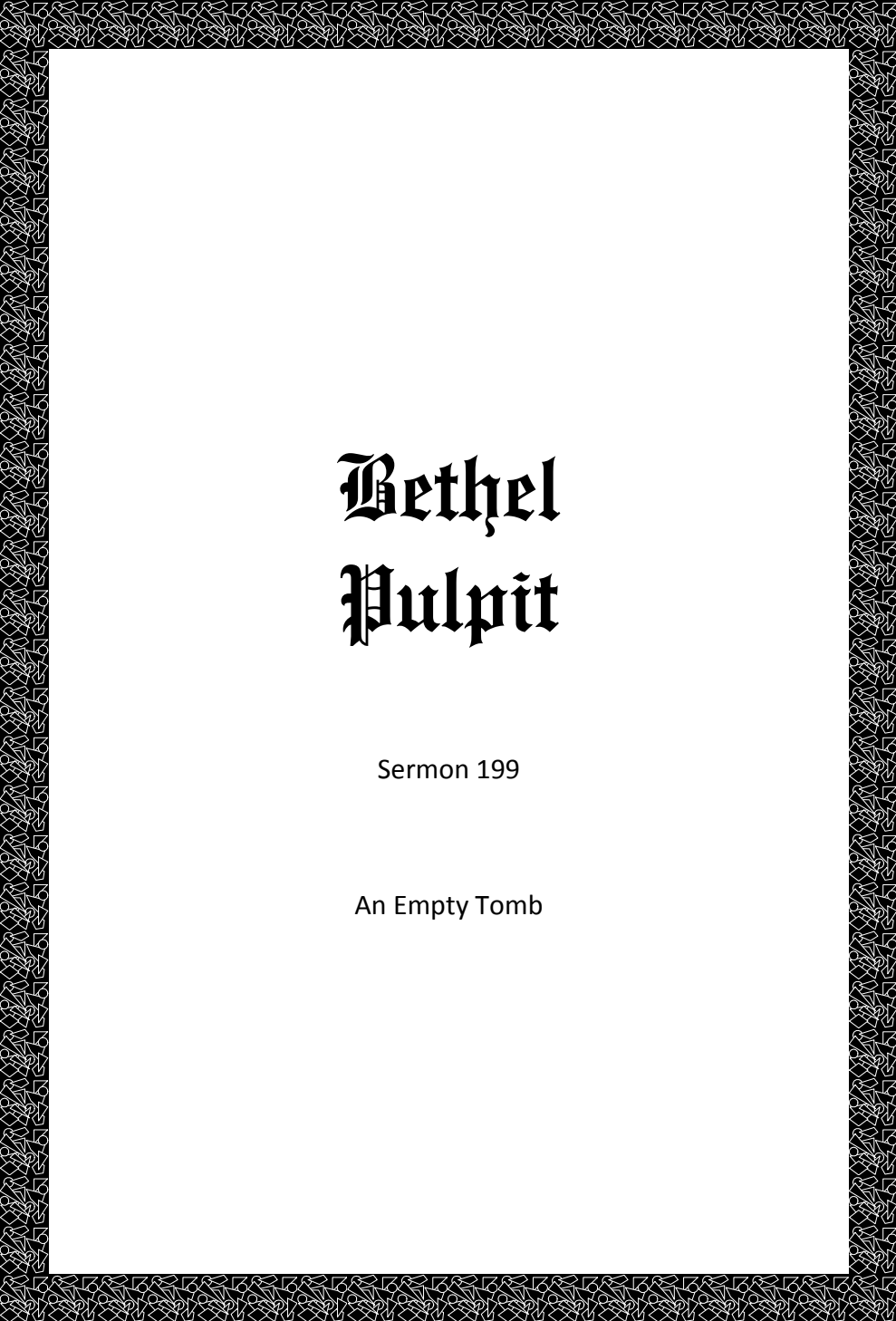




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 199

An Empty Tomb

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 15th April, 2001 (Easter Sunday)**

Text: *"Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28. 6).*

This is the angel announcing the glorious tidings of the resurrection. "The Lord is risen indeed." O what a sacred, blessed truth the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead is! The grave could not hold Him. Death could not hold Him. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

"Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids His rise;
Christ has opened paradise."

"He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." O beloved friends, may you and I today sweetly feel something of the power of His resurrection. It is well- nigh two thousand years since the Lord Jesus rose triumphant, victorious from the dead, but the power of His resurrection is still the same this morning, and it can be known and it can be experienced. That was the desire of the great apostle: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection." In that order: Christ, and the power of His resurrection; a risen Saviour, and the power of His resurrection.

