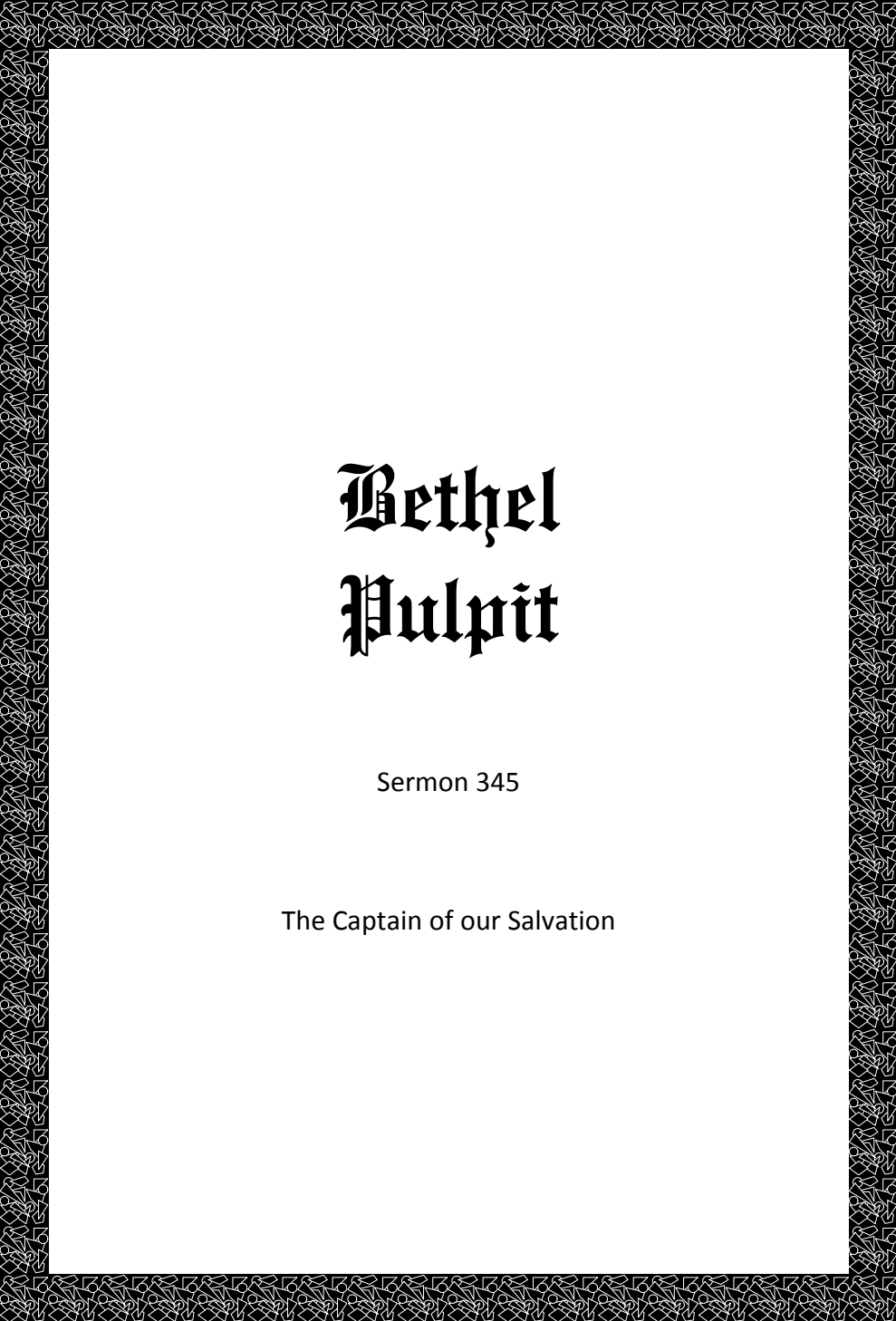




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 345

The Captain of our Salvation

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 30th March, 2014**

Text: *“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a Man over against him with His sword drawn in His hand: and Joshua went unto Him, and said unto Him, Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries? And He said, Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto Him, What saith my Lord unto His servant? And the Captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so” (Joshua 5. 13-15).*

After forty years wandering in the wilderness, God's ancient people at last had been brought through Jordan and set foot in the Promised Land, and immediately there was a terrible difficulty and danger before them. They knew there was going to be fighting; they knew there were going to be battles. Here was Jericho, a great, walled, impregnable city, but unless they took it, it would always be behind them as a source of danger in their campaign. It was absolutely necessary right at the outset of the conquest of the Promised Land that Jericho should be overthrown, but it was a complete impossibility.

