

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 352

The Man Whose Name is the Branch

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 22nd December, 2013**

Text: *“And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the Man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord: even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zechariah 6. 12, 13).*

One of the very wonderful things concerning the coming of the Saviour into this sinful world and His birth at Bethlehem is the way that all this was foretold in the Old Testament. There was a godly remnant expecting Him to come. This evening, to remind you of this interesting and important subject, I read to you two of the well-known prophecies (Isaiah 9. 1-7; Micah 5. 1-5). One told us clearly where the Saviour would be born: “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” The other prophecy told us that there would be a Child born, but He would be a Son given. He was the Son of God before He was a Child born. “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

These many prophecies, these many promises of the Lord's coming, and how the ancient church longed for their fulfilment! “Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence!” And the Lord was blessedly faithful to every promise and every prophecy – the faithfulness of God. There were those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem, there were those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel, and they were not disappointed. One of the wonderful truths of Scripture and one of the best evidences of its infallibility is how these ancient prophecies and promises were fulfilled to the very detail in the coming of the Saviour.

Now what I have read to you this evening was a foretelling of the Saviour's birth and His office and His glorious work. But beloved friends, this is not just a prophecy, and it is not just a promise, and it is not one of those many visions. Here is something that actually happened. The prophet Zechariah was told to go down to the house of Josiah, the son of Zephaniah, and some visitors had just come from Babylon to visit Jerusalem, and they had brought gold and silver. The prophet was told to take this gold and silver and make crowns out of it, and then he had to place these crowns on the head of Israel's high priest, Joshua, and then he had to speak these wonderful words. It was a real happening, but it was typical; it was prophetic; it was foretelling Christ. As the prophet crowned the high priest, put these crowns of gold and silver on his head, he had to say, "Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place." It is very clear that this is a promise of the Saviour's coming and His office and His work.

Now there are many well-known names of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. You children could tell me some of them. We speak of Him as the Saviour. We speak of Him as the Shepherd. But this is an unusual name given to Him: *the Branch*. Let us be clear, it appears quite a lot in the Old Testament. You have it in two different places in Isaiah; you have it in two different places in Jeremiah; you have it in two different places in Zechariah. So it is not a name just casually applied to the coming Saviour; it is a name given to Him again and again.

Now what are we to understand by what seems to us such a strange and such an unusual name being given to the Babe of Bethlehem? We can understand Immanuel; we can understand Lord; we can understand Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. "The Branch"? I think the best way to understand it is as the Lord Himself explains it here. He is called The Branch because "*He shall grow up out of His place.*" The Lord Jesus did not descend from heaven in glory and might and power attended with all the holy angels with Him. One day He will in His second coming when He comes to judge the world in righteousness, but He did not come like that. He grew up out of His place. "The Branch." "He shall grow up before Him," says Isaiah, "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." Now this is the meaning.

“The Man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place.” Now this is pointing to Bethlehem; this is pointing to the incarnation; this is pointing to the Saviour’s birth. And it speaks of His humility, that He came so quietly. It speaks of His poverty. “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor.” “The Man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place.” That place was Bethlehem. That is the place where He was born. “And He shall grow up out of His place.” It speaks of Nazareth. “He shall grow up out of His place.” The boyhood of the Lord Jesus. “He shall grow up.” We read this morning that He grew in stature and He grew in wisdom. We have Bethlehem here. We have Nazareth here. We have the Lord Jesus in His infancy. We have Him in His boyhood.

“His name is The Branch,” growing up out of His place. It speaks of His real humanity. “He shall grow up out of His place. “His name is The Branch.” There is something very beautiful about the humility of the Lord Jesus, that He took not upon Him the form of glorious angels, or He came not as a mighty king to reign, but we have that expression, the meek and lowly Jesus. “He shall grow up out of His place.” The Branch. So you see something of the meaning of it. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation.” He was “found in fashion as a man.” This is “the Man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place.”

Incidentally in passing, though I do not want to labour this point, they say that the name *The Branch* and the name *Nazareth* in the original Hebrew are more or less the same. Because that scripture that closes Matthew 2 has puzzled a lot of people where it says that He grew up in Nazareth “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” Wherever is there a scripture, “He shall be called a Nazarene”? But the godly commentators tend to think the reference is to this: “The Man whose name is The Branch.” It is almost the same as saying, the Man whose name is the Nazarene.

So this word was not spoken of Joshua who was high priest of Israel at that time. He has long since been dead. None of these glorious things were ever fulfilled in Him, good and gracious man though he was.

So this was something which actually took place, but yet it was used as a beautiful type, a beautiful illustration of this glorious Person the Son of God, who in matchless condescension should come and who should be born at Bethlehem.

“Behold the Man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place.” That word, “Behold the Man,” is the very same word that Pilate by divine authority, not according to his own counsel and will, but that Pilate spoke when he brought the Saviour forth wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. “And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the Man!” Whether Pilate meant it in scorn or whether he meant it in pity, we do not know, but we do know it has been the occupation of the blood-bought church of God from that day to this, and it will be their occupation to all eternity. “Behold the Man,” once a Man of sorrows, now crowned with glory and honour. Faith delights to behold the Man, to see Him growing up out of His place, to trace His footsteps from Bethlehem onwards to Calvary, to trace His footsteps from Bethlehem, the stable, onwards to the cross. Faith delights to behold the Man as He grows up out of His place.