With what delight did this holy angel announce to these poor, fearful, trembling women the glorious tidings of the resurrection! And you notice how the angel began. "Fear not ye." The first word spoken to sinners after the resurrection, spoken to these godly women, spoken to the church of God right down to the end of time, and spoken to you and me, beloved friends, this morning if we can fit in here: "I know that ye seek Jesus." I believe this morning that as the all-seeing eye of Almighty God looks down from heaven upon us, He looks on one and another and He says, "I know that ye seek Jesus."

Well, this blessed *fear not* to all those who seek Jesus, the first word spoken after the resurrection to these godly women, to the church of God down to the end of time. No cause for fear now that the Saviour has died, the Saviour has risen. O those many fears! Your fear of sinking into

hell; your fear lest your sins should overcome you; your fear of Satan; your fear of the world; your fear of the great judgment day. But these tidings from heaven to every sinner of whom it can be said, “I know that ye seek Jesus.” Then, “Fear not ye.”

This, then, was the first word spoken to the church of God after the resurrection, spoken by an angel. The first word the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself spoke after His resurrection: “Weep not.” The angel said, “Fear not.” The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ said, “Weep not.” Sinner, dry those falling tears. No cause for tears now that the Saviour has died, the Saviour has risen again. Weep not. Fear not. “I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” – the empty tomb. And that is the glory of the Christian church, the empty tomb. No other religion, no other philosophy can point to an empty tomb. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” There was a young man once preaching in the open-air and there was a crowd listening to him and a note was passed up to him for him to answer, passed up through the crowd: “What has your religion got that all these religions have not got?” And there was a great list of them. The young man paused in his preaching and wrote, “An empty tomb.”

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” It is a call to investigate. They could see the evidence. There was the empty tomb. These women had seen His sacred body, His lifeless body, laid there and they knew there was the Roman watch and the grave sealed, but there was no body there. If you are in doubt, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay” – an empty tomb, a tomb for ever vacated, a living Saviour.

“The Saviour lives no more to die!
He lives, the Lord enthroned on high!
He lives, triumphant o’er the grave!
He lives, eternally to save!”

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” The Christian religion is not afraid to be investigated. It stands on solid ground, on solid evidence. Here is the fact, the blessed the fact, the historical fact that Jesus died, that Jesus was buried, that Jesus rose again. The evidence for the resurrection is answerable.

There was a man some years ago who thought it was nonsense. I believe he was a lawyer. He set out to write a book to disapprove this

“nonsense of the resurrection.” Frank Morison was his name. Yet the more he investigated, the more he came to the conclusion that the fact of the resurrection, the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus, could not be denied. He wrote that little book, *Who moved the stone? The evidence for the resurrection*. In some of the copies, I believe the original chapter of the book he was going to write appears, a chapter entitled, “The book that refused to be written.”

So we have this fact of the resurrection, and let the sceptics come, the agnostics, the atheists, and let them investigate the evidence. You young people, you children, do not be afraid of this. There is the fact, a well-attested fact of history, the fact that Jesus died, that Jesus rose again. Well, one of the clearest evidences for the resurrection is this. At this time all the disciples had forsaken their Lord and Master and fled. Peter had even denied Him. They were all afraid. But a few days later, all their fear had gone. They were changed men. They were different men. Why, they knew that their Lord and Master had risen from the dead. They had met with Him. They had seen Him. They had eaten with Him, and later they were willing to lay down their lives in a death of martyrdom because they were so sure of this. It was only six weeks later, poor, trembling, denying Peter stood up and preached that glorious sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and three thousand people were brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. But do not forget this, that when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, when the sum and substance of his preaching was the resurrection, he was standing, preaching his sermon, only about half a mile away from where this empty tomb was to be found. Peter without doubt could say, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” There was not a person in Jerusalem could have gone to that grave and produced a lifeless body. Peter was not in any doubt about this. He could say, “Whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.”

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Some say his disciples stole Him away. The Roman guards, and the tomb sealed, and His poor, fearing disciples could steal Him away? Some say that He never really died and He was able to escape. What, a dear Man after shedding so much blood on the cross, being carried into a cold grave which was securely sealed, and escaping from it? Well, beloved friends, I leave these things, the *fact* of the resurrection, the glorious fact and the evidence of the resurrection. Now I leave these things. I have gone to a little length to mention them this morning because I feel it is time that we should. The

evidence for the resurrection. We live in an increasingly sceptical age where, generally speaking, people are denying these facts of our most holy faith, and I feel that we and our young people and children should be well established in this, that apart from real, vital godliness and experimental religion, apart from all this, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in a sinner's heart, apart from this, the truth of the Christian faith stands on a solid foundation. There is a fact, a historical fact, the fact that Christ did die, the fact that He did rise again, indisputably. Now the Christian faith can still say, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." A grave for ever vacated, an empty tomb, a living Saviour.

"Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Then there is the glorious doctrine of the resurrection, and then there is the gracious experience of the resurrection. But the way this Scripture rests with me this morning is this: *the place where Jesus lay*. He lay in the grave, but the Word of God speaks of so many places where Jesus lay.

"Come, see the place where the Lord lay." From everlasting He lay in the bosom of His Father, the eternal Son of God, the Object of His delight, equal, co-eternal with His Father. Who can ever estimate the love of the Father to the Son and the love of the Son to the Father, that ineffable love, as there from all eternity, before all worlds, before angels or men were created, the Father and Son dwelt alone with the Holy Ghost? And how the Lord Jesus delighted to speak of this truth, "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father." "The place where the Lord lay."

"But lo! He leaves those heavenly forms;
The Word descends and dwells in clay,
That He may hold converse with worms,
Dressed in such feeble flesh as they."

As very God, He lay from all eternity in the bosom of the Father. But then, wonder of wonders, He lay in a manger. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." The mystery of the incarnation, how He, the eternal Son of God, could become a Man, a real Man, without ceasing to be God. "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness." Perhaps by precious faith you have viewed Him in His eternal Sonship as everlastingly He lay in the bosom of the Father. But have you ever by precious faith come to Bethlehem and looked in the manger and have you seen the place where the Lord lay? And have you worshipped that dear Babe of Bethlehem as true Almighty God?

“No less almighty at His birth,
Than on His throne supreme;
His shoulders held up heaven and earth,
When Mary held up Him.”

Now do you believe it? “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” Now why did He leave those heavenly forms? Why did He veil His glory? Now why did He become a Man, a real Man, a “Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”? Now why did He lie in the manger? Perhaps the nearest we can come to the great mystery of the incarnation is this: “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich” – *rich* – “yet for your sakes He became poor – *poor* – “that ye through His poverty might be rich.” O the greatness of the love of Christ to sinners, the greatness of His matchless condescension! Who can ever understand it? Who can ever comprehend it, lying in the bosom of His Father from all eternity and lying in a manger in a stable? Now may you by precious faith go to Bethlehem, and “come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ once lay under the waters of the River Jordan when He was baptized by John. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” The River Jordan is a very sacred place. “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.” O the condescension, the humility there! He did not send for John. He came that long, arduous journey to be baptized by John, and John shrank from it, and well he might. He said, “I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” What was the purpose of the baptism of the Lord Jesus? That He might be identified with His people, that He might set a gracious example, and that He might prefigure that awful baptism of suffering even unto death when He said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” So we see that wonderful scene, John laying the sacred body of the Lord Jesus under Jordan’s flowing waves. So you have the second Person of the Godhead in the water and you have the voice of the eternal Father from heaven, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And you have the third Person in the Godhead, the Holy Ghost, descending as a Dove upon His sacred head. The mystery of the Trinity: three Persons, one God. Well might the ancient fathers of the church say, Would you know the doctrine of the Trinity? Then go to the River Jordan.

O but, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay,” symbolising that awful baptism of suffering which one day He would endure when He was immersed beneath the awful wrath of God against the sins of His people laid upon Him, and,

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

Now the River Jordan is a sacred place. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” And it is that sweet constraining of the love of Christ, following His example.

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” And then we see Him prostrate on the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. And He sank and He lay on the ground beneath that awful weight, because it was there that He saw the awful cup which His Father gave Him, the cup of suffering He had to endure at Calvary. O the weight of sin He had to bear, and the hiding of His Father’s face, and the cross He had to bear, and His holy soul shrank from it. Now, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” You are on holy ground here, beloved friends. “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” But, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” To see that love to sinners. “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”

O Gethsemane!

“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;
Not a glimpse of hope for me,
Only in Gethsemane.”

And of course, when we speak of a sinner being saved by Gethsemane, we mean not just the taking of that bitter cup, but the complete emptying of it to its very dregs when the Saviour cried, “It is finished.”

Now, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” And then they laid Him on the cross and they crucified Him. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved

them unto the end.” Now was ever love like this? The sufferings the Saviour endured, the nails, the spear, the crown of thorns. And He died that cruel, ignominious death. O but the wonderful accomplishments of the cross, in His precious blood opening the fountain where sin is put away, making a way by which the guilty can come to heaven, satisfying all the righteous claims of divine justice! “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.” The wonders of the cross of Christ!