You can understand the dreadful weight that rested on Joshua's shoulders as the leader of God's ancient people Israel. It seems here that in his trouble and in his doubt and in his fear he had gone out all alone to have a look what Jericho was like and what the walls were like. Was it possible to scale them, to undermine them? What possible hope was there for him? What hope was there for Israel? What should they do? It was a time of dreadful perplexity, a time of dreadful need. There we see Joshua with his head down, weighed down with all this responsibility and all this anxiety and not knowing how to act or what to do.

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked,” and there he saw a Warrior standing in the pathway with His sword drawn. It must have been to him something of a shock. “Behold, there stood a Man over against him with His sword drawn in His

hand.” It is clear Joshua did not know who He was or what He was doing, but being a courageous man, he went up to Him and enquired who He was. He wondered whether He was an Israelite or a Canaanite, or which side He was on. “Joshua went unto Him, and said unto Him, Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries?” He got a very striking answer. “He said, Nay.”

It is very clear that this Man with the sword drawn in His hand was the Son of God in one of those pre-incarnation appearances. You remember in bodily form He appeared to Abraham, and He appeared to Gideon, and here He appears to Joshua. It is very clear that this was not some created angel; it is very clear that this was the Son of God. Why do we say that? Because Joshua fell down on his face and worshipped Him, and this Man with the drawn sword received it. Now no godly man and no created angel would ever do that. Worship is reserved for God alone.

“Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship.” He realised who this was. He was met face to face with the Son of God and it was confirmed more when the Lord said to him, “Loose thy shoe from off thy foot.” Moses did at the burning bush – a mark of reverence for the presence of the Most High God. “The place whereon thou standest is holy.” It was Canaan, at that time belonging to the heathen, but it is the Lord’s presence that makes a place holy. “The place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.”

Now who was this glorious Person, this Man with the sword drawn in His hand? “Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries? And He said, Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.” The Captain of our salvation. And as you must have noticed, we have this name of the Lord appearing again and again right through holy Scripture, that the Lord Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. “As Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.” There is something beautiful. He had come for Israel’s deliverance, but He had come to answer all Joshua’s problems. He had come to deal with his case. He had come to oversee the overthrow, the conquest of Jericho. He was going to perform it without Joshua having to fight a single blow.

“As Captain of the host of the Lord am I *now* come.” *Now*, Joshua; *now*, when you are wondering whatever to do; *now* when you are in this crisis; *now* when you feel your helplessness. And beloved friends, that is just how the Lord always comes and how He still comes. Perhaps

there are some of you here tonight something like Joshua. You have some responsibility resting on you and it is too heavy for you; you cannot manage it. It may be a problem you have. It may be a difficulty. It may be something with your sins and your soul and eternity. It may be in the church of God. It may be in your family. It may be in your business. It may be in your relationship with other people. It may be your health. It may be the health of those you love. It may be the trouble you are in. And this is the time when the Lord delights to come. We sing sometimes.

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

“Now.”

He said, “As Captain of the host of the Lord am I *now* come.” In a two-fold sense He was Captain of the host of the Lord. That is, He was over the whole of the armies of Israel, in control and leading them all to victory. Of course, He could not answer that question, Are you on our side? He was not just a soldier on Joshua’s side, under Joshua’s jurisdiction; He was Captain of the whole host of Israel. But then secondly, He was the Lord of hosts. He was Captain of a “host of angels, bright and glorious.” He was Captain even of a host of devils who must obey Him. He was Captain of a host of circumstances. “All creatures obey His command.” He is the One who is almighty. He is the One who is above all things. He is the One in complete control. And He is still the Captain of His people’s salvation.

“Art Thou for us, or for our adversaries? And He said, Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto Him, What saith my Lord unto His servant?” He was in a posture of humility and dependence and seeking the guidance and the help and the blessing and especially the direction at this time of this glorious Man with the drawn sword in His hand, the Captain of our salvation.

Now then, beloved friends, this is a vital question, and may it ever be a question in our hearts, and may it ever be the posture in which our lives are lived: “What saith my Lord unto His servant?” Because if our religion is real, if we are true Christians, washed in the Redeemer’s blood, Jesus is our Lord and we are His servants. The wonderful privilege of it! I

felt it once: “For ye serve the Lord Christ.” O what a privilege! If a person is a servant of Lord Someone or Lord Someone Else, they think it is a wonderful honour, but ye, unworthy sinners, “Ye serve the Lord Christ.” The privilege of it, and yet the responsibility of it! “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price.” The Lord Jesus is not just your Saviour. If He is your Saviour, He is your Lord, the Lord of your life to order all things. It is for us to seek to walk in obedience to Him, but it is for us to seek to know His holy will as revealed to us in the Word of God.

