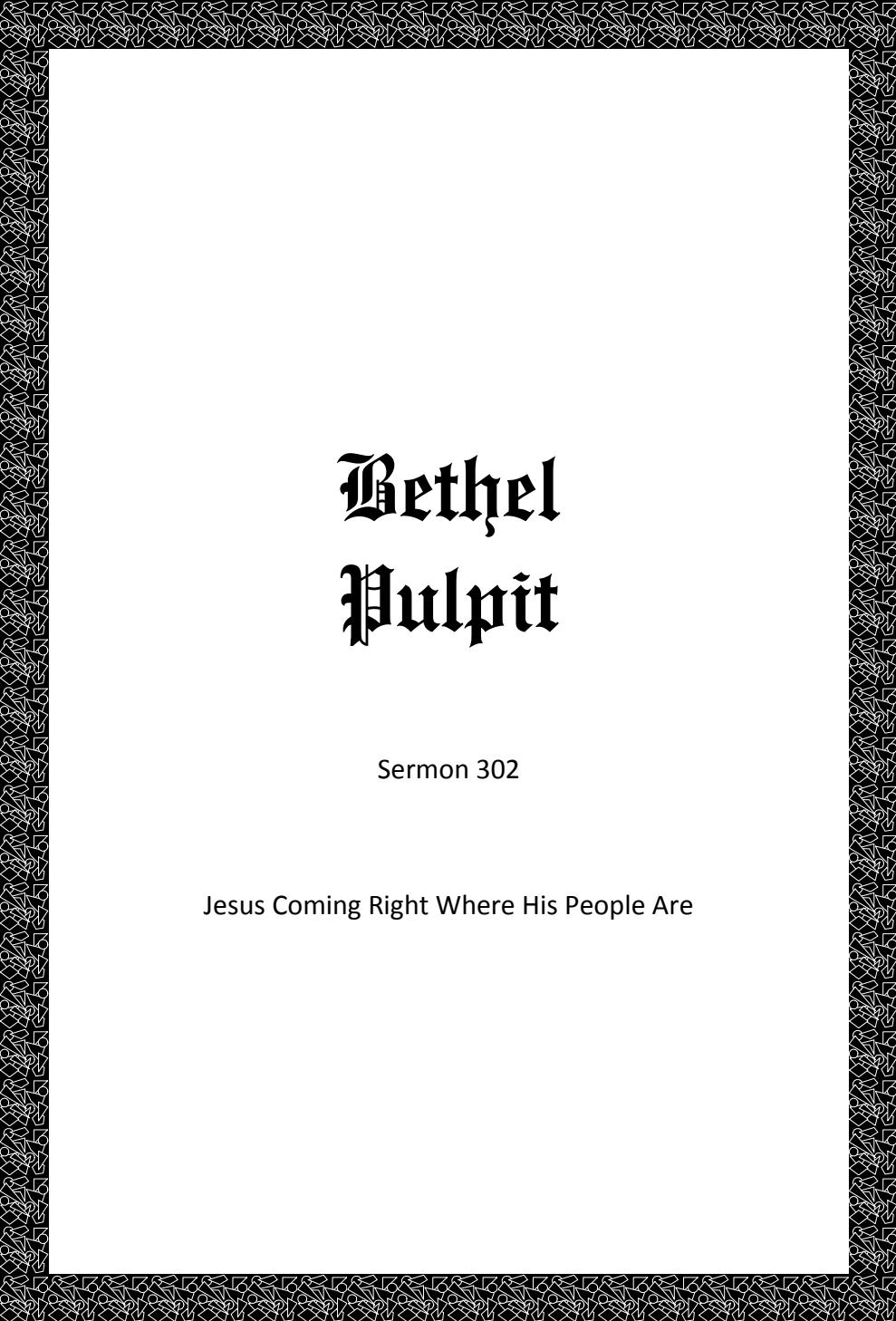




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 302

Jesus Coming Right Where His People Are

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 18th July, 2010**

Text: *"But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary" (Matthew 14. 24).*

No-one ever had clearer leading than the Lord's immediate disciples did here. We are told that "Jesus *constrained* His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side." He told them what to do, how to do it, and where to go, and they obeyed Him. But soon things seemed to be going wrong; things were not easy; there were problems – not that they might perish, not that the Lord had made a mistake, not that *they* had made a mistake, but for the trial of their faith. And at the end they knew more of their Saviour than they ever knew before.

