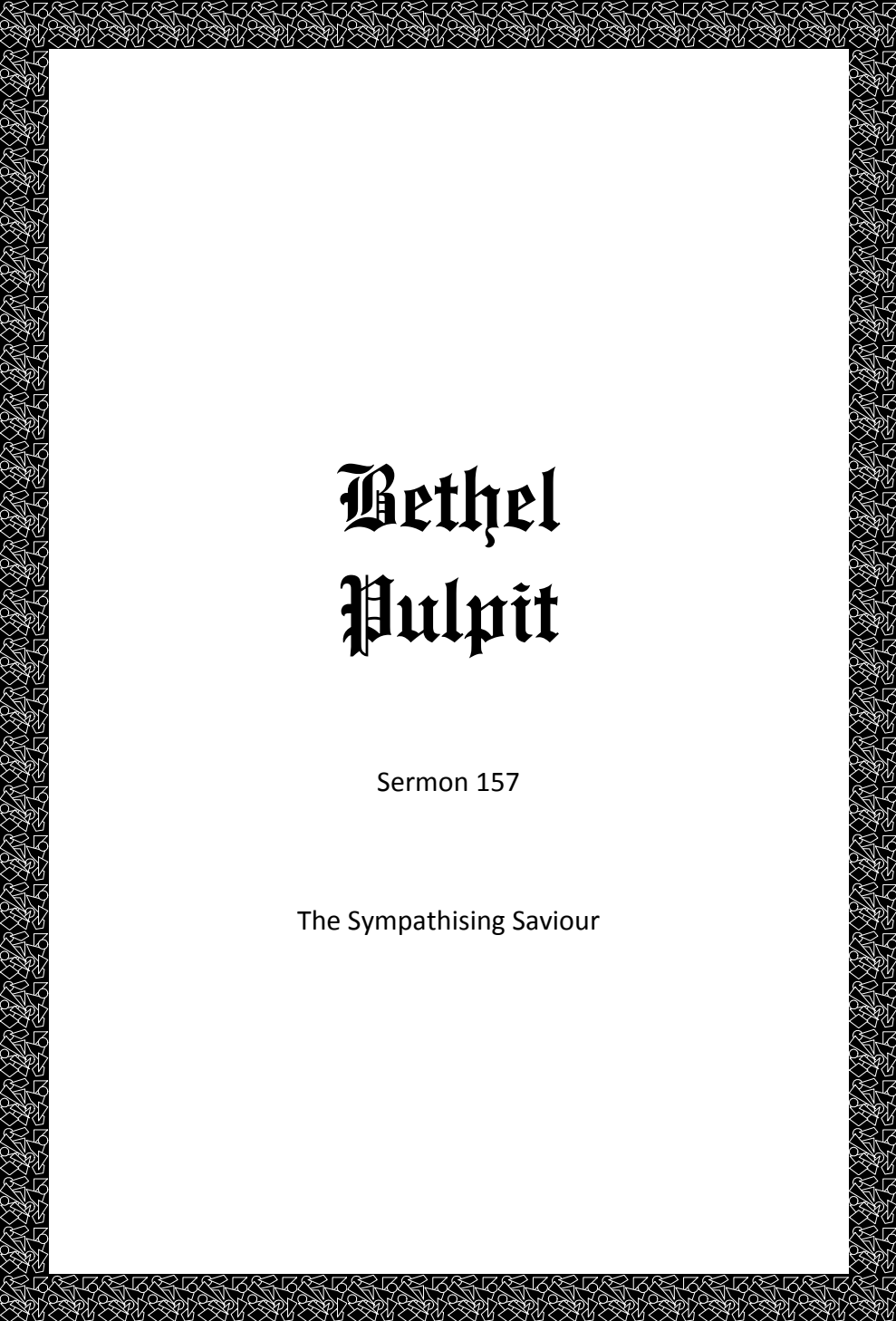




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 157

The Sympathising Saviour

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 5th July, 1998**

Text: “*Jesus wept*” (*John 11. 35*).

