

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 184

The Birth of the Saviour (2)

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 19th December, 1999**

Text: *“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2. 10, 11).*

I suppose this morning I did not really deal with the text itself. Especially I spoke to you on the wonder of the birth of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who He is, the reason for His coming, the wonder of it all; and then I spoke to you of the angelic message and its gracious effect to these few, poor, gracious shepherds. We believe that they were “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.” This evening I do not intend altogether to give you an exposition of this text, though it is a beautiful text, this angelic message. But as it rests on my spirit there are two vital things here. The first is the gift of the Saviour and the second, that the Saviour is the answer to all His people's fears.

“The angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour.” It is no wonder that the angel said these were “good tidings of great joy.” They were. They were the most blessed tidings that had ever been heard upon this sinful earth. When Adam fell and sin entered the world and death by sin, there *were* joyful tidings: the promise that one day the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. But never tidings like this, that the long-awaited day, the long-expected day, the day of redemption had now arrived.

“Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” It is a beautiful word, isn't it? The Saviour. The dear Babe of Bethlehem, a real Man, without sin, true Almighty God. But the purpose of it all, a Saviour. This has relationship to you and me as sinners. If we had never sinned, if we had never fallen, if sin had never entered the world, then the Lord would to all eternity have still been the second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, God over all blessed for evermore, but He would never have been the Saviour. “A Saviour.” It is heaven coming down to earth. It is Jacob's ladder. It is a new and living way made between heaven and earth. “A Saviour.” It is One to meet our lost, ruined condition. It is a most beautiful word, this. I

believe it was a sweet, harmonious sound to these poor shepherds. “Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” Now to some, a Saviour means nothing at all. To others it is just a point of interest. But then to others it means everything. “A Saviour.” “What comfort can a Saviour bring to those who never felt their woe?” May I ask you this one question, whatever you have or you do not have, or you know or you do not know, have you been brought to feel your need of a Saviour? That is the beginning of all real, vital godliness, the effect of the new birth. Whatever you have or do not have, you will feel your need of a Saviour, One who saves from death, destruction and despair.

“Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” By nature, dead in trespasses and sins, we do not feel our need of a Saviour. We do not want saving. We do not want salvation. We are satisfied, whether we are religious or irreligious, whether we are moral or immoral. We are satisfied with the things of this world. It may even be we are satisfied with the things of religion. But when the new birth takes place, well, there is eternity and the judgment day and the everlasting reckoning and heaven and hell. I wonder if any of you can go back to the first time you did not enjoy this season of the year as you had enjoyed it before. You had always looked forward to it and you had enjoyed it, but this time came and there was a kind of gloom over everything, a dark cloud over everything. It was eternity. You have a never-dying soul. You are not here for ever. One day you must die and what then? O I go back to my first time with me like that. I think it was when I was eighteen years old. It was different from any before. Well, there were all the usual things, but eternity, tremendous sound! It is this, the Holy Spirit’s great work to teach you your need of a Saviour.

Now it is not an angel today who pronounces the good tidings of great joy. It is sinners saved by grace who are appointed by God to preach these good tidings. And really that is what the gospel is, the gospel of the grace of God, good tidings. That is, that there is a Saviour for sinners, a real Saviour for real sinners. In the Old Testament there were the prophecies and the promises, a Saviour would come, “a Saviour, and a great One.” “As for our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name.” “Look unto Me, and be ye saved.” But now the day has come. The fulness of the time has come when God sends forth His own Son, “made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.”

“Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” “And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him.” The shepherds looking down in the manger – now, “This is our God, we have waited for Him.” And you longing, seeking souls, when unto you personally, experimentally is born a Saviour in your heart, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him ... we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.” These are tidings of great joy. And if you are taught your need as a sinner, that you need a Saviour, there is nothing will give you great joy apart from a personal knowledge of that Saviour. All the outward things, all the rejoicing, that will do nothing. O but if the Holy Spirit brings its right home to your heart, unto you, such a sinner as you, one so unworthy as you, but unto you who feel your need, you who look for salvation, “Unto *you* is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

Now there are some to whom the Saviour means everything and there are some to whom the Saviour means nothing. Let me give you a very simple illustration. Years ago when our children were little, very early one Lord’s day morning there was a loud knock on the door. I hurried down wondering whatever it could be, and there was a great big man standing at the door. He said, “You want a doctor.” I said, “No, we don’t want a doctor.” He said, “You have sent for a doctor, so I have come.” I said, “No, we haven’t sent for a doctor.” So he said, “There must have been a mistake. I must have come to the wrong house.” And he had. Now if one of our children had been really ill and we had been anxiously waiting, what a welcome it would have been, what joyful tidings! But it did not mean anything at all. If anything, it was a nuisance. But it brought that word home, “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Now all of us need a Saviour but there are few who feel their need of that Saviour. “What comfort can a Saviour bring to those who never felt their woe?” O but to the longing, waiting, seeking, enquiring soul, just to hear of a Saviour! But when the dear Saviour is made known and revealed and if the Holy Spirit says, “It was for you! This breaks the stony heart.”

“Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour.” Of course, these glad tidings were announced by the angel to Joseph. “Thou shalt call His name Jesus” – that means *a Saviour* – “Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.” That is why He

was born at Bethlehem. That is why He came, that He might be a Saviour. He came with a covenant engagement. He came as the great Shepherd of the sheep, to seek and to save that which was lost. O that wonderful name, the Saviour; that wonderful name, the name of Jesus. Does it mean anything to you tonight? I do not want to use extravagant language (you know I hate that), but does it ever give you a thrill just to hear the name Jesus? “Thou shalt call His name Jesus.” “Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” “He came the lost to seek and save by grace.” That was the purpose of His coming. He came into the world to save sinners. And so the whole of His life, He was an example. He was a teacher. But the whole of His example and His teaching will not take you to heaven.

“Here’s my claim, and here alone;
None a Saviour more can need;
Deeds of righteousness I’ve none;
No, not one good work to plead.”

But O to see the Saviour and that great work of redemption He accomplished! Because He came to Bethlehem that He might go to Calvary, and He was born that He might die. We do not believe in paintings of the Lord Jesus, but there is a famous painting called, *The Boy of Nazareth*, and there is a picture of Jesus as a Boy in the carpenter’s shop at Nazareth. There are two big beams and they make the shadow of a cross over the painting. Well, that is just a painting, but the shadow of the cross was over His life.

You who flee for refuge, who confess your sin, who feel your need of the Saviour, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” The Holy Spirit never tantalises a sinner. The world and sin tantalise. They offer you something and you are going to take hold of it but it is not there. The Holy Spirit never taught a sinner his need of a Saviour without making that Saviour known to him.

“Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” His birth in itself did not save His people, but His birth, His coming was that He might save them. Really, there were two things needful. Here were His poor people, lost in the ruins of the Fall, neither could they do anything to save themselves. A holy God demanded a holy, spotless life from them which none of them had given. The dear Saviour born at Bethlehem lived that holy, spotless life that it might be reckoned to the account of His people just as if they

had lived it themselves. That is the doctrine of imputed righteousness. But then there were their sins against a holy God. They must be punished. And the dear Saviour said, "Pardon them and punish Me." He takes the sinner's place at Calvary, the Saviour, and all the sins of all His people were laid upon Him, yours and mine if we are among them, and He suffered, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." That is the Saviour and that is salvation. But O the love in it! The love of the Father in sending Him; and the love of the Son in coming; and the love of the Holy Spirit in revealing it. And dying, rising again and ascending, He ever lives in heaven an almighty Saviour, able to save even to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. O we commend to you this evening this dear, loving, almighty Saviour who not only is able to save to the uttermost, but who is willing to save. "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Well, may you seek Him and may you find Him and may you rejoice in Him.

"A Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Now the other thing which has rested on my spirit is this: that the Lord Jesus, this dear, almighty Saviour, is the answer to all His people's fears. The first message, the first word from heaven after the resurrection (to Mary Magdalene) was, "Weep not." The first message, the first word after the incarnation was, "Fear not." But then if you take the angel's words to those godly women, it was the same as this: "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus." The first word: "Fear not." It was not spoken by accident. This is the point. There were many reasons why Jesus the Saviour came, but one was that He might deal with all the things His people fear. But now as a risen, exalted Saviour in heaven, "He lives, to still His people's fears!" So the answer to all the fears of His people are in this glorious Person, this Saviour once born at Bethlehem, this Saviour now risen, exalted, glorified. "Fear not... For unto you is born ... a Saviour." That word we put on our greetings card this year:

"What was the first angelic word
The startled shepherds gladly heard?
'Fear not!' – and 'tis as true today
Now two thousand years have passed away,
As true for us as it was for them,
For Christ is born in Bethlehem."

