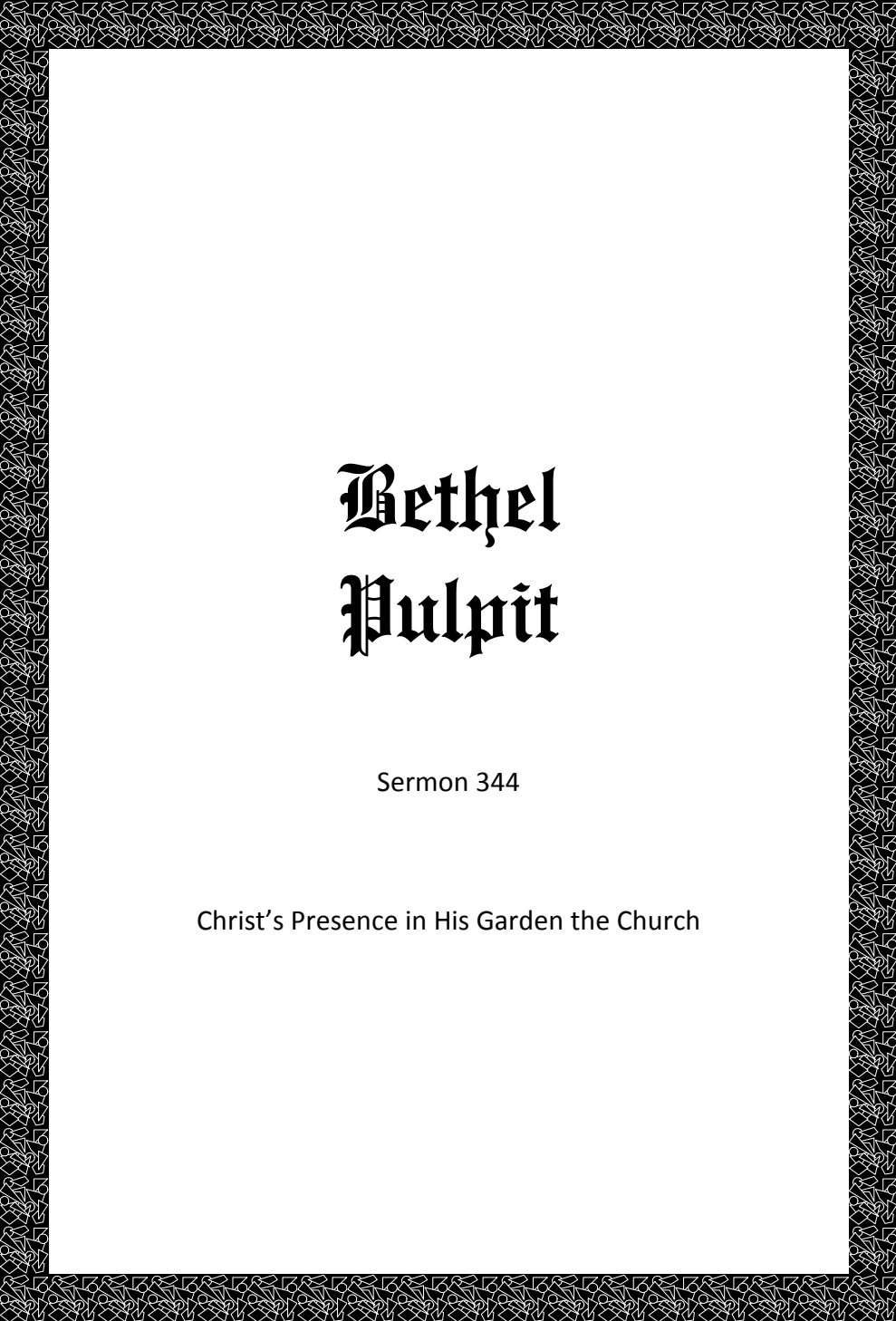




# Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 344

Christ's Presence in His Garden the Church

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,  
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,  
on Lord's day morning, 23rd February, 2014**

**Text:** *“Whither is thy Beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy Beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with thee. My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies” (Song 6. 1, 2).*

This beautiful book is a book of one theme: the mutual love between Christ and His church. How dearly does Christ love His poor, sinful, unworthy people – so dearly that He died for them. And led by His Spirit, how they are brought to love Him in return! So the theme is the love of Christ to sinners and theirs to Him.

Let us be very clear on one thing. Though the Song of Solomon is written in poetical language, allegorical language, figurative language, it is speaking of divine realities, of blessed realities, divine certainties, blessed certainties. I think you will find in the history of the church of God that in days of real spiritual prosperity this book has been very highly esteemed. In days of spiritual declension it has been neglected. I think also you will find the same in your soul's experience. In your best days, when you feel something of the love of Christ, union, communion with Him, you love to get into this book, but when your soul is dark and dry and dead and barren, then this is one of those books that you seem to keep away from.