Nowhere is the mystery of the Lord's sovereignty more clearly seen than in this chapter. “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” And yet, “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.” Sickness is not a mark of the Lord's disfavour, neither is trouble a mark of the Lord's disfavour. For, “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.” It is a mark of the Lord's disfavour if here is a person going in the way of sin and death and that one never meets with any check, never meets with any sorrow, if that one's way is never hedged up with thorns.

O but the mystery of the Lord's sovereignty! They tell Him, “Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick.” And what does the Lord Jesus do? Nothing. “When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place.” In other words, He waited until Lazarus was dead. That is the mystery of divine sovereignty. “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.” He gives no account of His matters. And then at last that solemn revelation to His disciples. “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” You say, Is there any beam of comfort? Is there any beam of divine light? Is there any bow that can still be discerned in the cloud? “Nevertheless let us go unto him.” And beloved friends, you can never get beyond the Lord's *nevertheless*, and you can never sink beneath it, however sad, however solemn. “Nevertheless let us go unto him.”

Then we have these interesting transactions with Martha first and then with Mary, when the Lord Jesus gives that glorious revelation which has been read time and time again at the funeral of a believer: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.” That was Martha. And then Mary. “The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” You find Mary in that posture, the most blessed posture in which a sinner can ever be found, at the feet of Jesus. We read three times in Scripture of dear Mary of Bethany and each time, on each occasion,

whether in joy or sorrow, she was found at Jesus' feet. And then we find the Lord Jesus going to the grave of Lazarus. "When Jesus therefore saw her" – that is Mary – "weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." That loving, tender, sympathising heart. "Are the consolations of God small?"

"I feel at My heart all thy sighs and thy groans,
For thou art most near Me, My flesh and My bones;
In all thy distresses thy Head feels the pain;
Yet all are most needful; not one is in vain."

"When Jesus therefore saw her weeping ... He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." And that beautiful word (O that we might enter into it by faith this morning): "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

Jesus said, "Where have ye laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see." And then this amazing verse: "Jesus wept." He wept at a grave. I believe I have known something of this experience, mingling my tears with the Saviour's tears. You are on precious ground there. Perhaps at an open grave; perhaps after the loss of one you have loved; perhaps in deep sorrow. But to remember that Jesus wept and to be sweetly enabled by faith to mingle your tears with His. That is a precious experience. That will sanctify your sorrow.

Then of course we see that it was not a helpless sympathy, an impotent sympathy. We see the God shine gracious through the Man. We see a miracle. "Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth." Whether right or not, some of the old preachers used to say that if the Lord Jesus had not said, "*Lazarus*," if He had just said, "Come forth," then *all* the graves would have given up their dead, as they will at that solemn, last day. But, "Lazarus, come forth," and the impossible takes place, a miracle takes place. "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."

Well, this beautiful word, this solemn word. The Lord Jesus, the Creator of heaven and earth, He who is true, almighty God, here He weeps in loving sympathy with His people. You see the wonder of it, the

impossibility of it. But you see here the real, sacred humanity of the Lord Jesus, He who was a real Man though true, almighty God, possessed of a true, human body and a reasonable, human soul. God cannot weep. A body without a soul cannot weep. But Jesus wept. Of course, this is the shortest verse in the whole of Scripture, yet there is so much in it that eternity itself could never expend it all, that “Jesus wept.” When we think of who He is, His glorious Person, His greatness, His majesty, and yet as we think of His infinite condescension that He should weep in sympathy with His poor, unworthy people!

O this word, “Jesus wept.” It brings back one or two memories for me. When I was only about twenty-three, when I was away from home for a time, I had to take the service on the Lord’s day morning. I said, “I will try to read a sermon.” They said, “That is no good at all. You will have to speak.” I said, “If I try to speak, it will have to be from the table.” They said, “That is not possible. You will have to go in the pulpit.” I did not sleep much that night. On the Lord’s day morning, I tried to speak for about half an hour, and it was one of those seasons in your life you remember – when your heart was made soft and when the Lord Jesus Himself drew near and went with you.

