be found. O may there be those living souls going forth after Christ, who want Him, who cannot do without Him. What is it this sinner wants in Christ, and what is it you want in Christ? “Well,” you say, “I feel my need of Him. I am sinful and lost. I cannot prepare myself for heaven. I do want His blessing, His smile. Life is empty without Him. True happiness can only be found in Him. I have that aching void. Outward things cannot satisfy me.” I wonder if there is one person here and you look back to Christmas Day and last Monday and this week, and meeting with your family, and your presents and all these things, but there is something within you which says, “These can never satisfy; give me Christ, or else I die.” But what is it you see in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, truly God, truly Man, the glorious Mediator, the One who made atonement for sin, the One who has a glorious righteousness He puts on His people, the One who now in heaven lives and reigns and intercedes? It is a wonderful thing if this morning you have that one point: you see a little sweet attraction in Christ; if you can say, “The desire of our soul is to Thy name, and to the remembrance of Thee.”

“I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.” There is such a difference between the slumbering, sleeping condition of the first verse and this active condition of the second verse, but her testimony is the same: “But I found Him not.” You see, it would not be a good thing if we go on carelessly, sleepily, indifferently, and then we feel one day there is something missing and we begin to seek the Saviour – it would not be a good thing if we found Him straight away. He is going to be glorified in our salvation. He is not just going to be there ready for any whim and fancy of ours: when we want Him we have Him and when we want to we

forget Him. Still she says, “I found Him not.” She did find Him, but not at first.

“I sought Him, but I found Him not.” There was a godly Scottish preacher of the last century who made a rather striking remark on this word. He said it would be a wonderful mercy if we heard more and yet more people crying out, “I found Him not.” At first that might sound strange, but his point was this: there are people in churches and chapels who have not found Christ, but they do not seem to realise it, neither are they concerned about it. Have you these two points (you say, These are negative marks of grace. Well, they might be), but have you these two points: you know you have not found Him, and secondly you are solemnly concerned about it, and cannot find any true peace or resting place until you find Him? You come to chapel and hear the preaching. Do you find Him, or when you go home, is it this: “But I found Him not”? Do you realise it and confess it and mourn over it? Now she did here. She knew it, she realised it, and she was solemnly burdened about it. “I found Him not.” If we are really honest, there are many times when we come to the house of God, we “go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways” we seek Him, and when the Sabbath evening comes it is this: “But I found Him not.” Have you been brought to realise it and make it your confession and are you solemnly concerned about it? These are vital things, this personal relationship with the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is being drawn towards Him. It is being near to Him, finding Him.

“The watchmen that go about the city found me” (verse 3). These watchmen are gospel preachers. “They watch for your souls, as they that must give account.” “The watchmen that go about the city found *me*.” She could not find the Saviour, but the watchmen found her. I believe some of you know something of that experience. You have not got what you want; you are not fully satisfied; you have not found the Saviour; but the preaching finds you. Sometimes it finds you out. Sometimes it shows you where you are. Sometimes it pricks your conscience. Sometimes it rebukes you. Sometimes it tells you you are wrong. Sometimes it encourages you. Sometimes it lifts you up. “The watchmen that go about the city found me.” Those are profitable hearing times when the word finds you. They will not always be your most pleasant times, but these are

profitable times when the preached Word finds you, when it finds you out, when it speaks to you personally. “*Me*,” she says.

“The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” This is the first time we have heard her speak, and it is a question she asks, and there is a lot in this question. “Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” It is very similar to Job. “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!” “Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” She wants to see Him herself; she wants to find Him. I have thought of this, and may it be the experience of many of you here during this year: “His track I see, and I’ll pursue the narrow way, till Him I view.” You cannot be satisfied until you find the Saviour. You cannot be satisfied until you have a little glimpse of Him by faith.

“Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” Tell me, is that how you come to chapel? Is that how you come to hear? Is that the spirit of your concern, your desire? “Saw ye *Him* whom my soul loveth?” In other words, I want to see Him too. I want to find Him. It is just the same exercise, the same burden, as those Greeks who came to Philip saying, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” “Saw ye Him?”

“While walking on the gospel way,
I would see Jesus every day,
And see in all His grace;
See Him my Prophet, Priest, and King;
See Him by faith, and praises sing;
Then see Him face to face.”

“We would see Jesus.” “Saw ye Him?” Sometimes it is a personal enquiry to the watchmen, perhaps speaking to them or perhaps a letter. We do not seem to have so many of these as in former days. O those epistles of faith we used to know in former years, and the substance was this: “Saw ye Him?”

“The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye Him?” Let me make the point I have made so often to you on this and similar verses: she does not mention His name. She does not say, Have you seen the King? or, have you seen the Bridegroom? Have you seen the Saviour? She just says *Him*. Surely the watchmen know what she

means. Of course they do. Why, she does not feel she even needs to mention His name – as if everyone must know. There is only one *Him*. There is only one whom her soul is after. *Him*. There will be times in your life like that. It is what the hymnwriter means when he talks of being “wholly taken up with Thee.” *Him*. Job does not mention His name. “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!” Mary Magdalene did not mention His name. “Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him.” *Him*. Only one Him. “Saw ye *Him* whom my soul loveth?” “In *Him* my treasure’s all contained; by *Him* my feeble soul’s sustained.” “Saw ye Him?”

“It was but a little that I passed from them” (verse 4). She could not just be satisfied with the preaching or the preacher. She had to go further than that; she had to go beyond that. It was more than just chapel and singing and preaching. “It was but a little that I passed from them.” But these true watchmen must have been keeping close to the Saviour, because He was not far from the watchmen. This is where some of us today feel to come so far short: He is not as near to us watchmen today as He was to our godly forefathers. But “it was but a little that I passed from them.” She did not just want preaching; she wanted Christ. “It was but a little that I passed from them.” They pointed out the place where He was to be found. May the gospel ministry do that with you. May it first of all find you, and then may it lead you to the Saviour, by the power of the Holy Spirit. “Point out the place where grace abounds; direct us to the bleeding wounds of our incarnate God.” “It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him whom my soul loveth.” That was her testimony; it was the testimony of the shepherds; it was the testimony of Philip. “We have found Him, of whom Moses ... and the prophets, did write.” It will be your testimony if you are this seeking sinner of Solomon’s Song chapter 3. The end of a thing is better than the beginning. “Surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off.”

O, she says, “I found Him” and “I held Him.” Satan will try to snatch Him away from you. You need strength to hold Him when you have found Him. But she says, “I held Him, and would not let Him go, until I had brought Him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me” – the gospel church. “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare” how I sought Him, how I found Him. “I will

declare what He hath done for my soul.” And when you find Him, beloved, go and do thou likewise. Hold Him, and do not let Him go until you have brought Him into your mother’s house, into the chamber of her that conceived you.