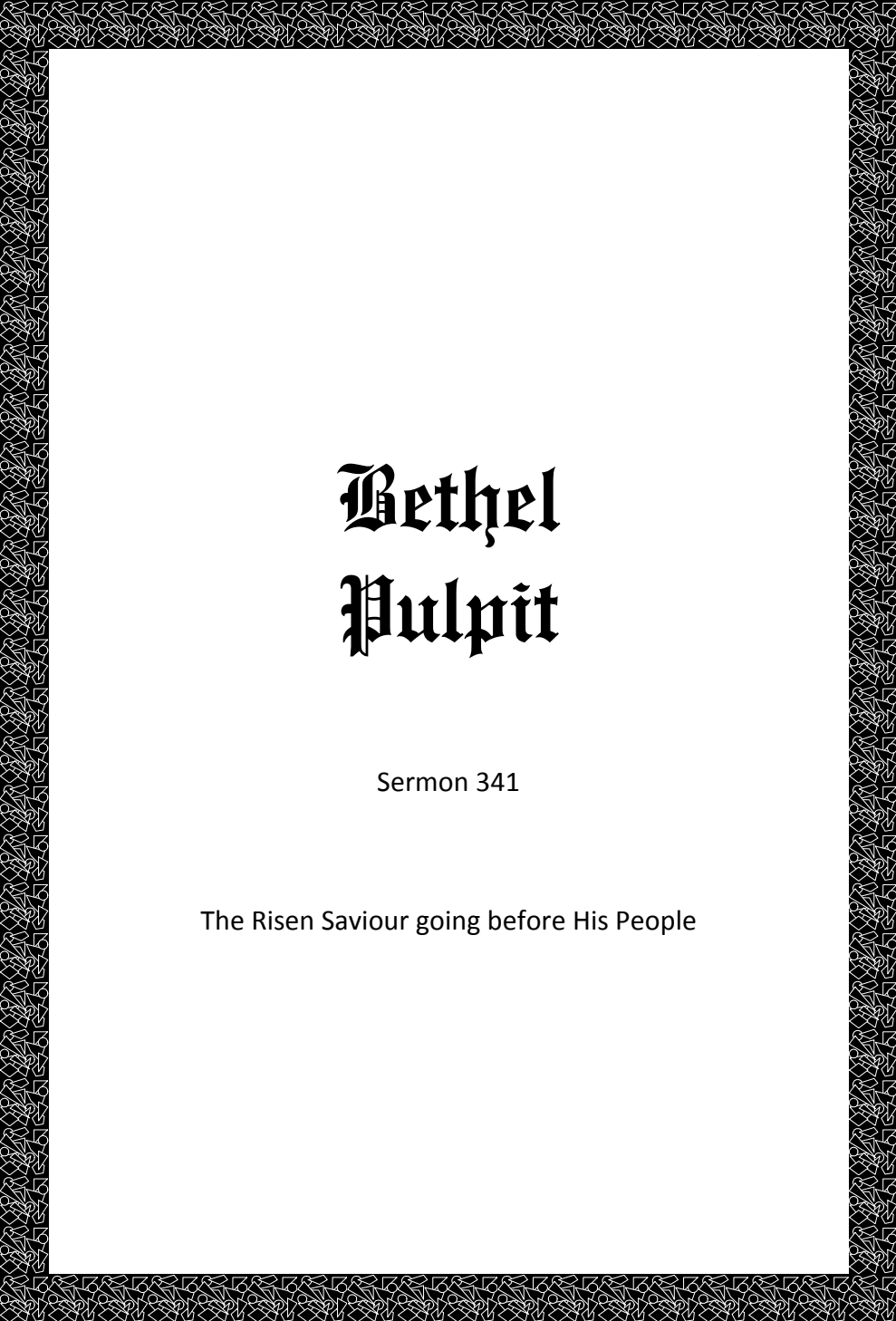




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 341

The Risen Saviour going before His People

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 6th January, 2013**

Text: *“And, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you” (Matthew 28. 7).*

This is the wonderful announcement of a risen Saviour, that “the Saviour lives no more to die.” “Vain the stone, the watch, the seal; Christ has burst the gates of hell.”

