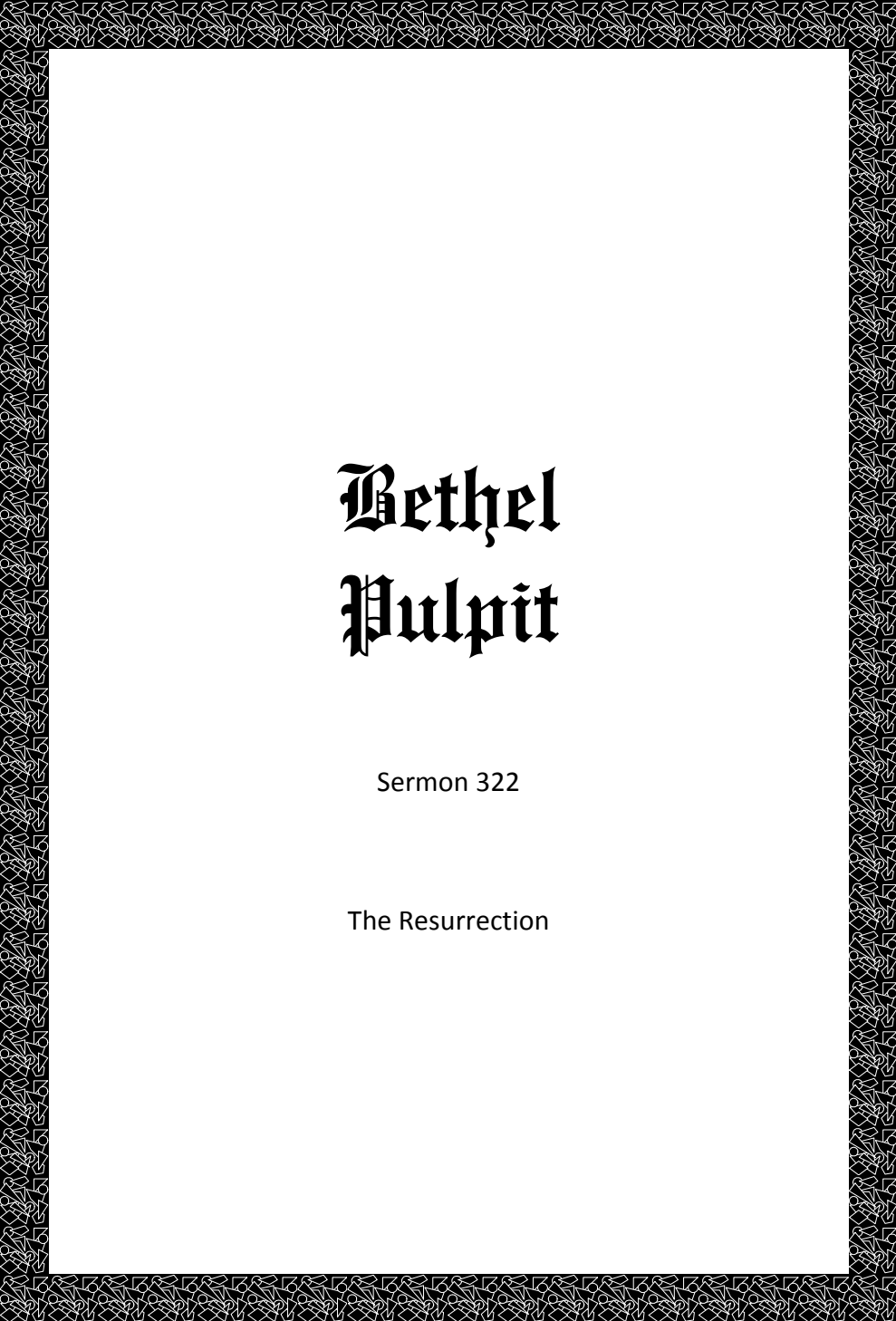




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 322

The Resurrection

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 29th April, 2012**

Text: *“Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15. 23).*

What a glorious truth this is: the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from the dead! “Vain the stone, the watch, the seal.” One of the foundation truths of our most holy faith, a foundation truth that sin and Satan and the world can never overthrow, and all that it means: a living Saviour who ever lives, almighty to save, and who says, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” What else does it mean? The sting taken from death, the victory from the grave. And what else? That Almighty God the Father in heaven is well pleased with the work of His beloved Son on the cross, so He raised Him from the dead.