If our religion is real, this is the relationship. He is our Lord and we are His servants, and so we have that word almost as Scripture ends: “His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads” – which means that people will see and know who they belong to. I have often said it: if a person came in chapel tonight with a black mark or a red mark on his forehead, everybody would see it. He might have a mark on the palm of his hand; no-one could see it. If your religion is real, it will be seen. It will be seen by the people of God, it will be seen by the world, and it will be seen by the Saviour. “His name shall be in their foreheads.”

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” Are there any of you here in this posture this evening? You could not be in a better posture, a more blessed posture – prostrate, helpless at the Saviour’s feet, looking to Him, depending on Him, enquiring of Him, asking your way to Zion with your face thitherward, not wanting to go your own way or speak your own words or make your own decisions. “What saith my Lord unto His servant?” It is a posture, an attitude we should be in all the time, but we are not always there. Sometimes we do something and perhaps there is not much prayer, and perhaps we make this decision – we think it will be most comfortable for us.

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” One way in which we should come with this enquiry: when trouble comes in our life, or difficulties, or perplexities. Now do not seek for those troubles, but when they come, what is the Lord’s voice in them? Is there something He is telling us? Is there something that He is correcting? Is there a stirring up of our nest? Is this the Lord’s loving chastisement? In these things which have come into my life, “What saith my Lord unto His servant?” Left to ourselves, we come into trouble and the first thing we do is pray to the

Lord to get out of it. Let us be clear, there is nothing wrong in praying to the Lord to get out of our troubles, but I am not sure it should be the first thing. “What saith my Lord unto His servant?” And then again this should be our question, seeking to know and do the Lord’s will. Sometimes in providence, often in your family, thinking of the Apostle Paul: “What wilt Thou have me to do?” Thy will, not mine, be done.

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” Well, it may be some of you will have to go home with this word this evening and think about your plans and your purposes and your thoughts and your decisions, for the Lord to decide. “What saith my Lord unto His servant?” And then to listen, to listen in His Word, to listen to the preaching, to listen when you are in prayer for an answer to this question – it is an important question – “What saith my Lord unto His servant?”

Well, the immediate answer that Joshua received to us seems rather strange. “The Captain of the Lord’s host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.” Was it to confirm to him who the Speaker is, that He was the Son of God? Was it to test his obedience? But whatever it was, immediately we read this – it is a remarkable word – “And Joshua did so.” You say, Was that all that the Captain of the Lord’s host had to say to Joshua? A lot of the old divines are very strong there should not have been a chapter division here, because if you go on to the next chapter, the Captain of the Lord’s host is telling Joshua a lot of things he has to do. He is saying a lot of things to His servant. Really what he said was solving Joshua’s problems, and it was answering all his difficulties, and it was granting that sweet assurance as he stood there with that drawn sword. It was there on Joshua’s side and it was there on Israel’s side. It was a clear token of victory.

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” Well, He did not say much at first, but He said a lot after. And really across the whole of chapter 6 you can read two Scriptures. One is this: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” And the other: “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” Perhaps Joshua had been thinking of carnal weapons. He could not see how they could avail. But he had to learn this: the weapons of his warfare were not carnal. They almost seemed foolish.

We read in the New Testament, “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,” and here it seemed by foolishness that the city of Jericho, that impregnable city, was going to be overthrown and destroyed.

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” It must have been a surprise, a shock to Joshua. He had to do a strange thing. Really he had to make himself a fool in the sight of Israel and he had to make himself a fool in the sight of the Canaanites. You think of it, seven priests blowing the seven rams’ horn trumpets, followed by the holy ark of God, and then some of the soldiers in front, some behind and going round that city once, and the seventh day they went round seven times, and the seventh time: “Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city.” It was the Captain of their salvation who was going to do it all. He was not holding that drawn sword in the air before Joshua as some people would make a display of themselves. It was an evident token to him that victory was going to be with Joshua and it was going to be with the people of God.

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” Well, He said things that no human could have thought up. He did move in a mysterious way, but Joshua obeyed and he was blessed in the obedience of faith. I do not know whether you noticed one thing as we read the chapter. (I do hope you do notice things when we read the chapter.) There was such an emphasis on the ark of the covenant, the holy ark of God, with the overshadowing cherubim and the mercy seat sprinkled with blood, the token that the Lord was in the midst of His people, and He was with them on the ground of mercy and He was with them on the ground of sprinkled blood. We keep reading about the ark, and in one of the verses you would have thought it might have said that the priests and the Levites and the soldiers all encompassed the city, but it just says this: that “the ark of the Lord compassed the city” (verse 11). That was the important thing. That was what Israel had to know. It was because the Lord was gracious among them that victory was to be theirs, and it was to be to the praise and honour and glory of God.