“Jesus wept.” Well, beloved friends, we are on sacred ground here. “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” The way it rests on my spirit to bring before you this morning is in two ways. First of all, the whole of this solemn, sacred scene, the suffering Saviour. “Jesus wept.” And then secondly, the purpose of it, some of those reasons why the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ did weep. “Jesus wept.” “A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” We have this word recorded here, that “Jesus wept.” I think I am right in saying there is only one other place where it is actually recorded that Jesus wept, and that is that most mysterious occasion when He wept over Jerusalem. Now I cannot explain that. Here is the almighty God and He looks on this sinful city that rejected Him, and He weeps over Jerusalem. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” So really there is just this occasion and that when it is actually recorded that the Lord Jesus wept. But the whole of His sacred life from Bethlehem to Calvary was a life of sorrow. “He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid

as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

The sorrows of the Lord Jesus began early when there was no room for Him in the inn. “Despised and rejected of men.” His sorrows continued when in a special way He was made under the law and His blood was shed in His circumcision. We would not be fanciful, but we think of His holy childhood in this black, dark, sinful, ungodly world. You know what it is when you are found in the company of the ungodly – their foul language, their blasphemy, how it grieves your spirit. Well, what of Him who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens”? “A Man of sorrows.” “Jesus wept.” We think of the temptations. “He suffered being tempted.” The Captain of our salvation must be made perfect through suffering. We think of the cruel accusations of the ungodly, the scribes and the Pharisees. We think of how “every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.” We think of that word, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.” And we think of those cold mountains and the midnight air that witnessed the fervour of His prayer.

“Jesus wept.” “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” But what was the reason for it? Why did Jesus weep? Well, sin is the cause of sorrow. Had there been no sin, there had never been any sorrow. But here is the holy One, the pure, holy, spotless, sacred Lamb of God, but He is identified with sinners. He has become Surety for them. He has undertaken to be their Saviour. And because He has undertaken to bear their sins, He also must bear their sorrows. He came with a covenant engagement. He came with His people’s unworthy names upon His heart, because of His identification with them, His oneness and everlasting union with them. This is why He, the holy One, must be a Man of sorrows, though it is only sin which causes sorrow.

“Jesus wept.” In all its fulness, we see this in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the judgment hall and at Calvary. O that solemn, awful garden scene when the Lord Jesus sweat as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground! “None can penetrate through thee, doleful, dark Gethsemane.” The cause of the Lord’s awful anguish and suffering was when that bitter cup was presented to Him and He saw its awfulness,

all the awful things in that cup, and His holy soul shrank from it. “Nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be done.” Have you ever seen what was in that cup? Have you ever thought of the bitterness of it? Have you ever seen your sins in that cup? Have you ever seen your soul’s salvation in that cup? Gethsemane is the place where Jesus wept for poor, lost, ruined, unworthy sinners.

“There my God bore all my guilt;
This through grace can be believed;
But the horrors which He felt,
Are too vast to be conceived.
None can penetrate through thee,
Doleful, dark Gethsemane.”

“Jesus wept.” And then the judgment hall. “Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the Man!” “Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” “Jesus wept.” The cruel mocking and scourging and scoffing and spitting. O but that wonderful word, “Behold the Man!” Behold Him in all His sorrows.

“Ye that pass by, behold the Man!
The Man of griefs condemned for you;
The Lamb of God for sinners slain,
Weeping to Calvary pursue.”