And then, beloved friends, as we meet together here this morning, the power of His resurrection is still the same nearly two thousand years after the Lord Jesus rose triumphant from the dead. The power of His resurrection is still the same this morning, and O may it be felt in our midst, quickening sinners into life, and may it be felt in our hearts. What do we read? “The exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.... And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” The power of His resurrection, where we feel dead and lifeless and dark, and the power of His resurrection to set our affections on things above. The power of His resurrection to roll away the great stones we have in our lives. There was a great stone that was there at the door of the sepulchre and it was sealed with a seal. No way it could be rolled away; no way it could be moved. “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?” You know that, some of you, whether it is the stone in your heart, or whether it is your sin, guilt and unbelief, or whether it is all these things you have in providence in your home and circumstances and tomorrow and next week. “Who shall roll us away the stone?” The power of His glorious resurrection. When they came there, they found that the stone was rolled away already.

It seems as we come to this glorious chapter that there were a number in the professing church of God who were denying the resurrection. It seems perhaps they were suggesting that the resurrection to come is only a spiritual resurrection as in the new birth, and the apostle straight away points out the awful consequences, the dreadful consequences if Christ be not physically, bodily raised from the dead. He says, “We are of all men most miserable.” “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” And his conclusion: “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

Then it seemed as if Paul is just weary of these arguments and talking about these miserable things and what would be these dreadful consequences. Suddenly he bursts forth: “Now is Christ risen from the dead.” We are not having any dispute, any argument about it. “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.” Paul speaks of representation, the whole human race represented by Adam, and he fell, and so “sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Adam our representative. And then the last Adam, or as He is called in this chapter, “the second Man,” representing all His people, and they died with Him and rose again with Him and they triumphed with Him. You know what Thomas Goodwin, the well-known Puritan, said. Strictly speaking there are only two men: Adam and Christ, and they have all other men hanging at their girdles. You ponder the weight of divinity there is there.

“Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die” – you see this representation – “even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” When I was a young boy, I did not understand much, but I heard our ministers preach and this is one verse in the Bible I could not understand. I used to ask people and no-one seemed to explain it. I said, That verse seems to say that everybody is going to be saved: “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” But you understand what it does mean. Well, first of all, all through this chapter Paul is only speaking of God’s people. You have always got to understand things in their context. At the end of the world there is going to be a resurrection of all, the righteous and the wicked, the righteous to eternal life and the wicked to eternal death and condemnation. But in this

chapter the apostle only mentions the resurrection of the righteous. He is not dealing with the other subject. He has dealt with that in other places. But then also Paul is speaking of those who are *in* Adam and those who are *in* Christ. Now those who are in Adam, as everyone is; those who are in Christ, that is just the people of God. “As in Adam all die” – all in Adam die; it is the whole human race – “even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.”

So here we are very simply and plainly told that Christ was the first to rise from the dead, and then in the last great day all His beloved people are going to rise again to eternal life and bliss and blessedness in heaven. You might ask the question, How can it be said that Christ was the first one to rise from the dead? You have the one that Elijah raised from the dead by divine power, and Elisha, the Shunammite woman’s son. You have those in the gospels, for instance, the widow of Nain’s son. Yet not just here, but again in the epistles you have it that the Lord Jesus is spoken of as the first. Well, I think there is a two-fold emphasis here. First of all, Christ was the first one to rise by His own divine, almighty power, and then secondly, Christ was the first to rise from the dead and to rise to die no more, never to die again.

So, “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.” But beloved friends, the point here is not just this, not just that Christ was the first to rise and then at the last day His people will rise. But it is this: there is an intimate connection between the two. It is *because* Christ rose again that His beloved people in the last day will rise again to eternal bliss and blessedness in heaven. We firmly believe in a bodily resurrection, but it is *because* Christ died, *because* of what He accomplished, *because* He died for their sins, *because* He satisfied justice, *because* He opened up a new and living way to heaven. It is *because* He died. It is *because* He was buried. It is *because* He rose again. It is *because* His people have a union with His death and resurrection. It is *because* of this, on the grounds of this. It is not just a point of time that one day Christ arose and one day His people will rise. Christ ascended to heaven at His Father’s right hand, and at the last day His beloved people will rise again, body and soul to be re-united, and “so shall they ever be with the Lord.” But the one hangs on the other; one depends on the other.

