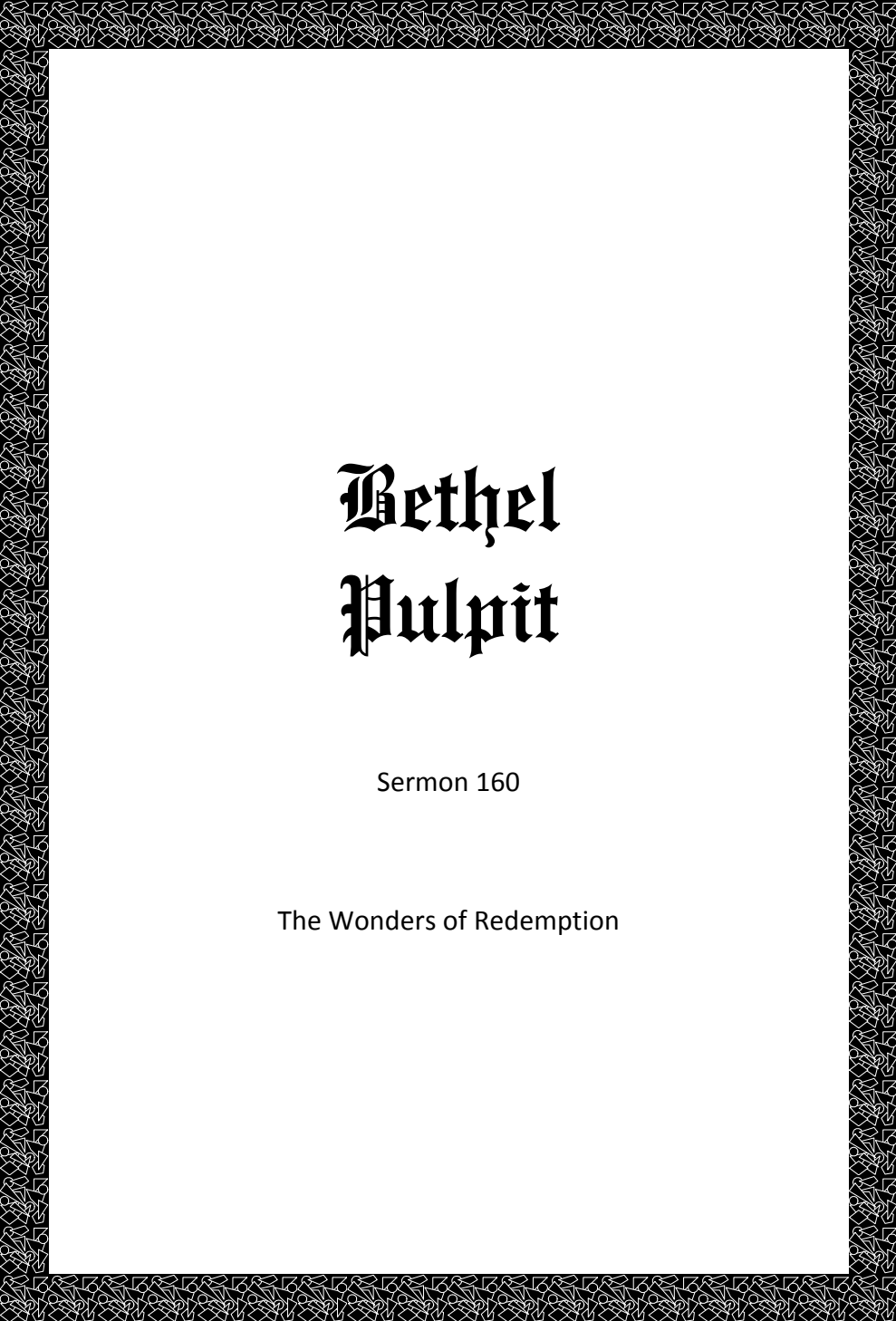




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 160

The Wonders of Redemption

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 21st December, 1997**

Text: *“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4. 4-7).*

We read this morning the beautiful, sacred account of the birth of the Lord Jesus – Bethlehem, Mary, Joseph, the stable, the manger, the angels, the shepherds, and then Simeon and Anna. The Lord Jesus born in Bethlehem. Beloved friends, there is the fact. Some of you may have read that most dreadful article in one of the *Daily Telegraph* papers yesterday which said it was impossible that the birth of Jesus could ever have taken place. There were striking headings, but if you read the article through, there was just no substance to it whatever. There was no real argument given. There were no real reasons brought forth. It is the infidelity of the present age that permeates the professing church of God. Beloved friends, this is a fact, a solid fact. “We *know* that the Son of God is come.” That is fact. Now hold it fast, that Christ was born in Bethlehem. So we read this morning of the glorious fact.