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” Well, beloved friends, in recent days I spoke to you on one occasion of giants, David going against the giant. “I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts.” And I said then it was a real giant, not an imitation giant, and I said then that David

did not know the end of the story; we do. He seemed to be facing death and destruction, going against the giant, and I spoke of this, that many in our congregation have things before you rising up like giants. And then I spoke to you about mountains. “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” And I said some of you, many of you might have mountains before you. So giants, and mountains. Well, this evening many of you might have before you something like the city of Jericho – something in your way, something hedging up your path, something you feel is going to destroy you, something which stops you from going forward, some terrible obstacle in your way, some case which is impossible, something which you fear – the city of Jericho before you.

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” Well, He says a lot of things in love and mercy, but in all its simplicity, He told them that all this was in His hands and *He* was going to be with them and *He* was going to deliver them. Now what is your city of Jericho you have before you? “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.” Is it something in the unknown way? Or is it some person you have to deal with? Or is it at the end, at the hour and article of death? Is it eternity? Is it the judgment day? “What saith my Lord unto His servant?” It was as if He said to Joshua, Leave it all in My hands and all will be right, and all will be well. But you cannot do it yourself, Joshua.

“Cease from your own works, bad or good,
And wash your garments in My blood.”

“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. 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.”

The Lord’s blessed ability to perform miracles for His people, to deliver them in the trying hour, to be with them, to help them, to bring them safely through. O when Joshua was looking at the walls of Jericho, before he saw the glorious Man with the drawn sword he must have been in black despair. But “now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing,” but it is not in Joshua’s hands and it is not in his own power, his own ability, his own forethought, his own plan. It is all this glorious Man. He has taken over from Joshua. It is a wonderful thing when the Lord takes

over from you. He had taken the whole case out of Joshua's hands. He was going to deal with it Himself, and all He told Joshua to do was to obey and to give the commandment. "'Tis mine to obey, 'tis His to provide." That word still stands: "Commit thy way unto the Lord trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."

"What saith my Lord unto His servant?" But the great thing here, this view of this glorious Man, the Man with the drawn sword, the Captain of our salvation. Of course, it speaks of a conflict. He would not have a drawn sword for nothing. There was a conflict. There was going to be a conflict. They were going to be victorious in it. And the Captain of our salvation still stands with that drawn sword in His hand to remind us there is a conflict.

I mention that conflict just in two ways. First of all, the conflict of the church of God that there has been in all ages, the conflict of the church with the world and its opposition and its allurements and with the flesh and with the dreadful opposition of Satan, and it seems that Satan and the world and the flesh are so much more powerful than the poor, suffering church of God. There is a conflict going on today in England and in the world. There has been since Adam fell. We have it opened up in the Book of the Revelation. You young people, girls and boys, you children, as you look at things around, it may seem that Satan is triumphing, but he never will. May you tonight view the glorious Captain of our salvation, Christ, and may you see Him with that drawn sword in His hand. "He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet." That means that that drawn sword of the Captain of our salvation will not return to its sheath until every enemy be overthrown and He reigns eternally, King of kings and Lord of lords, for He says, "Upon this Rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It is not Satan going to triumph; it is not the world. The cause of Jesus Christ is a victorious cause. O that we might see Him, this glorious Man with the drawn sword in His hand!

But then you see secondly, personally. If our religion is real, we have a conflict. From the moment the Lord deals with us there is the battle, there is the fight. There is so much about it in the New Testament. "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." And it is not like people singing joyfully, "Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war."

It is in secret. It is indwelling sin. It is the awful power of unbelief. It is Satan with his temptations. It is our hardness of heart. It is our deadness of spirit. Now this is the conflict.

“But has He not His promise passed,
That thou shalt overcome at last?”

May you see Him when Satan assails, when you feel down and when you feel helpless, and when you are plagued by so much in your own heart and life that is wrong. May you see this glorious Man, and may you see Him with that drawn sword that is going to overthrow every foe and cause you to stand at last.

“What saith my Lord unto His servant?” He has some blessed things to say, but really those blessed things can be sweetly summarised in one word: *victory*. Now there is a word on my mind to close. This is it, in the hymn on the Captain of our salvation, “My Captain sounds the alarm of war”:

“In Him I hope; in Him I trust;
His bleeding cross is all my boast;
Through troops of foes He’ll lead me on,
To victory and a victor’s crown.”