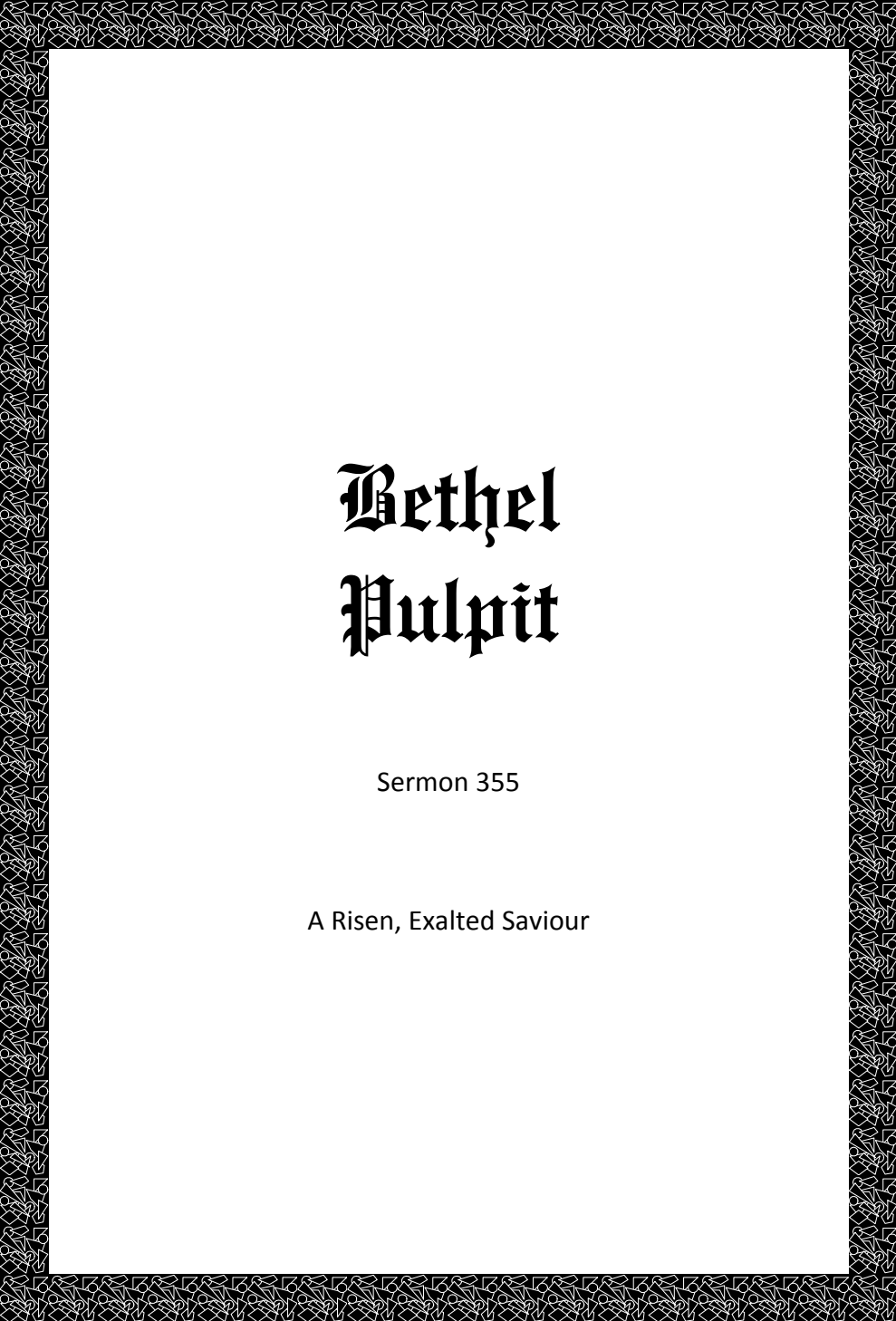




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 355

A Risen, Exalted Saviour

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 20th April, 2014 (Easter Sunday)**

Text: *“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9. 24).*

What a wonderful witness there is throughout the whole world today that “the Lord is risen indeed” – the *fact*, the glorious *fact* of the resurrection! “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables.” You think of all the attempts of the priests and the soldiers and Pilate – the stone, and it was securely sealed, and there was a watch of Roman guards – but all these things more than ever authenticated the glorious fact of the resurrection.

“Vain the stone, the watch, the seal;
Christ has burst the gates of hell;
Death in vain forbids His rise;
Christ has opened paradise.”