Now these verses I have read to you tell us what it was all about, what was the meaning of it, who this Babe was who was born at Bethlehem. Why did He come? What was the purpose of it all? So if you will, in Luke 2 you have the fact, and here you have the glorious doctrine. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son.” The Babe in the manger is the incarnate Son of God. He was the Son of God from all eternity, co-equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the Godhead. He did not become the Son by His incarnation, by His birth. These words are so simple (this is one of the great points that J. C. Philpot made so clearly and emphatically at the time of the Eternal Sonship controversy): “God sent forth His Son.” He was His Son before His Father sent Him. The great act of faith is to venture to the stable, the manger, to look on a helpless Babe and there to see true, almighty God.

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son.” This was the moment that had been fixed from all eternity, fixed by the counsels of God in the covenant of grace. “The fulness of the time.” This was the time that had been prophesied by the prophets, spoken of in the promises, foreshadowed in the ceremonial law. This was the moment the Old Testament church had longed for, sighed for. “When wilt Thou come?” “The fulness of the time.” And now the fulness of the time was come, and “God sent forth His Son.” This is the greatest of all gifts. “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.” And in it we see the matchless, wonderful, eternal love of the Father to sinners, that He should send His only-begotten Son, send Him to be a Saviour, send Him into this world of sin and sorrow, send Him that He might suffer, bleed and die. O may we see the love in it this morning, and the love of the Son in coming, for do not for one moment think there was anything inferior in the Son being sent and the Father sending Him. O you see that perfect, sacred union in the Godhead, the eternal love of the Father and the eternal love of the Son, His love to poor, lost, ruined sinners, His love which made Him so willing to come. God sent forth His own Son. You might go to Bethlehem, and you might see this written there in letters of gold: “God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.”

So here very simply, very clearly, we are told who this glorious Person is, and then we are told why He came. He came that He might be a Redeemer. “To redeem them that were under the law.” And that means one thing very simply. Why did He come? He came that He might die, because the price of redemption was the death of God’s dear, incarnate Son. Never forget that, that He was born that He might die. He came to Bethlehem that He might go to Calvary. O but this precious word, the *Redeemer!* It means that He came to shed His precious blood that sinners might be redeemed from sin and death and hell. “Not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.” The Lord Jesus came that He might be the dear Redeemer. And we love to hear of redemption’s work, don’t we? There was a price that had to be paid. There was a death that had to be died, and the only One who was capable, a real Man but true, almighty God. So you have the glorious Person and you have the glorious work, and you see love over it all. “Herein is love,

not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Bethlehem is the place of love. The stable, the manger, is the place of love. And O that today we might feel something of that love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and that we too might bow down and love and worship and adore.

“When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” Now we are under the law. We are under the law and accountable to it, because God as a holy, righteous God, God as our Creator, has a perfect right to give us a holy law and demand perfect obedience to it. I know the law was given in all its clarity on Mount Sinai, but really it was given to Adam in the Garden of Eden and given to Adam as the federal head of the human race. Do this, and thou shalt live; do it not and thou shalt surely die. Adam was made under the law, accountable to it, to obey it in thought and word and deed. Beloved friends, we are under the law, born under the law. The law shows no mercy. The law demands, “Pay me that which thou owest.” The law demands perfect obedience. O to see that holy, holy, holy law given by a holy, holy, holy God! We are under the law, accountable to it.

But then because each of us has broken it, we are under the condemnation of the law, because the law condemns all who break it in any precept, however small. So all of us are sinners. All of us are law-breakers. All of us are under the condemnation of God’s holy law; but not only accountable to it, not only under its condemnation, but under its curse. Of course, the apostle opens this up in Galatians 3. “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse,” and that is you; that is me. “For it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Now that curse rests upon each one of us. Disobedience to parents, not loving the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, failing to keep the Sabbath, theft, adultery, evil thoughts, unclean thoughts, covetousness, murder. “The thought of foolishness is sin.” He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all. We are under the condemnation and curse of God’s holy law, and that curse must rest on the wicked to all eternity in hell, that curse must rest on all those who are out of Christ to all eternity in hell.

There was only one way in which sinners could be saved, only one way in which sinners could be delivered from the curse of a broken law, only one way in which sinners could be delivered from a deserved hell, and that is that the Son of God should take the sinner's place and bear the curse and bear that curse away, which the blessed Redeemer did for His people.