On the Friday preceding this, the Lord of life and glory had been crucified, delivered by wicked hands, and yet “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” He came to this earth with a gracious purpose, a covenant purpose, and on the cross at Calvary as He died, He fulfilled that purpose. He said, “No man taketh [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father.” And in dying on the cross, He made atonement for all the sins of all His people. He opened a way to heaven for them, a way of forgiveness. In His precious blood, the blood that He shed, there was a fountain opened to wash away the vilest of sins. And so He died a cruel death, but in dying He conquered, and He cried with a loud voice, “It is finished” – the work of salvation, the work of redemption complete. Now this is the ground of our hope, and may sinners this evening be blessed with living faith to look to Calvary and there to see in the cross of Christ all they seek, all they need.

And so He was buried, but the grave could not hold Him. What an announcement the angel made: “Come, see the place where the Lord lay”! It is empty; it is for ever vacated. “The Lord is risen indeed.” It was a wonderful announcement to those godly women, and then to those first disciples. We look back; we know the wonder of it, the purpose of it, but how their eyes were darkened. They knew not that He would rise from the dead, and it seemed to them as if Satan had triumphed, the powers of hell had triumphed. It was a dark day, that day after the Lord had been laid in the grave. Was their hoped finished? Had they been deceived?

And so we find, “In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.” The most they thought was to anoint the lifeless body of their Lord and Master, but there had been wonderful things happening. “Behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.” You say, Couldn’t the Lord Jesus, who rose by His divine, almighty power, have rolled away that stone? It had to be an honourable dismissal from the sepulchre that held Him. The days of His sorrow, His ignominy, were now ended and an angel must come from heaven to roll away the stone. “And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.”

And what of these godly women? They were constrained there by love. They were the last at the cross; they were the first at the empty grave. “And the angel answered and said unto the women.” We do not read that those godly women spoke one word, but “the angel answered,” and sometimes you do not speak a single word, but the Lord in love and mercy answers, because He knows what is going on in your heart. “The angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye.” No cause for fear now the Lord is risen triumphant from the dead. “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.” And the Lord in heaven knows everyone in this chapel this evening who has come seeking Jesus, seeking to find Him, seeking to know Him. And where there is one and another here this evening through grace, by faith, seeking Jesus, then the Lord still says, “Fear not ye.”

“Fear not ye: for 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. And go quickly, and tell His disciples.” It was these godly women who were first made messengers of the glorious truth of the resurrection, and they had the honour, the privilege of announcing it even to the apostles. “Tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.” So the Lord in love and mercy appointed a meeting place with His people, and He promised, “There shall ye see Him.” In the gospel according to Mark, it is not just, Go, tell My disciples that they shall go into Galilee and there they shall see Me, but, “Go ... tell His disciples *and Peter*.” We can only imagine what Peter, who denied his Lord and

Master, was thinking, was feeling. Am I still an apostle? Am I still among the brethren? Does the Lord still love me after all I knew and experienced and professed, and then denying Him with oaths and curses? “And Peter.” The wonderful, unchanging love of the Lord to His people! “Whom once He loves He never leaves, but loves him to the end,” despite all their sin and failure and backsliding. Peter received more than he ever could have hoped for. And do you sit in judgment on Peter, or do you this evening feel you have a heart like his? Do you sometimes say, and mean it,

“False to Thee, like Peter, I
Would fain like Peter, weep”?

The whole point of it is this: it is for the chief of sinners, “the vilest sinner out of hell, who lives to feel his need,” brought to repentance and godly sorrow and humble confession. “Go ... tell His disciples and Peter.”

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him.” Now it is a wonderful thing that the Lord appoints these spots and places where He promises to meet with His people. Here it was Galilee, and there was a mountain in Galilee that was specially appointed. There were five hundred brethren met there. We are often interested to think who they might have been. But He still appoints places. He will meet you at the mercy seat, the throne of grace. He has promised it.

“I to Thy mercy seat repair,
Since Thou hast said, ‘I’ll meet thee there.’”

He will meet you when you fall before Him in prayer. He will meet you in the house of God. He has promised it. He will meet you as you are reading His Word.