So this morning we rejoice in the glorious fact that Jesus died and that Jesus rose again. But to the people of God there is something exceedingly precious, and it is this: that *Jesus lives*, and He lives for evermore, and to His poor, unworthy, sinful people He says, “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

Now this verse that I have read to you this morning, it answers three questions, three important, vital questions concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. You know that the angel said to the women, “He is not here: for He is risen, as He said.” Well, the questions. *If the Lord Jesus is not here, if He is risen from the dead, where is He this morning?* And then, *What is the Lord Jesus doing?* And finally, *What does all this mean to you and me?* And in this beautiful verse, we have the answer to all those three questions. O but beloved friends, if only we might enter in by faith, that we might see a once-crucified, now risen, exalted Saviour, and above all, if it might be like John Newton says of the risen Saviour:

“I read my name upon His breast,
And see the Father smile.”

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” So the question is very simply answered. Where is He? Christ has entered heaven. That is where He is. He has entered heaven. When the Lord Jesus was born, that was the great question of the wise men: “Where is He?” But they did not just want to know the answer. They wanted to find Him; they wanted to come where He is. “Where is He?” And they found Him at Bethlehem, but He is no longer to be found at Bethlehem, and He is no longer to be found on the cross. “We preach Christ crucified,” but we do not preach a dead Christ. We preach Christ who died, but Christ who is risen again. And He is no longer in the grave. “Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

If we would seek Him, if we would find Him, He is entered into heaven, risen, ascended, glorified. Because after His resurrection He remained on earth for a short time to show Himself by many infallible proofs, but He clearly revealed to His disciples that it was expedient that He should go away. It was expedient that He should not remain on earth. “And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them.” And while He was blessing them, He was taken from them up into heaven. Really, doctrinally we cannot separate the resurrection and the ascension and the exaltation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now He has entered into heaven, and did you notice as we read the text, that little word *now*? Even now, today. *Now* He is there at God’s right hand, risen, exalted, glorified.

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself.” The reference here, what the apostle is speaking about is the great Day of Atonement in ancient Israel when once a year ceremonially all the sins of God’s ancient people were put away. We have a full account of it in the Book of Leviticus chapter 16. Now you remember on that day when the great atonement was made, the high priest had to take two goats and the lot was cast, one goat for the Lord and one for the people. Now one goat was slain as a sin offering and its body was taken right outside the camp of Israel, and then it was burnt, an accursed thing, symbolising Christ as He should be made sin for His people, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5. 21). The camp of Israel stretched a long way. It must have been a solemn sight on the Day of Atonement as a fit man had to take that goat that had been slain and bear it right through all the masses

of Israel. It was not fit to remain inside the camp. It was an accursed thing. And there it was burned without the camp. “Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate.”

“What object’s this which meets my eyes
Without Jerusalem’s gate?”

The Lord Jesus was not permitted even to die within the walls of Jerusalem. Like that sin offering, He was cast out and He died in the place where criminals were put to death. “He was numbered with the transgressors.” He “suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.”

Now the other goat was the scapegoat, and over the head of that goat all the sins of Israel were confessed by the high priest, and ceremonially they were laid on that goat, and then it was taken into the wilderness, a land of forgetfulness, never to be seen by mortal eye again – symbolising the complete removing of the sins of all God’s people in the atonement. “I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.” “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.”

But then you see the blood of the goat that had been slain had to be taken by the high priest into the holy of holies. He was only allowed to enter there once a year and that not without blood. He had to shed it for himself as well as the people, and on that day alone he was allowed to go through the veil into the holy place and there he sprinkled the blood upon the altar. But it never really atoned for sin, and year by year the sacrifice had to be repeated. The blood of bulls and goats could never actually put away sin, so we read here of Christ, “Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world.” Now this is it, a finished work, a complete atonement, and that is why the high priest symbolically entered in because the sacrifice had been offered. That is why Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, because His great, atoning sacrifice had for ever atoned for the sins of His people. This is it: “For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them

that are sanctified.” “Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

Now this is the context and the background and all that surrounds this beautiful verse I have read to you this morning, that Christ has literally entered into heaven, even as the high priest symbolically once a year entered through the veil into the most holy place – the type completely fulfilled, the ceremonial law at an end. “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands,” like Israel’s high priest did, “which are the figures of the true.” It was a figure of heaven. It was a figure of Christ entering in. “But into heaven itself.”