“The angel said unto them, Fear not.... For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” I would like to try just to mention one or two of the fears of God’s people and how the answer to those fears is in the Person of the Saviour, this same Jesus who was born at Bethlehem, though now for ever exalted in heaven. If the Lord deals with you, you will have fears because of your sin and because of your guilt. It is a sad, solemn thing if you have never had any cause for fear, if you have never been afraid. You will have many fears. You will be afraid if the Lord begins to deal with you, or if He is dealing with you now and you feel something of your sin and guilt and a never-ending eternity before you and the judgment day and you are unfit, you are unprepared, neither can you save yourself or do anything to save yourself. Now it is to such as these who are fearing because of their lost condition that, not an angel now, but the blessed Spirit comes and says, “Fear not... For unto you is born ... a Saviour.” What is the answer to the sinner’s fears concerning his sin and his guilt? It is this: that Jesus has died, the Saviour has died and shed His precious blood to bring rebel sinners back to God. This dear Saviour who was born at Bethlehem, He has died at Calvary, and there He has satisfied divine justice, and there He has opened a way to heaven. And so in His precious blood He has opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness. And so this “Fear not” sounds forth down the ages from Bethlehem and from Calvary to poor, fearing sinners who are so fearful because of their sin and guilt. “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.”

Now it is all in the Saviour. You will not find it anywhere else. You have every cause to fear if salvation were by works or if you had to do anything towards it. You would have every reason to fear. But, “Fear not.... For unto you is born this day ... a Saviour,” and it is this dear Saviour Himself who said to this soul, troubled, fearing, burdened with sin, “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee.” O what a tremendous cost, “the price, His own heart’s blood”! “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name.” “O,” you say, “but how do I know that?” Because you feel your need of a Saviour and you cannot do without Him. O but, “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.” Mine now and Mine to all eternity. “He lives, to still His people’s fears!”

“Fear not.... For unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” There are many of the Lord’s people who are very fearful, very afraid because of the

trouble they are in or the trouble they are about to enter in, because of the various sorrows and perplexities and trials. Well might they fear. It is a wicked world, isn't it? We do not know what a day may bring forth. There is so much sin, so much sorrow. Now are there any poor, fearing souls here this evening? Our hymnwriter says, "Poor fearful saint, be not dismayed, nor dread the dangers of the night." These fears, these troubles, these perplexities, these difficulties, if you look at them and your eyes are kept fixed on them, your hearts will be full of fear, but if the blessed Spirit enables you to look to Calvary and back to Bethlehem and up to heaven to see the Saviour now for ever exalted, what is it? Well, "He lives, to still His people's fears!" It is the sweet assurance of His gracious presence. It is the sweet assurance that He is with you; the sweet assurance that He will not leave you nor forsake you; the sweet assurance that He will uphold you, support you, bring you safely through. And the Lord's *fear not* is this to that one in trouble, in the furnace, in the flood: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." And what more can He say than that? "I am with thee." The sweet assurance of His gracious presence. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness." "Fear not."

"Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed;
I, I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand."

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob ... I will help thee."

"Fear not.... For unto you is born this day ... a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Many of the Lord's people fear this, and it is a great fear with them, lest if left to themselves they should fall and they should dishonour the name of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. That is a real fear to many of God's people, and really it is a good fear and it is a healthy fear. It is a thousand times better than that careless, self-indulgent walk. Some of the most godly of men and ministers have been in great distress lest they should be left to themselves in some unguarded moment, lest they should speak a wrong word or do some sinful action and bring reproach on the cause of God and truth. It is a wonderful thing there is an almighty Saviour and He is almighty to save and He is almighty to keep. He "is able to keep you from falling." And not just to keep you finally in the great

day, but to keep you day by day, to uphold you in your pilgrimage and to help you on. He “is able to keep you from falling” – fear not – “and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” You see, it is all in the Saviour. It is not just that He saves you from your sins (you need that); it is not just that He saves you from hell (you need that); but a daily Saviour, an hourly Saviour, to save you from sinning, to save you from yourself, to save you from your own spirit, to save you from your own temper. O to be saved from yourself! Now this is the Saviour we need, an almighty Saviour. Not just to save us at last, not just to save us at the beginning, but to save us daily. And when we feel our weakness and like Peter we begin to sink and cry, “Lord, save me,” that almighty arm reached out to save us and keep us from falling.

“Unto you is born ... a Saviour.” That almighty arm to keep and to uphold and to preserve and to help and to bring safely through. And it is to be kept in that attitude of prayer, to pray your way along. It is to be kept with your eyes fixed upon the Saviour. “Sons of God, in tribulation, let your eyes the Saviour view.” It is when our eyes turn away and we begin to sink, we are not able to keep ourselves. In this we have so much cause to fear. But it is true that when we are weak we are strong and when we are strong we are weak. There is not a more solemn word in the Old Testament than that about Uzziah, and he was a good, godly man: “He was marvellously helped, till he was strong.” And what did he do? He sinned; he fell; he presumed upon the priesthood and died under the chastening hand of God, a leper. It is to be kept dependent. It is to be kept leaning on Christ. It is to be kept relying on all-sufficient grace. So these are healthy fears when we are afraid of dishonouring the Lord, afraid of falling, and we have to cry to the Saviour to save us. And that almighty arm stretched forth for our defence, to save us and keep us and bring us safely through at last.