Well, beloved friends, we have some glorious truths here this morning. I feel so burdened week by week that we may feel our interest in them. We do not want them to pass us by. We want to feel our interest in them. As we have been reminded recently with these three losses in our midst [three deaths in under a fortnight], we are not here for ever. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” We want to be right and to know these blessed realities in our souls.

Well, before us here in the Song of Solomon we have two questions. These two questions are vital questions and they are asked by those who are described as the “daughters of Jerusalem.” We have the Bridegroom, Christ. We have the bride, His beloved people. And then we have these daughters of Jerusalem. Who are they? Well, it seems clear

that they are *seeking, enquiring sinners*. And the first of the two vital questions they asked – and they asked these questions to the Lord’s people – “What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?” They want to be told who the Saviour is, what He is like, what He has done, why His people esteem Him so highly, love Him so dearly.

“What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?” Linger here, there are a few things. We do not find it so much these days, the young people coming to us and asking us to tell them about our Saviour, or to tell them how we were brought to know and love the Saviour, and I wonder how many of us who profess the Lord’s name are ready to give the same answer as the church gave here, to speak so beautifully and affectionately and so well of our Saviour and our Lord.

“What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?” It is that great question, “What think ye of Christ?” This is the question which weighs up all our religion as if in a pair of balances, and the result is that we are right or wrong eternally. “What think ye of Christ?” This is the test. O to be able to give a right answer!

“What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women.” These daughters of Jerusalem, these longing, seeking souls, see something attractive, something beautiful in the Lord’s people. They know the Lord’s people have got something they have not got. They contrast the bride, “Thou fairest among woman,” with others. Now seeking, longing souls looking on the people of God cannot see the root – that is deep in the heart – but they can see the fruit. And what kind of fruit do they see in us? Do you think young people, girls and boys, seeking souls, will look on us and say, “O thou fairest among women”? Now you cannot see the robe of imputed righteousness; you cannot see the justifying work of Christ; you cannot see the work of the Spirit in that sinner’s heart; but you can see the effect of the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the lives of the Lord’s people. I think some of us in our early days knew what this meant, to look on the Lord’s people and we could say, “O thou fairest among women.” We could see their blessedness as they stood eternally complete in Christ. But do these seeking souls see things like that in you? Do they see things like that in me? Do they want to come to us? Do they want to ask questions? Do they want to ask our help? Are we able to give it? Are we able to speak well of Christ? O these questions of the daughters of Jerusalem!

“What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy Beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?” And O what a wonderful answer she gave! What a wonderful answer! She can speak well of Him. She says He is “the Chiefest among ten thousand.” It has often been pointed out, beloved friends, there is no such word as *chiefest* in the English language. Something can be the *chief*, but she says He is the *Chiefest* – “the Chiefest among ten thousand.” “My Beloved is white and ruddy.” “All human virtues, all divine.” “White and ruddy” – His pure, spotless, sacred humanity, the precious blood that He shed. “My Beloved is white and ruddy, the Chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold” – that is, precious, those temple that bled, that were once crowned with thorns. What did we sing just now?

“Thy temples, Immanuel, bled,  
That mine might with glory be crowned.”

“His head is as the most fine gold, His locks are bushy, and black as a raven.” Now when John saw Him on the Isle of Patmos, he saw His hair white as snow, but he saw Him then as the eternal I AM, the Ancient of Days. But here she sees Him in all the glory of His eternal youth. “His locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set.” That loving look of compassion – not angry, not red, not staring, not vindictive. It is tender compassion. “His cheeks” – the appearance of His face, His smiling face – “are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: His lips,” that speak the promises, that once spoke on the cross of Christ, “It is finished” – “His lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh. His hands” – those hands that were nailed to the cross – “are as gold rings set with the beryl: His belly” – His sacred side that was pierced by the cruel spear – “His belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.”

But then the end seems different. “His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold.” It seems something different here. It is how solid our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ stands in His covenant engagement and in His faithfulness and in His promises. “His mouth is most sweet: yea, He is altogether lovely.” And this is the bride’s conclusion of her testimony, and it is a good testimony: “This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” It is a

wonderful thing if we can bear a testimony, even if it is only a little one, and say who the Saviour is and what He has done for us and what He means to us. “This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”

The last time our dear old friend Fred Warburton got out to chapel at Manchester, Tim Parish was preaching, and in the evening he spoke of Christ as the Friend of sinners. When he came out of the pulpit, Fred went up to him and said, “He has been my Friend for over seventy years and I don’t think He will leave me now!” Now can you bear witness to this, that you have a Friend, the Friend of sinners, and can you say, “This is *my Friend*, O ye daughters of Jerusalem”?