“Jesus wept.” “A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” And then to see the deepest of all sorrows, the cross of Christ, the hiding of His Father’s face, the sins of the whole church of God laid upon Him, mountains of almighty wrath, the wrath of His Father against the sins of His people lying heavy upon His soul. It is no wonder we have that agonising cry, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger.” “Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.” O the sorrows of the Lord Jesus, those seven words from the cross, till at length that triumphant cry, “It is finished,” and He bowed His head, His sufferings for ever ended, and then His sacred burial and resurrection

and ascension into heaven. But you look by faith at the whole of the sacred life of the Saviour from Bethlehem to Calvary, and you see this across it all: "Jesus wept." "A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

But then to come to the other part of the subject. Why was it that Jesus wept? Why was it that He was a Man of sorrows? Why was it that the eternal Son of God should be willing to stoop so low, to endure such agonies, to know such ignominy and shame? What is the reason? What is the cause for this? Why is it that the Innocent should suffer such sorrow, suffer such grief? Dear child of God, do you know the answer? Jesus wept so that you might not weep eternally in hell. That is why Jesus wept. We believe that there is a hell and we believe that in that hell to all eternity there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And we believe that for His dear people the Lord Jesus wept in order that they should not weep eternally. "Hell was our just desert, and He that hell endured." O you see Him as a Substitute, a glorious Substitute. It is He instead of me. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." It is to "behold that scene of matchless grace, 'tis Jesus *in* the sinner's place." "Christ must needs have suffered." "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" There was a reason for His sufferings. They were sin-atonement sufferings even unto death. They were by divine, eternal, covenant appointment. It was because

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

"Jesus wept," so that His people might not weep. "Jesus wept," that His people might eternally rejoice. Have you ever viewed this by faith, that all the salvation, and all the bliss and all the blessedness and all the happiness and all the joy that all the people of God will ever know to all eternity comes through the sorrows of Christ? This should endear the Saviour to us. "What think ye of Christ?" What think ye of this suffering Saviour? What think ye of His willingness to die? What think ye of His willingness to endure such sorrow? And what think ye of these for whom He did suffer, for whom He did weep, for whom He did die, the unworthy,

the guilty, the sinful, the rebels? No hope, no salvation, no heaven apart from the sufferings and death of Christ, and no joy, no joy now, no joy at last for a guilty sinner apart from the bitter sorrows of God's dear, incarnate Son. This should endear the Saviour to us. "What think ye of Christ?" "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious" – in this: that Jesus wept; and in this: that He willingly suffered and bled and died. We see His matchless love to His people. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." This is where you begin to have a little, sacred, heavenly comprehension of the love of Christ in His bitter sorrows even unto death. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." Well, there is the height of Christ's love and the length and the breadth of it, but here in this solemn, sacred word, "Jesus wept," you see the *depth* of the Saviour's love. O how deep He stooped and how deep He sank when

"The waves of swelling grief
Did o'er His bosom roll,
And mountains of almighty wrath,
Lay heavy on His soul."

Yet to see the wonder of it, the triumph of it, the glory of it, a fountain opened for sin, a way made to heaven, sin for ever put away in the atonement. You ask, Why did Jesus weep? You ask, Why should this innocent Sufferer endure such horrors, such agony, such shame? You ask, Why is it that a righteous God should permit these things? And then in the gospel to see the mysterious, the glorious answer: He died that His people might live. He suffered that salvation might be theirs. He drank that bitter cup that they might have a cup of blessing full and free and running over. He wept those bitter tears that they should not have to weep to all eternity. "O what wonders love has done!"

"Jesus wept." "A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Now beloved friends, there is another reason. Why did Jesus weep? That He might be able to sympathise with His people in their deep sorrows. That is why Jesus wept. "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." That is one of the most mysterious verses in all

Scripture, how it was possible for the Lord Jesus to be tempted in all points like His people, yet without sin. It is something we can never understand, we can never comprehend. I was once talking to Mr. Green of Gower Street about this, and he said he thought the nearest we can get is this: those mysterious transactions in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross at Calvary. O but the sympathy, the understanding, the compassion of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! He understands. He knows. He cares.

“That human heart He still retains,
Though throned in highest bliss;
And feels each tempted member’s pains;
For our affliction’s His.”

O the wonderful, tender sympathy and loving compassion of this great High Priest! “Touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” “A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.”