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

That is why the Lord Jesus came to Bethlehem. “God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” Now we have His mysterious birth. He was “made of a woman.” “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” Man had nothing to do with it. He was “made of a woman,” born of a virgin, born completely free of actual sin or original sin, born impeccable. That means He was incapable of sinning. He had a human nature, a human body, a human soul, a real Man like ourselves, sin excepted. His sacred humanity never existed apart from His divine Person. He took our nature into union with His divine Person, yet without sin, never to be separated to all eternity.

“God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” He was the Lawgiver as God, but in His matchless condescension He was made under the law. At a few days old, His sufferings began in his circumcision, and there He was clearly identified as being “made under the law.” So again when Joseph and Mary went and presented Him in the temple, He was “made under the law,” both the ceremonial law and the moral law, and in His perfect, holy, spotless life He rendered a perfect obedience to the law of God. In the work of redemption (O the wonder of it!) He gave His people that glorious righteousness and in exchange took all their sins. That is redemption.

“God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” And to redeem them that were under the law there were two things necessary. First of all, He must obey that law, which He did, and that obedience is imputed to His people. He is still the Lord our righteousness in heaven. “As by one man's disobedience

many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous.” But then also, what about the curse of the law? Well, He must bear that curse. “The curse of the law He sustained.” We have that awful, solemn, sacred, beautiful verse in the preceding chapter: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” The ancient law pronounced a curse on anyone who was hanged on a tree. Of course, the Old Testament did not know anything of crucifixion. It was unknown. But there it stood: “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” And then there came that solemn day when the blessed Redeemer at Calvary hung on the tree. We sing of it: “’Twas Jesus, my Friend, when He hung on the tree, who opened the channel of mercy for me.” But when He hung on the tree, when He was made sin for His people, when He bore the curse (and “His dear heart was broken too, when He bore the curse for you”) that is how the people of God are “redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.”

“To redeem them that were under the law.” That perfect, holy, sacred life of obedience to the law, and that reckoned to His people’s account. He takes their sins, bears them, and is made a curse for His people. “Believing, we rejoice to see the curse remove.” “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” This is why the Lord Jesus came. This is why He was born. This is why He came to Bethlehem. “To redeem them that were under the law.” And when He cried, “It is finished,” redemption’s work was complete. The price was paid. His Father accepted it in heaven, and all His people were blessed with an interest in that eternal redemption through blood. So that is the answer to these two great questions: “Who is this Baby who lies helpless in the manger?” and, “Why has He come?”

“God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Beloved friends, the emphasis of these verses I have read is this: just how low the Lord Jesus sank, His humiliation, and the height to which He raises poor, lost, ruined sinners. That is the emphasis of it all. He became so poor, He endured such sorrows, He suffered such a cursed death, that His people might be redeemed from sin and death and hell. But more than that: “that we might receive the adoption of sons”; that these

poor, lost, ruined, guilty, hell-deserving sinners for whom He died might be adopted into the family of God. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” I have often said it over the years, that in the days when criminals were executed, put to death, the king or the queen, the reigning sovereign, had the right of a royal pardon. Sometimes there was a criminal and it was the very day of his execution, and a royal pardon was sent, and the wonder, the amazement of it! But that poor, pardoned criminal was not taken to the palace, was not made a prince. He was not adopted into the royal family. This is the emphasis here: that the eternal Son of God stooped so low, to such depths, not just that His people might be saved, delivered from hell, but that they might be made the children of God; that the Lord Jesus stooped so low that they might be raised so high. I think it was John Calvin who said, “The Son of God became the Son of man that the sons of men might become the sons of God.” There is deep divinity in that.

“That we might receive the adoption of sons.” That is the double blessing. “A foe received a favourite, a rebel made a child.” Not just a pardoned sinner, but made an heir of God through Christ. I wonder if that is something of the meaning of that rather mysterious word: “She hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” That is a double blessing: not just forgiveness, not just deliverance from a deserved hell, but given an undeserved heaven; not just forgiven sin, but made a child. I would that the sense of wonder and amazement might fill our hearts today. How low the Lord of glory stooped! What sufferings He endured! And O what humiliation! And all this that poor, lost, ruined, guilty sinners might be raised, exalted so high!

“That we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” You have the two sendings here: “God sent forth His Son ... to redeem them that were under the law”; “God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” Again, there is no inferiority in the Holy Ghost being sent forth. He is the third Person in the Godhead, equal with the Father and the Son. This is the experience of it. If you and I have a saving interest in the work which Christ came to perform, then just as the Father sent His Son to Bethlehem, so He will send the Spirit of His Son into your hearts. That is the great point this Christmas. “We *know* that the Son of God is come.” We know that the Father sent His Son to Bethlehem. But has the Father

sent the Spirit of His Son into your heart and mine? Well, this is a vast subject, isn't it? But I will say this, that if the Father has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts and mine, then our hearts will be opened. There will be an aching void there the world can never satisfy. There will be a place there that none but the Saviour can fill. And as the Father sends the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, it is so that Christ might dwell there by faith, the hope of eternal glory. It is not just Christ in the Bible and Christ in the hymnbook. It is Christ dwelling in your hearts, in your affections, the hope of glory.

“Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” It is a wonderful thing that sinners deserving hell can be made sons of God by adoption and grace. Why, almighty God puts the problem: “How shall I put thee among the children” – such unworthy, guilty, lost, ruined sinners? “Because ye are sons” – if you have an interest in this great work of redemption, the ground, the foundation on which we are made sons of God – “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” That is a good prayer. I hope some of you will take it home with you this morning:

“If in the Father’s love,
I bear some filial part,
Send down Thy Spirit, like a dove,
To rest upon my heart.”

There are these two sendings forth: the sending forth of Christ to Bethlehem, and the sending forth of the Spirit of Christ into the hearts of all those for whom Christ came to Bethlehem. You will feel your sin. Your heart will be made soft. You will know real repentance. You will know that the world can never satisfy. And you will begin to pray. You will pray that these blessings might be yours.

“God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” This word *Abba* is an untranslatable word. It is an Aramaic word and it is a kind of term of endearment that a child would use to a loving father. “Abba, Father.” Well, there is bondage in the church of God today and not all can say, “Abba, Father.” But we have the young babies here this morning and not one of them is capable yet of framing that word and saying, “Father,” but they belong to the family. And what do those babies do? Well, they cry, and they look to their father and mother

for everything. They are completely dependent. They cling to them. They hang upon them. That is the mark of a child. They cannot yet say, "Father," but those little lips that this morning we have heard crying, the day will come when they can speak clearly, and they will be able to speak that word, and say, "Father," say, "Mother." So it is in grace. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word." It is an unspeakable mercy if God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts to awaken that cry for mercy, to be made ready, to be made right. It is the same Spirit of His Son which at length will breathe into your heart a sense of the Father's love, and you will love Him in return. You will have that sweet hope that you are in the family of God. I will tell you what the mark is of these who have received the adoption of sons, these into whose hearts God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son. They see that God has a family. They see the blessedness of that family. They do not feel worthy to be in that family. But they say, "Tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy Father's house for me?" That is the cry of an awakened soul. "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts."

"Lord, in Thy house I read there's room,
And, venturing hard, behold I come;
But can there, tell me, can there be
Amongst Thy children room for me?"

One so unworthy as me; one such a sinner as me. There was an answer to that question: "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" O to view this blessed subject! The people of God are His dear children in Christ.

"Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son." They tell me that in ancient times it was almost punishable by death if a servant every used this word, *Abba*, to the head of the house. There was the bondage, the darkness, the death, the fear. But,

"Adopted sons perceive
Their kindred to the sky;
The Father's pardoning love receive,
And 'Abba, Father,' cry."

"Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." What does that mean, to be an heir of God

through Christ? In a word it means this: all He is or has is theirs. O you see, the great point of these beautiful verses, who this Babe of Bethlehem is and why He came. It is this contrast that He stooped so low that His people might be raised so high. He endured such shame and humiliation and indignity and suffering even to death that poor, lost, ruined, hell-deserving sinners should not just be saved, not just be forgiven, but that they might be made sons and heirs of God through Christ. In a word it is this:

“Your heavenly Father ever lives,
And all His choicest treasure gives
To you, the favourites of His heart,
Nor will He ever with you part.”

Because if a child, then a child for ever. The prodigal went into a far country. He did not want to know about his home or his father. When he came back, he thought if only he could be a servant. But he was not a servant; he was still a son. The Lord will not cast away His children for His great name’s sake. O the privileges of being a child of God! It is this: to have a Father, and that Father in heaven. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” O the privileges of being among the children! “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” What do you need this morning, personally, savingly? What do you need in your family, your business, your life, your circumstances? What do you need tomorrow, next week? “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”

Well, beloved friends, may we know something of the love and the mercy, the free grace in it. May we see the wonder of it. And as we contemplate Bethlehem, the stable, the manger, may there be those questions: “Who is this in yonder stall?” and, “Why has He come?” And may there be a view by faith of just how low He stooped, how low He sank, and then just how high He lifts His people, how high He exalts them. And then may there be the sweet, personal, inward witness and sacred experience of it, as He who sent His Son to Bethlehem sends the Spirit of His Son into our poor, sinful hearts.

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye

are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”