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” And then His lifeless body was taken from the cross and laid in the grave, that grave which is now for ever empty, now for ever vacated. But that is where the sacred body of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ lay. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” So I want to speak of the burial of the Lord Jesus and then His glorious resurrection, all this that took place in the rock sepulchre, the sepulchre hewn out in the rock where before never man lay. O may we gently draw near, and may it be by precious faith, and may we see our interest, and may we hear a voice from heaven say, “All this was done for you.” O may we come and “see the place where the Lord lay.” Those loving hands of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea took His body so tenderly down from the cross. You see, beloved friends, when the Lord Jesus cried, “It is finished,” His shame, His ignominy, was for ever ended. He must by eternal covenant appointment have an honourable burial. According to Roman law, His body would just have been cast out, but now His shame, His ignominy is for ever ended. Sin is put away. It is atoned for. The work of redemption is for ever complete. And so, according to covenant appointment and the ancient prophecy, He must be “with the rich in His death.” This honourable burial. Have you ever felt a little love in your heart to Nicodemus and Joseph? They could not bear that there should be any further shame for their Lord and Master. You say, Where is Peter now, and the beloved disciple John, and all these others? “They all forsook Him, and fled.” It is that perfect love that put away fear with Nicodemus, and it is that perfect love which will put away fear with you. They were risking their reputation. They were risking death. We do not know that the two had ever met before, but they met at the cross of Christ. That is the place of love among the brethren, and that is the place of sweet union.

I have often stood in wonder and amazement at the conclusion of that wonderful work by Krummacher, *The Suffering Saviour*, when he speaks of these two godly men placing a ladder at the cross and going up

and so gently taking the lifeless body of the Saviour into their arms that they might take Him to His burial. Krummacher says, Unless you like Joseph, like Nicodemus, by precious faith have ascended the ladder of God-given faith and embraced a crucified Redeemer, then to heaven you can never go.

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” We are told those godly women “beheld where He was laid.” What does the burial of the Lord Jesus mean? Well, first of all it was the proof that He was really dead. People might say that if redemption’s work was complete when Jesus died, why did He not rise again straight from the cross? Well, He must be buried and lie in the grave as a proof of His death. But the burial of the Lord Jesus. “When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.” There is not a spot, dear child of God, where you come, and the Lord Jesus has not walked it out before. But the Lord’s people must die, and they must be laid in the grave, and so their Lord and Master has gone before. By His presence in the grave, why, He perfumed the grave for all His people. When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus met, I do not know how many pounds of spices they had bought. One of the old divines said that though these spices were incredibly expensive, they bought enough to embalm the bodies of everyone in Jerusalem! But they could not do enough for the Saviour. It was the same spirit as the dear woman who poured out that ointment of spikenard, very costly, upon His feet. But it was not that which perfumed the grave; it was the presence of the Lord Jesus. He sanctified the grave for all His people. Lying in that grave, He took all the sting and all the bitterness from the grave. But beloved friends, you have heard me time and time again, as one by one the Lord’s dear people from our midst are taken to the cemetery, taken to the open grave, you have seen me point down into the open grave of the believer and say, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

“Thine was a bitter death indeed,
Thou harmless, suffering Lamb of God!
Thou hast from hell Thy people freed,
And drowned destruction in Thy blood.”

You see, there are two places, the open baptistry and the grave of a believer. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” But this was the place not only of the burial of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but it was the place of His glorious resurrection from the dead. O what an honour was

placed upon that rock sepulchre, that glorious resurrection from the dead, taking the sting from death and the victory from the grave!

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” We can come by faith this morning to that open grave, that empty sepulchre, and we can rejoice in a living Saviour and that the grave has been for ever vacated. The Lord lay there. Blessed be His name, He lay there. But blessed be His name, He is risen, exalted, glorified, to die no more. I like that beautiful expression in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “the power of an endless life.” “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” This is the pledge of the glorious resurrection of all His people from the dead in the last great day. There in the death and burial of a believer, and viewing it as the place where the Lord lay, we see the pledge of the glorious resurrection in the last day. “Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

So there are three things this morning: the burial and the glorious resurrection of the incarnate Son of God. And second, as you think of those you have loved who have died in the faith and are now sealed in the grave, it is in hope of this glorious resurrection. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.” And the third thing, those of you who shrink from the grave, who tremble – and well we might as we think of that solemn day, because death is a monster, (isn’t it?) – O but if you and I have a sweet hope in the Saviour’s death, burial and resurrection, then,

“Jesus, the mighty Saviour, lives,
And He has conquered death and hell:
This truth substantial comfort gives,
And dying saints can sing, ‘Tis well.”

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

(If the Lord will, the evening sermon on the same text will be published next month.)