“Fear not.... Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” Now there is another thing. Many of God’s people are very fearful of the unknown way, and perhaps especially now. It seems to be a most solemn time. The end of every year is a solemn time, but what of the end of a century, what of the end of a millennium, what of the new millennium, what does it hold for us? Perhaps some of you here are really afraid of the unknown way. It may be just a general fear of the unknown. It may be, as often, we fear where no fear is. It may be that there are things in our pathway and circumstances, we know they are there and we are afraid; we fear. “Fear

not.... Unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” Now He is Christ the Lord. That means this: He is almighty; He is on the throne; He is in control. That word is often quoted at this time of the year and it is a beautiful word: “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder.” The government of this country, the government of the church, the government of the world. It is not upon the shoulder of any politician. It is not on the shoulder of Satan. It is upon His shoulder. “All must come, and last, and end, as shall please my heavenly Friend.” It is this dear Saviour, once born at Bethlehem, now in heaven, who is in control, and “my times are in His hand.”

So the Lord Jesus preached that very beautiful sermon on the mystery of divine providence, everything in His hands, everything working together for His people’s good. He said, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?” You say, “What? This great, almighty God, the Creator, exalted in heaven. Does God take care of sparrows?” Have you seen a sparrow today? If you did see one, you might have forgotten. “Not one of them is forgotten before God.” Do you believe it? “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?” The other gospel says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?” Matthew says one; Luke says the other. Luke says five for two farthings. Well, if you work it out, it means that if you paid two farthings you got an extra sparrow thrown in free. The whole point is this: it is a worthless, insignificant creature. “Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.” “Fear not.... For unto you is born ... a Saviour.” And He is exalted in heaven and takes care of sparrows. What value is a sparrow? “Not one of them is forgotten before God.” What value is a sinner redeemed by precious blood? “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?” Now one gospel says, “Not one of them is forgotten before God,” and the other says, “One of them shall not fall on the ground without *your* Father.” Not *their* Father; *your* Father. Does God take care of sparrows? Can not one fall to the ground without your heavenly Father? It means this: that nothing can take place in the coming year without divine permission. Like J. C. Philpot’s famous expression when William Gadsby fell in his garden and broke his leg and could not preach for weeks: if a sparrow could not fall to the ground without divine permission, how much less the redeemed body of William Gadsby. “Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

Joshua trembled as he set out on that unknown way, a time of crisis, a time of sorrow, Moses gone, Israel just about to cross Jordan, and then there was Jericho. Poor, fearful Joshua, and he had not got the clear revelation that we have. “And the Lord, He it is that doth go before thee; He will be with thee, He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.” O to look up to heaven and to see the exalted Saviour! “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand.” If you are a child of God He has put you into the Saviour’s hand and He has put all your concerns for time and eternity and He has put the whole of the unknown way there. “Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

The angel said, “Fear not.... For unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” Really it is this:

“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.”

“Fear not.... For unto you is born this day ... a Saviour.” There is just one other thing really I should speak about and that is the day of a believer’s death. O how many a child of God all his lifetime through fear of death has been in bondage! A lot of people speak very glibly and lightly about it. Every one of us here has to die, that is if the Lord tarries and does not first return. “It is appointed unto men once to die” – now this is it – “but after this the judgment.” Samuel Medley says, and he was a godly man, but he says, “My fears sometimes say I never shall find, in death’s awful day true peace in my mind.” It is one thing to speak lightly of it, but we are daily coming near and you older ones, it cannot be long, and you younger ones, you do not know when it may come. “If my hope on Christ is stayed, let Him come when He thinks best.” O the answer to it all, that there is a Saviour and those who by precious faith are enabled to build their hope for eternity upon Him shall never, never be ashamed in the hour and article of death.

So we think of John the beloved disciple on the Isle of Patmos when he “fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me” – the hand of authority and love – “He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of

hell and of death.” So believer, you cannot die until He opens that door with the keys and then you can never sink into hell because when He cried, “It is finished,” He turned those keys and locked the gates of hell against all His people, and those keys can never be found by Satan. Satan does not know where they are, neither can any man or devil open those gates of hell that a sinner saved by grace might enter there.

O these precious *fear nots*! You fearing souls this evening, may you feel them and may you see them all in this dear Saviour, once born at Bethlehem but now risen, exalted and glorified. It will not be an angel who will come from heaven and say, “Fear not,” but may the dear Holy Spirit come quietly and silently and whisper this “Fear not” in your heart. Then your fears will be gone and then you will know what these good tidings of great joy are, and despite all your sins and weakness and fears you will be able to go on your way rejoicing.

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

(The morning sermon on the same text was published last month.)