So think it not strange if you are clearly constrained to walk in a special way, if soon afterwards that is tried and things seem to go wrong. Perhaps you have been constrained openly to profess the Lord's name. Do not be surprised if very soon trials and temptations come. It may be you are constrained to make some move in providence and you feel sure it was right. Do not be surprised if things seem to be going wrong – so we might go on – when the Lord leads, when the Lord constrains, when He opens a door.

"Jesus *constrained* His disciples to get into a ship." So we have this account of the disciples sailing across the Sea of Galilee to the other side, and the storms they met, and the Lord Jesus walking on the sea, and how they came safely to the other side.

Now you know, beloved friends, that the life of faith is often compared to a spiritual voyage. Of course, there are various comparisons in the Word of God. There is the fight of faith. There is the pilgrimage we have to walk out through the wilderness. We might go on. There is this comparison of the life of the believer to a heavenly voyage, that heavenly voyage in which he sets sail.

"Jesus, at Thy command
I launch into the deep" –

the embarking, the setting sail in obedience to the Lord's will. Because let us be clear, beloved friends, you will never reach heaven unless you sail heavenwards. There must be the setting out.

“We leave this world's deceitful shore,
And leave it to return no more.”

“Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go ... to the other side.” And God has never promised that it will be an easy passage, though He has promised that it will be a safe passage which will end in heaven. “So He bringeth them unto their desired haven.” It is one thing to see that ship set sail, and perhaps there are the well-wishers on the shore, or perhaps it is one of those occasions when a ship sets sail for the first time and some royal person is naming it and there is all the applause, but soon that little ship is out in the ocean sailing alone.

So we find that after a time this little ship came into difficulties. The poor disciples wondered whatever was going to happen. I think you will find in your spiritual voyage that the time will come sooner or later when you know the storm and the wind and the waves and the tempest. Fifty or sixty years ago, popular Evangelical teaching in England was that *Let go, let God* theology: if you make the full surrender of faith, then it is fair sailing without any wind, without any storm. You do not seem to hear so much about that kind of theology today, because those whose religion was real found that it did not actually happen like that, much as they wished that it did, and many people were very, very troubled when they professed the Lord's name and found that everything was not fair sailing.

“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” I should like to bring this word and this subject before you this evening in three ways. First of all, the position in which the disciples of Jesus found themselves, and then secondly where their Lord and Master was, and then thirdly and finally how the Lord Jesus dealt with their difficulty and their danger and their concern.

“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” It should not have taken them too long to cross the Sea of Galilee. But they had not got very far when the fourth watch of the night came. As I understand it, the night was divided into four watches: six o'clock to nine, and nine to midnight, and midnight to three, and then three to six. So it was not until the fourth watch that they began

to make any headway, when they had been wrestling and struggling a long time, and when the night was darkest before the dawn.

“The ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” And the Apostle John makes a remark that neither Matthew nor Mark do: “It was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.” That was the trial. It was dark, but it was a double trial that Jesus had not come to them. Did He not know? Had He forgotten them? Why had this taken place? Was He leaving them? Beloved friends, some of you have known that at times. “It was now dark.” You have had a disappointment. You have had a bereavement. You have had a sorrow. You have had a loss or a cross. It is dark. “And Jesus was not come to them.” The wonderful thing is He did come, and He was not too late. Of course, right through Scripture you have the wonderful promise that the Lord will come.

“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” Mark tells us they were “toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary.” They were not making any headway at all. But one thing they did not do. They did not turn round and with the wind behind them sail back to the shore from whence they set out, and neither will you. They may have been blown back or blown out of their course, but they were still toiling in rowing till Jesus came. The Lord will never allow you to turn right round and sail back to the shore. It is a wonderful mercy. “But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” These contrary winds! Samuel Rutherford says,

“I’ve wrestled on toward heaven,
’Gainst wind, and storm, and tide.”

These contrary winds. Sometimes it is the trouble you are in, the sorrow, the difficult pathway you have to walk. “The wind was contrary.” Sometimes it is ill health, sickness, either sudden or drawn out, and what lies before you. “The wind was contrary.” Sometimes it is people, the difficulties you have with them.

“From sinner and from saint
You meet with many a blow.”

You might even have things in your own family, or it might be disappointment in your friendships.

“The wind was contrary.” There are a lot of contrary winds blow out of this sinful world, these adverse winds. Many people are suffering persecution in different ways. Some young people find it hard to be different. Some people can stand against most bitter criticism, but then cannot stand against people smiling at them, laughing at them. “For the wind was contrary.” There is another kind of wind from the world: that which would blow you into sin, blow you into wrongdoing. There is a contrary wind which would blow you into all kinds of earthly things and worldly pleasures.