Well, that is the first question that these living, longing, enquiring, seeking souls ask. They want to know about Christ, and the bride, the church of God, gives this beautiful answer, this glorious answer.

The second questions follows, and it is this: this glorious Christ – how can I find Him? Where is He? I want Him for myself. I want to know Him. He is your Saviour; I want Him to be my Saviour. But where is He? How can I find Him? So this is the second question, and these are the questions of grace, the questions of a living soul. “Whither is thy Beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy Beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with thee.” Well, where has He gone? We know that He went to Calvary, and we know what He did there when He shed His precious blood and died, but we know also that He rose again and ascended and that He has gone to heaven, and there He sits and there He lives and there He reigns eternally. There He says, “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.”

“Whither is thy Beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy Beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with thee.” Now I wonder how many there are here this morning who are in that exercise of soul. You want to find Christ, and because you want to find Christ, you are seeking Christ and you cannot be satisfied until you find Him. “Whither is thy Beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy Beloved turned aside? that we may seek Him with thee.”

Now this is the answer. She knows where He is to be found. “My Beloved is gone down into His garden” – that is the gospel church here on earth; that is the gospel church in her solemn and sacred assemblies. Now that is where Christ is to be found. I wonder if that is why you come to chapel, that you might find the Saviour, that you might meet with Him. “My Beloved is gone down into His garden.” Of course, this is allegorical language, figurative language. But let me give it to you twice now in very plain language, one from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament, where the Lord tells us where He has gone and where He may be found. First of all the Old Testament: “In all places where I record My name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.” That is clear, isn’t it! And then the New Testament: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there *am I* in the midst.” “My Beloved is gone down into His garden,” to meet with these longing, seeking souls. He knows that they are after Him, they are seeking Him, because He has put His grace in their heart. They are seeking to find Him, but He has come down into His garden that He might find them!

And where are they going to find Him in the house of God? Well, in His Word, in the preaching, in the glorious gospel of the grace of God. Now longing, seeking, enquiring souls, as you feel your need and your sin and your unworthiness, and you want forgiveness, you want to be made right, you want to be ready for the great day, you are seeking to find Christ. Now He has made Himself findable, and He has made Himself findable in the gospel, and unworthy, lost, guilty sinners are welcome to seek Him and find Him in the gospel, because the gospel comes right where they are and the gospel tells them what they need, and the gospel promises it for them.

“The Saviour died, and by His blood  
Brought rebel sinners near to God;  
He died to set the captives free;  
And why, my soul, why not for thee?”

And this is where these longing souls are to seek Him – to seek Him in His house; to seek Him in the gospel. He has promised to be present there. He has promised to reveal Himself there. O have you ever found the Saviour in the house of God? Have you ever been sad because you cannot find the Saviour in the house of God? But this is where He is to be sought and

where He is to be found, as He reveals Himself, as He makes the place of His feet glorious.

“My Beloved is gone down into His garden.” So we find that the church of God on earth – His people, the assemblies of His people – is compared to the *garden of the Lord*. We read of it this morning in the fourth chapter: “A garden inclosed is My sister, My spouse.” I take it in all its simplicity a garden is usually a little piece that is separated from everything around, with the whole point that it might be fertile, that plants and flowers might grow there. What does our hymnwriter say?

“A little spot enclosed by grace,  
Out of the world’s wide wilderness.”

The Lord Jesus says, “His garden” – His beloved people, His by eternal choice, His by redemption, His by calling.

“His garden.” And it is a garden enclosed. There is a wall of His sovereign, eternal love that surrounds His beloved people, and there is another wall, a wall of separation, a wall of difference from the world which lieth in wickedness. “The garden of the Lord.” In that garden there are many plants of the Father’s right hand planting. Some of them are plants of beauty; some of them are aromatic plants with a sweet savour; some of them are fruitful trees. But it is the Lord’s garden and He delights to come down into His garden, to visit His garden, and that is what we want when we are meeting for worship. We want our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to come down into His garden.

“More frequent let Thy visits be,  
Or let them longer last.”

And it is with delight that He comes into His garden. To think of it – poor, unworthy sinners, but it is with delight that He comes into His garden, because He loves His people dearly with an everlasting love. He died for them, and He is pleased with their praises and their thanksgiving and their worship and their obedience; He is pleased with their poor returns.