“Dear Jesus, my Saviour, Thy truth I embrace –
Thy name and Thy natures, Thy Spirit and grace;
And trace the pure footsteps of Jesus, my Lord,
And glory in Him whom proud sinners abhorred.”

“Behold the Man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place.” May there be some of you here this evening by precious faith who shall behold this glorious Man whose name is the Branch, behold Him in His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection; behold Him growing up out of His place as He goes onward to Calvary. “Behold the Man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place.” May you view Him in His blessed suitability to meet your deepest need, and above all, may you by faith behold Him going to Calvary.

“Ye that pass by, behold the Man!
The Man of griefs condemned for you;
The Lamb of God for sinners slain,
Weeping to Calvary pursue.”

“Behold the Man whose name is The Branch; and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the temple of the Lord.” And then it is repeated: “Even He shall build the temple of the Lord.” Well, when this word was spoken, God’s ancient people were in sore distress. The temple at Jerusalem meant so much to them. There was a priest there; there was a sacrifice; there was precious blood, there was the lamb slain. The temple meant so much to them, and the temple, of course, had been destroyed, Solomon’s temple, and now the rebuilding of it had begun by the remnant who returned from Babylon. The foundation stone had been laid, the work had begun, but now it came to a standstill. Not another stone was laid for about sixteen years. It seemed as if God’s work had failed. It seemed as if God’s purpose had failed. And the godly remnant were so distressed, and not least of them, Joshua the high priest along with the ruler, Zerubbabel, the prince of the house of David.

There is a promise here. They were not going to be disappointed. The temple was going to be rebuilt, and it was very shortly after this remarkable occurrence here that the temple was complete, impossible as it seemed at the time. The prophecy of Zachariah had quite a lot to do with encouraging them to go on. This was literally fulfilled. But of course it looks forward to the glorious revelation we have in the New Testament: “Upon this Rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The first Epistle of Peter chapter 2, that blessed foundation, and that building being raised, if you will, the church of God, the Lord’s people in all ages, each one a living stone built upon the rock foundation, Christ. It points forward to gospel days, and there will always be the opposition, as there was the opposition to building the literal temple, so the opposition to the building of this spiritual temple.

“What though the gates of hell oppose?

Yet must this building rise.”

That is as every elect soul is brought to feel his need, brought to flee to the Saviour, brought to rest on the foundation, another living stone built in the building. I do not know whether I have ever told you this, but when one and another of you have come to tell your little tale, and when I have seen you signing your name in the church book, so often this word comes:

“What though the gates of hell oppose?

Yet must this building rise.”

That is the only reason why this world exists, till the last stone is hewn out of the quarry of nature and put in its rightful place, and then the angel shall cry, "Let time be no longer." O the wonders of that last great day! "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

"O what a sweet, melodious song
Shall rend the vaulted skies,
When, shouting grace, the blood-washed throng
Shall see the top stone rise!"

It is Christ who is going to do it.

When I was young, for a short time I taught at a little boarding school. I could write a book about the strange things that happened there, but I had to take the boys on church parade on the Lord's day morning, and I used to go with a crowd of boys from this school. I always remember one wintry morning the heating had failed completely. It was tremendously cold and the vicar said, "I have got a sermon ready, but because it is so cold I am just going to tell you the heads of it." Remarkably, I have never forgotten it. He said, "You never find a building, or never hear of one, where the same person is the architect and the builder and the buyer and the owner and the occupier," and those were his five points concerning our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the church. He is the Architect – He planned it; He is the Builder – He built it; He bought it by His precious blood; He owns it – it is His; and He dwells there.

"He shall build the temple of the Lord: even He shall build the temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory." The Babe of Bethlehem once brought so low in humility, in poverty, in sorrow, "He shall bear the glory." He will to all eternity in heaven. He will when He comes again in great majesty. But even now He shall bear the glory in His church. "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." "He shall bear the glory." And He shall bear the glory in the hearts of every sinner saved by grace. Not least, He shall bear the glory when His people see His matchless condescension and His humility, lying in that manger at Bethlehem. Now does He bear the glory in your heart at this time?

“He shall bear the glory.” Now once He bore His people’s sins, and bearing His people’s sins, He for ever bore them away. But, “He shall bear the glory.” It is a wonderful truth. You think of Bethlehem, and then you think of a Man of sorrows. You think of the temptation. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” You think of Gethsemane; you think of the judgment hall; you think of Calvary; you think of the grave. But, “He shall bear the glory,” and you see it in His resurrection, and you see it in His ascension into heaven, and you see it at the Father’s right hand.