So you notice the word Paul uses. He does not say, Christ the first, but he says, “Christ the firstfruits.” What were the firstfruits? In the Old Testament under the ceremonial law, the law of Moses, there had to be a special offering to the Lord, and that offering was called the firstfruits. Long, long before the harvest was gathered in, when any of the fruits began to show some sign of ripening, the sheaf had to be gathered and it had to be brought into the sanctuary and it had to be offered to the Lord in thanksgiving. In one way it was a thanksgiving for God’s goodness and mercy and for the blessing of the harvest, the promise that God gave to Noah after the flood, the bow in the cloud, a symbol of it, and the faithfulness of God and His mercy and His covenant. The firstfruits of the harvest, just a sheaf had to be gathered in. It was only one sheaf and it was offered before the Lord, but really it was a token, a symbol of the whole of that harvest which one day would be gathered in. Just one sheaf, the firstfruits, thanksgiving, offered to the Lord, but the symbol, the token that as the months went on there would be a harvest through God’s mercy and the whole of the harvest would be gathered in. That is what Paul was thinking of, what Paul was referring to.

“The firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.” Which means as surely as Christ died and rose again and entered into heaven, and now is exalted at the Father’s right hand, the firstfruits, so surely in that last great day the whole of His beloved people, those who have lain in the grave since Adam fell to the end of time, shall be raised again and they shall enter into eternal bliss and blessedness with Christ in heaven.

Now let us just linger here for a moment. We firmly believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. People say, How can this be accomplished? Well, Paul answers it at some length. The simplest thing seems to be this. He says, you take a bulb or a corm and probably it is in the autumn and you look at it and it does not seem to be much; it does not seem to be very beautiful. In fact, it looks rather ugly. It is planted in the ground, but then in the springtime there is a most beautiful flower. Now there is a perfect identity to this same plant. But we have these things “sown in corruption ... raised in incorruption ... sown in dishonour ... raised in glory.” When I first came to Bethel, the old people used to tell me that the old pastor’s wife was once very tried about the resurrection of the body, and she had a blessed revelation and view of it in that. She was

going out into the garden and she looked at this bulb that she had, this corn in her hand, and she thought, It does not look much; it looks rather ugly. And she had a view of what it would be in the spring time when it sprang up a glorious flower, and what the resurrection of the dead would be, and what her own resurrection would be.

“Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.” Some people say, Yes, but the martyrs were burnt with fire, and some have been lost at sea, and some have even been eaten by cannibals. Do we limit the power of God? Mr. Oliver Pack of Irthlingborough spoke to me on this point once, how he saw it, how easy it is with a great and almighty God to raise the dead, just as if you had a few little pieces on the palm of your hand, and how easily you could gather them together. We must never limit the greatness of God.

“Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.” But there is a very blessed, sacred truth here, and really it is the same point that the apostle makes in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He is speaking about heaven and he says, “Whither the Forerunner is for us entered.” It is the very same point as the firstfruits. “The Forerunner.” “Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, *even Jesus*,” once crucified, now risen, exalted, glorified. “Even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” “The Forerunner.” “The firstfruits.” It means as surely as the Saviour has entered heaven, so one day all His people shall enter there. That is the *ground* of your hope of heaven, and that is the *ground* of your security, and that is the *ground* of your eternal safety, despite all your weakness and your unworthiness and your helplessness and your sin. “Christ the firstfruits.” “Where Jesus is, there they must be.”

“Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.” It is like the old hymn:

“This I do find,
We two are so joined,
He can’t be in glory
And leave me behind.”

Do you believe it? “Christ the firstfruits,” the ground of your hope, the anchor ground of your hope. “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are

Christ's at His coming." "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus." That means where your hope is cast, where your anchor is cast, there one day through grace you must be. "Whither the Forerunner is for us entered." "Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming."

So the Lord Jesus very beautifully opened this up. "Let not your heart be troubled." Well, this morning perhaps it is about a lot of things. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me." O what a claim to Godhead there! "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Which to you in your troubles this morning means this: leave everything in My hands and all will be well there; all will be safe there. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Now that is Christ the firstfruits; that is the Forerunner. "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

"Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming." So we come to the vital point: who are these people? If Christ is the firstfruits, who are these people who have an interest in His death and resurrection? Who are these who shall be raised triumphantly and gloriously from the dead? Who are these who shall enjoy a blessed bliss of immortality? "They that are Christ's." A few years ago I saw it very clearly. This word was on my mind, and I thought, Well, this is for a funeral; we have not got a funeral. A day or two afterwards I was asked to take the funeral of a minister's wife down in Kent. She was a godly woman. I did not really know her, but I felt something of the power of this and spoke of it in my funeral address.