“There shall ye see Him.” Perhaps some of them thought they would never see Him again, and there are perhaps some of you here this evening and you feel, O that it were with you as in days past, when the candle of the Lord shone round about you and when you did see your Saviour; you saw Him so blessedly, and now your days of darkness are many, and you feel it is your benighted mind, your benighted soul. Behold, He still goes before you into Galilee, and there shall ye see Him. “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty.” You say, What about my days of darkness now? “Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.” The subject really on my spirit this evening is: *the risen Saviour going before His people*. As we have this word, “Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee” – behold, He goeth before you into this new year that lies before you, in this unknown way that lies before us. This is one of the divine certainties of the new year. “Behold, He goeth before you” – the risen Saviour – “into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.” It is a wonderful thing, the Lord of life and glory going before His people, His gracious presence with them.

So it was with Israel in the wilderness. The Lord went before them every step of those forty years in the wilderness, despite all their sins and backsliding and rebellion. “Behold, He goeth before you.” With them, they had the visible token of it. They had the pillar of cloud by day; they had the pillar of fire by night. The Lord went before them, and when they rebelled, and when it was Marah, and when they wanted to appoint a leader to take them back to Egypt, and when there was the golden calf, and when there was the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram and Korah, still the Lord went before them because He had promised. He brought them out that He might bring them in. And still He goes before His people in their pilgrimage, though there is not now a visible sign in the sky.

What did His gracious presence mean going before them in their pilgrimage? The supply of every need; the manna day by day; the water from the smitten rock; the overthrow of their enemies – the Egyptians on the banks of the Red Sea, and then the Amalekites, and then Og the king of Bashan. Moses valued this. He highly valued it – the Lord going before them. And He still goes before His people in their pilgrimage, and if your religion is real, you will value it. Wherever would you be without it? But there was that occasion when because of their sin the Lord threatened that no longer would He go before them, and Moses could not stand that, and neither will you as you face this new year. If it is just the fear of the unknown, if it is your pilgrimage, if there is some special, trying day, if it is your weakness: “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” “And He said” – this is the Lord going before His people in the wilderness – “And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.” So we have the Lord still with His people, His

gracious presence, and that gracious presence known in going before them. When the Lord met them in Galilee as promised here, when that meeting took place of the five hundred, He spoke specially to His immediate disciples and through them to His beloved people to the end of time, and He gave them that sweet assurance that He ever would go before them and that His gracious presence ever would be with them. “All power,” He said. This is the risen Saviour; this is the One who goes before you; this is the One who is with you. “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.” An almighty God and Saviour.

“Go ye therefore.” Of course, to His ministers it is go and preach “and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” But to all His people He says, “Go ye therefore,” in this unknown way, in this new year. Go forward into Galilee. Go in the way the Lord has appointed. But before He says, “Go,” He tells them who He is. He says, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.” And on the grounds of this, “Go ye therefore.” This is it: “And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” – the sweet assurance of the Lord’s abiding presence with His people not just in this new year, and not just to the end of their lives, but until time shall be no more. “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him.” Now this is a lovely truth, the Lord’s gracious presence with His people and the Lord ever going before them. We have it in a few places in Scripture, one particularly in the New Testament and one particularly in the Old. Now in the New Testament, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ specially speaks of going before His people *as the good Shepherd of the sheep*. You all know the custom of the eastern shepherd, that he goes before. He does not drive the sheep; he leads them. Apparently it is always so.

Perhaps some of you have come across this story. Only quite recently there was someone in Israel who had heard that a shepherd in Israel always goes before and always leads. It is so in every case. One day he saw a flock of sheep, and he saw what he thought was the shepherd behind them, driving them along. He could not understand how it fitted in. He thought he would enquire, so he took courage and went to this shepherd, as he thought, who was driving his sheep along, and said,

“Excuse me, but I always thought in Israel the shepherd led his sheep, and here you are, you are a shepherd and you are driving the sheep.” The man answered, “I am not the shepherd; I am the butcher.”

“When He” – the Saviour – “when He” – risen from the dead – “when He” – the good Shepherd of the sheep – “putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.” Now when the Lord first begins to deal with you in love and mercy, when He calls you by His grace and when He says in spirit, “Follow Me,” He puts you forth in the narrow way which leads to life, and He goes before you, and He ever will go before you, and He will never leave you until He brings you safely through.

“When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.” Sometimes the good Shepherd will put you forth in a special way of gracious exercise. “This is the way, walk ye in it.” It is the Lord putting you forth. “Ye have not passed this way heretofore.” It might be a pathway of trouble and sorrow, but, “when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.” It means you will not have to tread one single step but the Shepherd has trod it before, which means He knows and He sympathises and He understands and He cares.