For many years now I have felt the compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ is a most sacred subject. I remember once a man in prayer suddenly saying, “Lord, we thank Thee for Thy compassion.” I thought, “Lord Jesus, we do!” Whatever would we do without it? “Though He *cause grief*” – that is the mystery of it. Why does He cause grief? “Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.” That is why Jesus wept, that He might weep with His people, that He might have that loving, sympathising heart (He still has it in heaven this morning), that He might understand.

When the Lord Jesus says, “Weep not,” it is the word of One who Himself knows what it is to weep. I think of how the Lord Jesus said, “Weep not,” to the widow of Nain, and how the Lord Jesus said, “Weep not,” to Jairus. And then that wonderful word in the Book of the Revelation when the Lord Jesus appeared in heaven in glory, freshly risen, ascended from the dead. “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals?” And John said, “I wept much.” The book of God’s providence, the book of God’s decrees, the book of God’s purposes. John says, “I wept much.” “Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals.” And all heaven rejoices as they see the book in the hands of Christ. That means all the things in your life, the things that happen to you, the

things that take place, the things that have fallen out to you, they have not come by chance or accident. They have not sprung out of the dust. They have sprung out of the hands of Him, the Lamb once slain, of Him who once wept at Lazarus' grave, of Him who still has that loving, sympathising heart. Nothing can ever take place for good or evil apart from His divine permission. But what a wonderful thing that the book is in the hands of this loving, sympathising Christ! It is not in the hands of Satan. It is not in the hands of wicked men. It is not in the hands of blind fate or chance. It is not in our hands. It is in the hands of this compassionate Saviour. "Weep not: behold the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed."

"Jesus wept." The One who says, "Weep not," is the One who knows what tears are, who knows the bitterness of tears. We think of the Lord Jesus on the resurrection morning. There is a broken-hearted woman, Mary Magdalene, in her sorrow. "Woman, why weepest thou?" It has struck me, you know, that twice in the Word of God there was a broken-hearted, sorrowful woman and the question was put, "Why weepest thou?" Or in other words, "Weep not." One was Hannah; the other was Mary Magdalene. When the word was spoken to Hannah, it did not do a scrap of good. It was spoken by her dear, loving, sympathising husband. He looked on her and said, "Hannah, why weepest thou?" It did not do a scrap of good. He could not help. He could not bear her burden. He could not answer her prayers. He could not relieve her cares. With Mary Magdalene, it was the Son of God freshly risen from the dead who says, "Woman, why weepest thou?" O the difference between that word spoken by Elkanah and the word spoken by Jesus, spoken by a sinful man and spoken by Him who is true, almighty God! Hannah's husband would have done anything to have assuaged her grief, but he was so helpless; but when the Lord Jesus spoke one word to Mary Magdalene, that assuaged her grief, that stilled her tears. "Mary." "Weep not." "Fear not: I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine."

"Jesus wept." He wept here. His tender compassion. But if one thing shines through John chapter 11, it is this: that if there is that tenderness and kindness and compassion in the loving heart of the Saviour, there is nothing helpless about it. It is divine compassion; it is almighty compassion. And He who weeps is the very same Person who a few moments later with a voice of omnipotence speaks the word and the deed

is done and the miracle performed. Do you believe it? Dare you say which was the greatest, His pity or His power? We think of our little hymn, “Look to Jesus, kind as strong – pity joined with power.” But it was this One who wept, this One who sympathised, this One whose heart overflowed with compassion, who was almighty to deal with the case, to perform the miracle, to grant the deliverance, to still Mary’s and Martha’s fears, to command that complete deliverance for them, to hear and answer their prayers, to do exceeding abundantly for them above all that they could ask or think. Do you believe it, this same Jesus this morning at God’s right hand, this great and glorious, loving High Priest? “His heart is made of tenderness; His bowels melt with love.” But still almighty to save, still almighty to deliver. Beloved friends, may you this morning have precious, clear, believing views of this dear Saviour who once wept and now for ever lives and reigns enthroned on high.