“The wind was contrary.” And then there are the temptations of Satan, as Satan tempts you to sin, as he tempts you to unbelief. The temptations of Satan sometimes are a continual blast, but sometimes it is that sudden gust, that sudden gale which would almost submerge your little boat. “The wind was contrary.” And the wind sometimes blows out of your own carnal, unbelieving, sinful heart. “The wind was contrary.” There are different kinds of wind. I know the Lord holds the winds in His fist, but He allows Satan to tempt. He allows the world to assail. “The wind was contrary.”

“It was now dark, and Jesus was not come.” They thought these contrary winds were going to overthrow their little boat. Well, I do not want to linger too long on this, this dark side, this trying side. If you are in it tonight, you know it and you do not want the pulpit to delineate it and open it up and describe it. You know what these contrary winds are that you have to grapple with at present, or you may have to grapple with this coming week. Contrary winds; toiling in rowing. “For the wind was contrary.”

“But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” Now where was the Lord Jesus? He was not with them. He had sent them away, constrained them to get into the ship. He had sent the multitude away, and then He had gone up into a mountain apart to pray. It was a different occasion from that when they were crossing the Sea of Galilee and the Lord Jesus was with them in the boat. Mind you, He was asleep then and they thought He was not taking any notice. They said, “Master, carest Thou not that we perish?” But He was with them and perhaps they realised, how could they perish with Christ in the vessel? But now He was not with them, and it does not seem clear they

knew why He was not with them, what He was doing, where He was. He had gone up into a mountain apart to pray.

“And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.” It is something like that today, beloved friends. The church of God is like a little boat in the midst of the ocean, tossed about by the contrary winds. I have been speaking about personal winds, but when you think of all the things that are happening in England at present and in the world – contrary winds – and where is the Saviour? “He went up into a mountain apart to pray.” Well, He has ascended to heaven and He has ascended to heaven to pray, to intercede. He ever liveth to make intercession for all who come unto God by Him.

“For Thy people Thou art pleading;
There Thou dost their place prepare;
Ever for them interceding,
Till in glory they appear.”

But He was not with them.

“When He had sent the multitudes away, *He* went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” Not in this chapter, but in Mark’s version, in Mark chapter 6 we have a beautiful word, and it is this: “And He saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them.” He saw them. His loving eye was upon them. He was watching them. They could not see Him, but He could see them. They did not know He was watching them, but He was. “He saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them.”

So if you will, beloved friends, it is the same subject as this morning (“Thou God seest me”). Really the subject this evening is a good commentary on that word of Hagar in Genesis chapter 16. “She called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me.” And what an illustration there is of that truth here: “Thou God seest me.” Our hymnwriter beautifully puts it:

“He sees us when we see not Him,
And always hears our cry.”

“The ship was now in the midst of the sea.” But, “He saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them.” Let us be clear, it

was not just natural sight. “The God shines gracious through the Man.” Naturally speaking, how could a man at the top of a mountain on a very dark, stormy night see that little ship so far away? This is one of those displays of the Godhead of the Lord Jesus. “He saw them.” That is where He was, up in the top of the mount. And your little ship tonight as it steers its course, perhaps you do not feel to be making headway very fast. Perhaps you are “wrestling on toward heaven, ’gainst wind, and storm, and tide.” Perhaps you are toiling in rowing. Perhaps the winds are very contrary to you. Perhaps you are being blown back, you are being blown out of your course. But may you know that there is an eye that never slumbers, that never sleeps, and that eye is upon you for good. It is a loving eye. It is a watchful eye. It is an almighty eye. “The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him.” That was a good little word we sang in Jonathan Franklin’s hymn at the close this morning:

“He sees when we are sunk in grief,
And quickly flies to our relief.”

“He saw them.” “The ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” “He went up into a mountain apart.” But “He saw them.” Well, He saw His people from everlasting in the covenant of grace.

“He saw me ruined in the fall,
Yet loved me notwithstanding all.”

You believe that, don’t you? O but to realise there is not a spot, not a place, not a condition where a child of God can ever be that he is out of the loving sight of his Lord and Saviour. “He saw them toiling in rowing.” He saw them with that look of love. He was the Keeper of Israel who neither slumbered nor slept. His eye was a watchful eye and nothing could ever escape it. O the wonder of it, the all-seeing eye of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in love and mercy! That remarkable word we have in the life of King Asa: “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him.” And that is just what the Lord and Saviour Jesus was going to do. He was going to show Himself strong on His people’s behalf. He was going to do something that nature could not do. He was going to perform a miracle for them.