And then very beautifully we are told what the risen Saviour is doing, even now at the Father’s right hand, the risen Saviour in glory: “*now* to appear in the presence of God for us.” He is in the presence of God as the Father’s beloved Son. He is exalted a Prince and a Saviour. He is at God’s right hand. He is almighty. He is on the throne. But may we enter into it by faith this morning. He is there in heaven “to appear in the presence of God for us.”

“Ye children of Zion, now dry up your tears;
For you the Redeemer in glory appears.”

It is a wonderful thing to think that there is Someone in heaven who is on our side, who is appearing for us. We have so much against us. We have Satan against us; we have the world against us; we have ourselves against us; we have indwelling sin against us; we have temptation against us; we have our hard hearts against us; we have unbelief against us. But you think of it: a dear, almighty Saviour appears in heaven *for us*.

That is what the Apostle Paul gloried in as he came to the end of that wonderful Romans chapter 8. He said, “Who is he that condemneth?” Well, there are many answers to that. Who is he that condemns us? We deserve condemnation because we have sinned, we have broken God’s law, we are guilty. “Who is he that condemneth?” You can say, Well, surely the holy law of God must condemn us. Almighty God Himself in His holiness condemns us. And then Satan condemns us, and then our own conscience condemns us. Now the Apostle Paul lays it down not just as a question, but as a challenge. He throws the gauntlet down. He says,

“Who is he that condemneth?” It does not matter who it is. “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” “Now to appear in the presence of God for us,” to answer all who would condemn. For, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself” – because He has made the true atonement – “now to appear in the presence of God for us.” As Israel’s high priest went and sprinkled the blood upon the mercy seat, so,

“Our great High Priest before the throne
Presents the merits of His blood;
For our acceptance pleads His own,
And proves our cause completely good.”

There to appear, a risen Saviour, “in the presence of God for us,” as a great and glorious High Priest, who having made the atonement, presents the merit of it and,

“His sweet atoning sacrifice
Gives sanction to His claim,”

and on the grounds of His sacrifice He there intercedes for poor, unworthy sinners here upon earth who sometimes feel they cannot pray for themselves. “Now to appear in the presence of God for us,” as our great High Priest, ever living, ever interceding.

For “this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood” – not like those priests who went in once a year and then they died and another one came in. “An unchangeable priesthood.” It is based upon the unchangeable merit of His finished work, His precious blood. “He ... hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth” – that is what we are thinking about this morning – “*He ever liveth* to make intercession for them.”

“Now to appear in the presence of God for us.” *A great and glorious High Priest*, ever living, ever interceding, and there to appear for us as *an almighty Saviour*. That is what you need – an almighty Saviour to save you from death, destruction and despair, to save you from the guilt of

your sin, to save you from its penalty, to save you from its power. He is able to save even to the uttermost.

“Now to appear in the presence of God for us.” He appears in the presence of God for us *as our Advocate*, for the apostle writes, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin.” The whole of the gospel of the grace of God warns the people of God against sinning, and they do not want to sin, but they do sin, and the Word of God knows that they shall sin. But, “If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” In a sense it is the same glorious truth spiritually as the high priesthood, but the high priesthood was better understood by the Jews, and advocacy was better understood by the Gentiles. They did not know so much about the ceremonial law, but the Gentiles, especially the Romans, were well versed in the law, and justice, and judges, and courts of law, and a person accused appearing, and an advocate speaking for him, and the judge giving the sentence.

“We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” This one in the dock is guilty; he is condemned. How can the Advocate plead for his freedom? Well, the Advocate agrees that the man in the dock is guilty. He has a debt that can never be paid. But the Advocate says, “But I am paying it for him.” Yes, but he is sinful. And the Advocate says, “Yes, but I have borne away his sin.” Yes, but he has not got any righteousness. The Advocate says, “Yes, but I have a righteousness here for him.” That Advocate has undertaken thousands of cases and all of them were impossible, wretched cases, but He has never yet lost a case. You remember that famous advocate who died some years ago [George Carman]. He was brilliant. No opposition could argue with him; he could carry anything. But occasionally even he lost a case, it was so bad, it was impossible. But there was never a case so bad, never a case that was worse than ours, but this Advocate has never lost a case and He never will. It is no wonder our hymnwriter says,

“Give Him, my soul, thy cause to plead,
Nor doubt the Father’s grace.”

“Now to appear in the presence of God for us.” He appears there, with heaven and earth at His command, to answer our prayers. O may you

view the living Saviour here this morning, a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God, equal with the Father.