“When He putteth forth” – what a word this: “His own sheep.” He loves them. They belong to Him by choice, loved with an everlasting love, by eternal union, by redemption, by calling. They are His; they always will be His, His own sheep. And He puts them forth, and when He puts them forth, His own sheep, He goeth before them. Why does He go before? Well, of course one thing is to lead them in the right way. He is leading them into the green pastures. He is leading them beside the still waters. That is what you want – the green pastures of the gospel, the still waters of His everlasting love. He is going before, and He is leading you there. But why does He go before them? To make sure that it is a good pasture and it is not some noxious, poisonous weed where they are going to feed. Why does He go before them? To see that there are no enemies or no robbers awaiting them. It is His loving care, His loving concern, His watchfulness of His sheep.

“Behold, He” – the risen Saviour, the great Shepherd of the sheep – “Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee.” So see that you are

following after Him. He says, "Follow Me." He says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." But see that you are following Him, not keeping in front of Him and bidding Him follow you.

"The way I walk cannot be wrong,
If Jesus be but there."

And it cannot be right if Jesus be not there.

"When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him." What a blessed union, the Shepherd and the sheep! And so in this Galilee that is before you, the unknown way, the new year, whatever it holds, or whatever it does not hold, and the things that are marked out for you which you perhaps fear, "Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him." That is, "He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." He will be with you to help and uphold and support and bless and bring you through.

"Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you." Well, that is the New Testament. What about the Old? "I will go before thee." Which brings back a lot of memories for me. It was forty-eight years ago today when I had come down from Lancashire for three months with a view to the pastorate here. There are not many people here this evening who were there that Lord's day. That was the text: "I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron." It was in much weakness and much fear and much trembling, and fearing we were mistaken, and not seeing any way out. Hasn't the Lord fulfilled that these forty-eight years! We have had some crooked things in the church of God, and in our lives and souls and experience and in our families, and we look back, and we see one by one the Lord has made those crooked things straight. But the word is not exhausted. It is as true now as it was then. It is as true for 2013 as it was for 1965.

"I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight." Now who can make that straight which the Lord has made crooked? And above all, what about all our sin and guilt and iniquity? There is only one way that can be made straight, and that is through the merit of the atonement

and the precious blood of Jesus that cleanses from all sin. But all these crooked things. “I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.” Which if words mean anything at all, I take to mean this: the Lord’s blessed ability to make a way where there is no way. Iron bars, brazen gates – no way through, no way over, no way round, no way underneath. The Lord says, “I will go before thee.” He has the key of every door. He says, “Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” When He shuts, none can open; when He opens, none can shut.

“Behold” – this year, the Galilee of the new year. “Behold He” – a risen Saviour – “goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him.” Now we wait to see this fulfilled at Bethel, one and another of you whose prayer is, “We would see Jesus.” Well, the promise, the fulfilment of it, this new year: “There shall ye see Him.”

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.” There is one other aspect of it: not just the risen Saviour going before His beloved people in the unknown way, but *the risen Saviour going before His people into heaven*, because He is risen and He is ascended. He has gone before His people into that Galilee above, and the promise to each one of them, every one of them is this: “There shall ye see Him.” “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.” But even now by faith they see Him there, seated on the throne, ever living, ever interceding, presenting the merit of His finished work, almighty to save. “There shall ye see Him,” by faith now and at last face to face.

“Behold He *has gone* before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him.” Every one of His people, all for whom He died. So He says, “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.” That is what that word means where the Lord Jesus is spoken of as *the Forerunner*. He is the One who has gone before. He has entered heaven, but He has gone before as the Representative to claim heaven for all His people.

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him.” “Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.” And if you

read that beautiful passage through in Hebrews chapter 6, it is speaking of the anchor ground of a sinner's hope. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." Now this is the anchor ground of hope: "Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus."

"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." People have asked, how does heaven need to be prepared for the people of God? They need to be prepared for heaven, but how does heaven need to be prepared for them? It seems the answer, the one thing that was lacking there: the presence of a once-crucified, now risen, exalted Saviour. That is the preparation for heaven. When He ascended triumphantly into heaven, heaven was prepared for His people. "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." It is that old hymn:

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

What a word this is, both for the new year, the Galilee of the new year, and then the Galilee of heaven!

"Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you."