“And the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.” So we come now to what the Lord Jesus did. We have seen where the disciples were. We see where the Lord Jesus was. But now we see what the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ did, and what He did in love and mercy, and what He did in divine, almighty power. Do not forget that humanly speaking their case was not just hard; it was a complete impossibility. There were not any helicopters then. How could anyone come where they were, that terrible place where they were toiling in rowing, where they felt their lives were in jeopardy? How could anyone come even in a boat?

There will be times in your life when you cannot altogether see the way of escape. Can you follow me here? There are times when you have a problem, a difficulty; you are in trouble yet you can clearly see the way out. You cannot do it, but you know the Lord can. But there are other times when as you try to think, you cannot think of any possible way that the Lord can bring you out. But you and I do not need to think of a way. Moses could not think out a way on the banks of the Red Sea. “Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord,” and that is what these disciples had to do. They had to see the salvation of God. But their case was not only hard and trying; it was impossible. So what did the Lord Jesus do? He performed a miracle for them. And the great point here, the simple point, the blessed point was this, and this is a delightful theme: the Lord Jesus came right where they were. Now that is the way in love and mercy He deals with His people. He comes right where they are.

Well, you have it in the Song of Solomon: “The voice of my Beloved! behold, He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.” There was no way there any more than there was any way here. These great mountains, these hills in the way! The mountains of sin, the sin of His people, mountains of difficulty, the mountains of Bether, which means the mountains of division, separation. “Behold, He cometh.” It is an easy thing for Him to come leaping over the mountains. That is why He is described as “like a roe or a young hart,” so fleet footed, able to come where no human foot can stand. “Behold, He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.” And He comes right where she is in her distress to look through the window, to show Himself through the lattice, to reveal Himself in His love and to do everything for her that she longed for.

It is a wonderful thing this, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ coming right where you are. So it was with the poor, wounded man in the parable of the good Samaritan. There he was lying weak and wounded and half dead, and he could not do anything. He probably did not know where the inn was and I do not think he had got the twopence in his pocket, and he knew he could not have got there. "A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was," and when he came, he did everything for him. He poured in the oil and the wine; he bound up his wounds; he put him on his own beast; he took him to the inn; he paid for his keep, and gave a promise for the future. It is a very beautiful truth, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ coming right where we are and never too late. One of our hymns ends up like this:

"He tarries oft till men are faint,
And comes at evening late."

But He is never too late; He is always in time.

O but this truth, the Lord Jesus coming right where we are! It is this same Jesus, "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." Now that is the blessed point we need to hold fast by faith. These wonderful miracles, it is this same Jesus, His power, His compassion, His love, His promise still the same. And the promise is that He will come right where you are. If your little boat this evening seems to be tossed about, and if you are toiling in rowing, and if you are not making much headway spiritually, and perhaps some of you are being driven back out of your course, and these contrary winds of temptation, and what is the end of it all going to be? And this same Jesus has promised to come right where you are, do everything for you, bring you safely through, bring you safely to the other side.

"It was now dark, and Jesus was not come." It was the fourth watch of the night. They had wrestled long. They had waited long. It was the darkest hour. "And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea." That stormy ocean which seemed to be threatening their destruction, He made it a carpet on which He could walk majestically to the place where they were and do everything they needed. There is no closed door with the Lord. There is no barrier. There is nothing to stop Him. O you say, But what about the separation, my sin, my unworthiness, my guilt, my hardness, my prayerlessness? Well, this Jesus who comes walking on the sea in love and mercy is the same Jesus

who went to Calvary to make an atonement for sin. “And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Where sin abounds, grace does still yet more abound.

But you see the disciples were even frightened when He was coming. Our unbelief – how often we would almost push the blessing away and say, It cannot be, or even, It is not for such as me! Now this is it, and may some of you know it and prove it tonight: “Straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.” “Why those fears? behold, ’tis Jesus.” Well, they seemed to have every reason to be afraid. But, “It is I; be not afraid.” Because their Lord and Saviour was going to deal with all those things that were filling their hearts with fear. “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.” Joseph Hart says,

“Cheer up, ye travelling souls;
On Jesus’ aid rely.”

“Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.” And then He did everything for them, everything they needed, and “the wind ceased,” because winds and waves obey Him. It is no wonder the disciples said, “Of a truth Thou art the Son of God.” They had a clear proof of His divinity.

Well, almost immediately they were there at the other side, though they had been struggling all night, but there they were at the other side. The psalmist says, “Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven.” Which means two things, beloved friends who are toiling and rowing with the winds contrary to you. First, the Lord Jesus is going to bring you safely through, and secondly, the Lord Jesus is going to bring you safely to heaven.