"Christ the firstfruits; afterward" – this is it – "they that are Christ's at His coming." So when you die and when Christ comes again as He surely will, and when you stand before His judgment seat, there will be only one thing that matters then, and it is this: do you belong to Christ or do you not? "They that are Christ's at His coming." I understand there is a grave somewhere in England and it has not even got the name of the person who died on it. It just has this one word: "Christ's" – belonging to Him; that is all that matters. I say this in much love and affection. Do not

take it for granted that you belong to Christ and do not take it for granted that all will be well with you in the great day. John Newton said, “Am I His, or am I not?”

“They that are Christ’s,” and only they that are Christ’s. There is a terrible resurrection for the wicked. We do not want that. “They that are Christ’s at His coming.” They were His from all eternity by His everlasting choice. They were His as loved with an everlasting love. They were His as they stood in eternal union with Him. They were His in covenant bonds. “They that are Christ’s.” Especially they were His by redemption as He laid down His life for them, as He shed His precious blood that they might be His, that they might never be lost, that they might be His eternally. He died for them; He rose again for them; He ascended into heaven for them. They are His. Eternally they shall be His, the purchase of His blood. That means they can never be lost.

But to put it very simply, if you have something at home and you have paid a lot for it, you will not easily let it be lost or broken. You will take great care over it. What does the Lord Jesus say? “Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price.” And what a price! “The price, His own heart’s blood.” May some of you have the sweet assurance of it this morning, despite all your sin and wretchedness and guilt. “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.”

“They that are Christ’s.” But then the time comes when Christ claims them as His own, because born into this world, they are “the children of wrath, even as others.” They belong to Christ in His eternal purposes and divine appointment and by redemption, but in their affections they belong to themselves and the world and sin and Satan. “Satan’s blind slave.” But there comes the appointed moment when Christ claims them as His own. Has He claimed you, has He claimed me as His own?

“The appointed time rolls on apace,
Not to *propose* but *call* by grace.”

“This soul I bought with blood,” the Lord Jesus says to sin, to Satan, to the law, to death and hell. “And now I claim him as My own.” It is that lost sheep wandering in the wilderness and He goes after it till He finds it, and claims it as His own, and brings it back to the fold.

That prodigal, He claims him as His own. How does He do it? I suppose many books could be written on that question and many sermons preached. Let me try to put it in one sentence. They are brought to a time and place in their life when *they cannot do without Him*. That is it. There may be this and that and all kinds of things, but when that time comes, if you are an object of God's eternal choice and His everlasting love, and if you are going to be amongst those who are Christ's at His coming, that moment arrives in your life, suddenly, or perhaps gradually, when you cannot do without Christ. It is the one thing that matters, and coming to points, you know whether this time has come in your life or it has not. There is too much of this no-man's-land religion in our chapels. But you have come to that point in your life:

“I must have Christ as All in all,
Or sink in ruin, guilt, and thrall.”

It is the only thing that matters. There might be things going on in the world and things going on in your family. You have a soul to be saved; you have to die; you have to meet your Maker; you are unfit; you are unprepared; you cannot save yourself; you must have Christ. And so you flee to Him for refuge. You confess your sin. You pray that He will save you. You ask Him to prepare you for heaven. You ask Him to deliver you from hell. You pray for an interest in His precious blood. So there you are, in His hands, in His arms. He has claimed you as His own. He has got you and will never let you go.

It is a wonderful thing to belong to Christ. “Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His loving breast.” These are the only ones who will stand in that last great day. That is the Holy Spirit's preparation for heaven, to be prepared through grace by the Holy Spirit as sinners, personally and savingly and experimentally to belong to Christ. There you are; you are safe in His hands. There you are, engraven on His heart. There you are; He is never going to lose you. There is not going to be a sheep or lamb missing in that last great day. There is not going to be a jewel missing from His crown. He says, “They shall be Mine ... in that day when I make up My jewels.”

“Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming.” Well, He is coming. It may be with those in this chapel He comes in the day of death before the day of His glorious second coming.

But He is coming again, not as He came to Bethlehem in weakness: He is coming in power and glory and majesty, “and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.” Can you, dare you say, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus”? He comes to judge the world in righteousness. O but when He comes, then the dead shall be raised, the righteous and the wicked, body and soul for ever united, and those still alive, in a moment they shall be changed, and together they will meet the Lord in the air. And the Word of God says, “And so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Beloved friends, it will be a wonderful mercy if that is true of you and me. And then the eternal bliss and blessedness of the redeemed for ever and ever in heaven singing the Saviour’s praises. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.”

“Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s” – and only they that are Christ’s – “at His coming.”