“My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices.” Now that is a beautiful garden where there are beds of spices, and the point is this: there is such a sweet fragrance. O that is what the great Head of the church delights in, when He comes down into His garden, when He finds it

a bed of spices, when there is the sweet fragrance in the hymns that we sing, and there *is* a sweet fragrance in them, isn't there? And in the preaching as it exalts the Lamb once slain. "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish" – that sweet savour ascending to heaven, and this is what delights the great Head of the church when He comes down, and how pleased He is with His people's poor returns, and they are poor returns, but He is pleased with them.

Really, there is one word which beautifully explains all this: "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." These living, longing souls as they come to the house of God find it such a sacred delight, but we often forget this: that it is a sacred delight for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to come down on the Lord's day and to meet with His people. When they are found "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," it is His sacred delight as well as their sacred delight.

"My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices." We read that prayer: "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out" – when the Lord comes into His garden and when the Holy Spirit graciously works and the spices begin to flow and there is love and there is gratitude and there is humility and there is repentance, and "every grace is active here."

"My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens." I do not take this to mean that He feeds His people. As the great Shepherd of the sheep, He does feed His people, but I take it rather to mean that with sacred delight when He comes into His garden He Himself feeds. That is, "For the joy" – this joy of being with His beloved people – for this joy "that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

"My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." O what a mysterious thing that the Lord Jesus looks on His poor, sinful people and He sees them as lilies! You know what a lily is. It is a thing of beauty; it is a thing of such sweet fragrance; it is a thing of purity. Did you notice that the Lord Jesus says, "I am the Lily"? "I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys." And immediately afterwards He says, "As the lily among thorns, so is My love

among the daughters.” The people of God and every sinner saved by grace, a lily among thorns.

There are one or two things there. Sometimes you will be among thorns in this: you will have a thorny pathway, and sometimes the thorns will prick you, and sometime they will cut you, and something they will wound you. But really what the Lord is saying here: no-one can estimate the difference which the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ sees between His own beloved people and the world. He says *they* are the lily, and *they* are the thorns. O what a difference there is, and you can hardly think of a greater difference; you can hardly think of a greater contrast: a lily and thorns. And yet in your heart, as you are taught of the Spirit of God, you feel you are more like the thorn than like the lily. This is what a sinner saved by grace is in Christ: as pure as the lily.

What is it? A sinner forgiven, a sinner washed in the Saviour’s blood, a sinner completely clothed in His perfect obedience, a sinner in whom the Lord Himself can see neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing, a sinner the Lord looks on and says, “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” “I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters.”

But here we are told that sometimes the Lord Jesus when He comes down into His garden, He gathers a lily, and what a beautiful way this is of explaining the death of a believer! I do not know whether you have ever noticed this. In the New Testament we have this word concerning the Lord Jesus: that as “Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus.” You read that Jesus *died*, but in the rest of the New Testament, you do not read much about God’s people dying; you read of them sleeping in Jesus. “If we believe that Jesus died” – and His was a cruel death – “Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”

“Asleep in Jesus! Blessèd sleep,  
From which none e’er awakes to weep.”

There are some most beautiful expressions that the Lord in love and mercy uses for the comfort of His people. He says, “I will come again, and receive you unto Myself.” He said, “The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” “Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away.” These

beautiful expressions! But this to me seems very, very beautiful: the death of a believer, the Lord Jesus coming down in His garden to take the purchase of His sufferings and pain to be with Him for ever with no more pain or suffering or sorrow. “My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.” So lovingly, so kindly, with His own gracious, almighty hand, that hand that was once pierced for them, to hold them safe, to take them securely to heaven.

“My Beloved is gone down into His garden ... to gather lilies.” Now that is what has been happening here. We believe this is the garden of the Lord, and I do not think we are deceived – this is the garden of the Lord. But then the Lord has a perfect right to those who are His from all eternity, whom He loved long before we ever loved them. And,

“Christ will gather in His own  
To the place where He is gone.”

“Give the Saviour, without grudge,  
The purchase of His pain.”

“My Beloved is gone down into His garden ... to gather lilies,” to take them into that garden Paradise above, to bloom there eternally, where

“Everlasting spring abides,  
And never-withering flowers;  
Death, like a narrow sea, divides  
This heavenly land from ours.”

O to see death in the death and resurrection of Jesus – the sadness, the sorrow, but no sting, no bitterness. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” There is no bitterness, no sting in the heavenly Gardener gathering that beautiful lily in love and clasping it to His bosom and taking it to be with Him for ever and ever. “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Well, beloved friends, may there be many here asking the two great questions: “What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?” and, “Whither is thy Beloved gone?” But that is not the end. See in His beauty, His glory, the suitability, the one thing needful, to see Him and not be satisfied till we find Him.

“My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the beds of spices,  
to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.”