“He shall bear the glory.” Perhaps it seems a strange word at first: *bearing* the glory. Do you know why? Another Scripture says, “*exceeding ... weight of glory.*” He bears it. It is not just Christ exalted; it is the Man of sorrows; it is “the Man whose name is The Branch.” It is the Man growing up out of His place. “He shall bear the glory.” And you will know something of that. “He shall be exalted,” says the prophet Isaiah, “and extolled, and be very high.” And that is in the gospel, and that is at His Father’s right hand, and that is in the hearts of all you here who are sinners saved by grace. He shall be exalted; He shall be extolled; He shall be very high. And the proof of it: you shall be very low.

“He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne.” This is a remarkable view of the offices of Christ, that He is going to be both a Priest and a King. Figuratively here was Israel’s high priest Joshua, but now a kingly crown is put on his head by the prophet. So just at that moment Joshua was appearing as if he was priest and as if he was a king. But the Lord says that is what is going to take place in reality with His dear Son. “He shall bear the glory ... and He shall be a Priest upon His throne.”

Now I think you all know that in the Old Testament no-one was permitted to be a priest and a king. There were some good kings; there were some good priests; but none were allowed to combine both offices. There was one who tried and he was a godly man too, King Uzziah. He was a godly king, but he presumed upon the priesthood. He went into the temple and burned incense to the Lord. He thought he would be a priest as well as a king. That was reserved for the Lord Jesus and no-one else. Though he was a godly man, he was struck down with leprosy and dwelt in a several house until the day of his death. That is what it means: “The

Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” Before the New Testament era, even in the days of the patriarchs, Abraham met this person returning from the slaughter of the kings. He was priest of the most high God, but he was King of Salem, and the two offices were combined in Melchizedek, but there never had to be another until the Saviour came. You have this mysterious man Melchizedek and then silence until you come to the one hundred and tenth Psalm: “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” A royal priest, a priestly king.

“He shall be a priest upon His throne.” And then you come to the Epistle to the Hebrews, and chapter after chapter the apostle so beautifully opens this up, the everlasting priesthood of the Son of God, but also He ever lives and reigns, King of kings and Lord of lords. This is the Babe of Bethlehem, beloved friends. This is the One lying in the manger. This is “the Man whose name is The Branch.” This is the One who grows up out of His place.

“He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne.” So just a few things on the priesthood. He stands as a Mediator between a holy God and sinners, and sinners are welcome to approach a holy God through Him, and a holy God looks down on sinners through Him and accepts them in the Beloved. As a Priest He offers a sacrifice.

“Jesus, our great High Priest,
Offered His blood and died.”

And then as Israel’s high priest, when he had offered the sacrifice, went into the most holy place to intercede and to sprinkle the blood upon the mercy seat, so Christ ascends to heaven and there He ever exercises His everlasting priesthood. He ever lives to make intercession for us. He pleads on behalf of His people. He pleads His own relationship to His Father, and He pleads the work of redemption which He has finished for sinners, and,

“For their acceptance pleads His own,
And proves their cause completely good.”

O what a beauty there is in the everlasting priesthood of the Son of God! But He is “a Priest upon His throne,” King of kings and Lord of

lords. He reigns over all things, all the mighty concerns of this world. It was said in prophecy, “The government shall be upon His shoulder.” And then He reigns in the hearts of His people, and then He reigns over them to save from their enemies. Beloved friends, your Saviour is both a Priest and a King. That is, a Priest to forgive you, a Priest to atone for your sin, a Priest to wash you in His precious blood, but a King to rule over you, to rule in your hearts and lives, to rule for you against all your enemies. And if you have such a Priest and you have such a King, it means one thing: that Satan can never prevail against you, despite all your sins; that you will be brought safely through.

“And He shall bear the glory” – the crown upon His head – “and shall sit and rule upon His throne.” He shall *sit* because the work of redemption is for ever finished. He shall sit because it is not a precarious throne.

“He ... shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” What does this mean? Well, of course sometimes we speak of the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son as the counsel of peace, and rightly so, but I take it that is not what is really being referred to here. I take it to mean this: the union that exists between these two offices in the Person of Christ – the kingly office and the priestly office. They meet, they unite together in peace and harmony and love in the Person and in the finished work of the Saviour. “The counsel of peace shall be between them both.” It means this: this is the ground of our peace, peace made by the blood of His cross, peace given to His people. This Man whose name is The Branch, this Man shall be thy peace. As a Priest He obtained the peace and as a King He pronounces it in your life and in your profession and in your circumstances.

“He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” Do not forget, when He lay in the manger he was made of a woman that He might be our great High Priest, and do not forget the wise men knew He was a King. “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” And that is why the angels pronounced, “On earth peace, good will toward men.”

“The counsel of peace shall be between them both.” So we end really as we began, and that is to see this remarkable scene in the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, the high priest standing there, and then these crowns brought forth, these crowns of silver and gold, and we see this amazing scene – it must have amazed Joshua, unless the Lord revealed to him what was happening – and the prophet taking these crowns and crowning Joshua the priest as a king, putting the crown upon his head, and then pointing forward to Jesus. You know what it is. “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death,” now for ever “crowned with glory and honour.”

“And He shall bear the glory,” and surely it is the desire of all His people to take that crown and to place it on His head, and that desire at last to “join in the everlasting song, and crown Him Lord of all.”

“He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”