The point the apostle delights in, and it is a lovely point: *His tender, loving heart*, His sympathy, His compassion. “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” He knows and He understands and He cares, and there He is, to appear in the presence of God for us, to hear, to answer our prayers. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

“Now to appear in the presence of God for us.” He appears there as the way of access to His Father, the way of acceptance, the way of forgiveness, the way to heaven itself. For there is no other way to heaven. When Adam fell and the whole human race was ruined in the Adam Fall, the way to the tree of life was shut and guarded by the cherubim with the flaming sword. It says, No access, no entry for sinners. And the ceremonial law, that thick veil that separated the most holy place from the rest of the tabernacle, it spoke of the same thing: no way, no entrance for sinners. No-one could enter except the high priest, and he only once a year, and then not without blood.

When the Lord Jesus died, at the moment He cried, “It is finished,” there was an invisible hand and it tore that thick veil in twain right from the top to the bottom. No bar to entry now! Sinners welcome, a new and living way made even into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, through the rent veil of His flesh, that now the most guilty can enter in! For there He sits and lives and reigns in heaven, and He still says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.” O but a way opened up through the death and resurrection of Jesus by which the vilest sinners are permitted to enter, are welcome to enter!

“Now to appear” – a living Saviour – “in the presence of God for us.” He appears there *as a Mediator*. Every religion, however false, seems to realise through the light of nature the need of a mediator. That is why these heathen religions, even the wildest of heathen religions, always have their priests, because a sinner cannot come directly to a great and holy God. “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” You remember Jacob at Bethel with guilt on his conscience. He deceived his aged father; he deceived his twin brother; but

he had a view by faith of a mediator. There was a ladder and it came right down from heaven to earth, and it went back from earth to heaven. It came right where he was lying. A new and living way in the Person of the Mediator. There He appears “in the presence of God for us.”

So as you would approach a holy God in prayer with all your deep needs, with your troubles, confessing your sin, praying to be made right, praying to be made ready for heaven, the eternal Father in heaven does not look on you. He looks on His beloved Son as the Mediator. At the time of the Evangelical Revival, there was a little hymn they used to sing with this as a chorus:

“Him” – that is Christ – “Him, and then the sinner see;
Look through Jesus’ wounds on me.”

But in the verse we know (and hasn’t it been made a blessing to many!):

“But since my Saviour stands between,
In garments dyed in blood,
'Tis He, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God.”

“Now to appear in the presence of God for us” – *our Representative*. One of the Puritans, speaking of a sinner looking into the glass of the law, says his own face is an ugly, deceitful, vile, spotted face. O but he says, it is not this face that is seen in heaven; there is another face that is seen in heaven. It appears there for you; it is your representative; it is a beautiful face; it is a sacred face; it is the face of God’s dear Son, this risen, living Saviour. O to see that there is a glorious Man who appears in heaven on our behalf!

“Now to appear in the presence of God for us.” And He appears *as our Forerunner*. You know what that means. He is risen this morning. He has entered heaven, and He appears for His people, but as sure as He is there, it means that every one of His poor, unworthy people one day will be there with Him where He is. He is the Forerunner. “Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.” Of course, this is the anchor ground of our hope. “Which hope we have.” Can you say that, that you have a hope, if it is only a little hope? And where is it cast? Not in yourself, not in anything you have done, not in your feelings. “Which hope we have as an anchor of

the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.”

“In every rough and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.”

But His people’s Forerunner. 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.” As old Rowland Hill, the famous preacher, in the last days of his life when his mind had failed completely and they could not get any sense out of him, all he would say was,

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

That is good divinity.

“Now to appear in the presence of God for us.” This risen Saviour *now*, this Man who shall be our peace.

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” Well the final question: *What does it mean to you and me?* We have seen the answer to the question where the Saviour is and the answer to the question what is He doing. What does it mean to you and me? “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” Well, the Apostle Paul just before he died used an interesting expression: “All them also that love His appearing.” He is speaking of the crown of righteousness. He said it is laid up, “not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.” Well, I wonder if we can creep in there, that we do love His appearing! Tell me, do you love His appearing, as you meditate on it this morning, as now He appears in the presence of God? Do you love that appearing? Do you love it because it is yours? Do you love it because you long that it might be yours? Is there an attraction in it?

There is another word: “Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” We have read it at many a burial, and I have looked round at our congregation and thought there are many there surrounding the grave who are looking for His

appearing. Well, what a promise to those who *love* His appearing, and what a promise to them that are *looking for* His appearing. O to be found amongst them!

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”