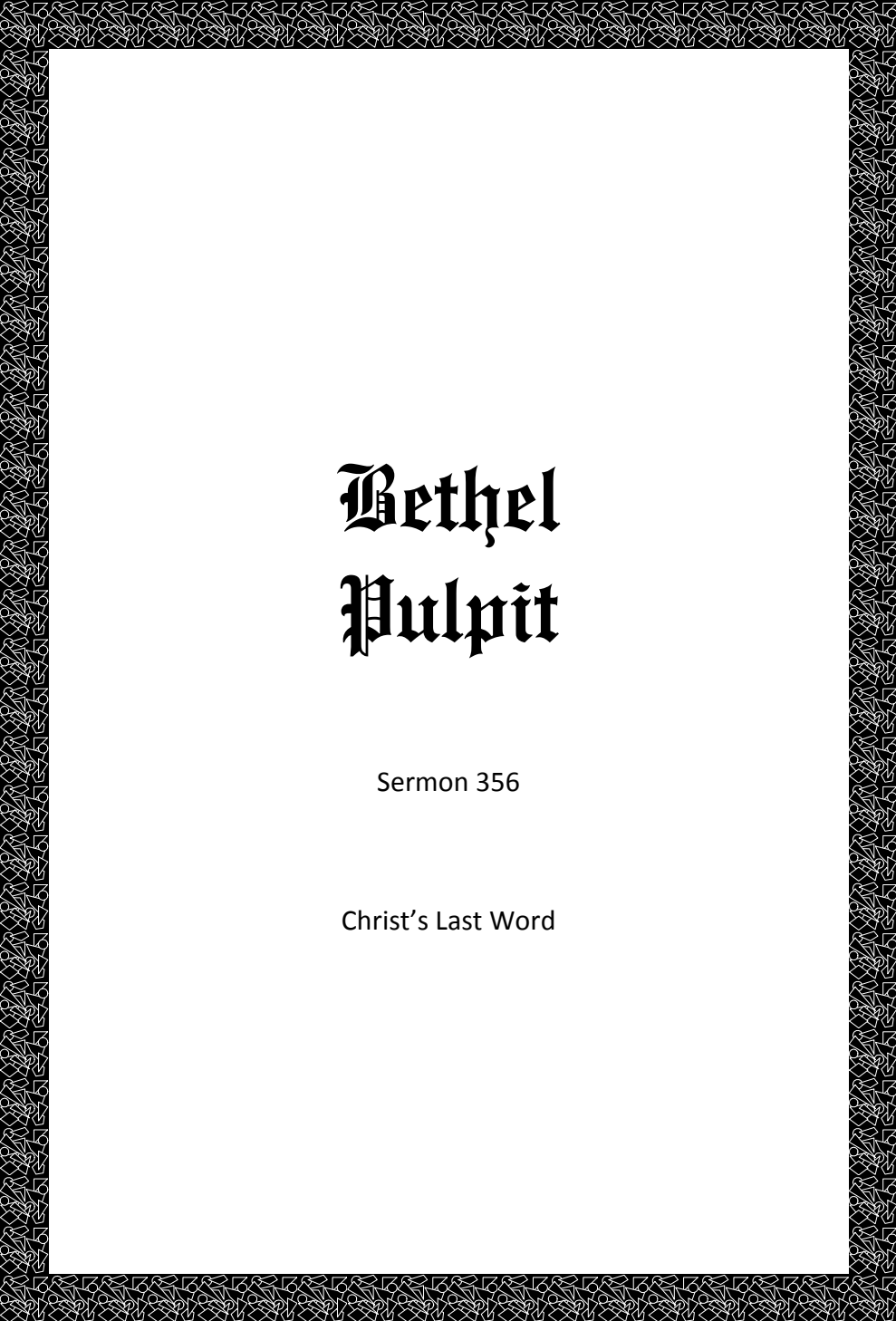




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 356

Christ's Last Word

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 18th January, 2015**

Text: *"I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star" (Revelation 22. 16).*

There seems to be something solemn as holy Scripture quickly moves to its end, when the canon of holy Scripture is closed for ever. And before it comes to an end, the risen Saviour Himself speaks, and if it is the right word, He authenticates everything that has been said to the churches and in the prophecies of this Book. There have been some remarkable things said, some important things said, and right at the very end it is the risen Saviour who speaks. This is the last word of holy Scripture, and it is spoken by the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Himself, and I believe also not just authenticating the Book of the Revelation, but the whole of sacred Scripture from beginning to end.

Did you notice that solemn warning? What a condemnation of much present-day religion! "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this Book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this Book." There are people who do add to the words of this Book. I am thinking for instance of the Roman Catholic church. They believe that tradition on the one hand and the "infallible" decrees of the pope on the other hand have the same value as holy Scripture. Now that is adding to the words of this Book. "And if any man shall take away from the words of the Book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this Book." We have not to look far for the multitude of people in Protestant churches who do not believe in the infallibility of Scripture, who believe there are mistakes in it, who take pieces from it, and their condemnation is written on the very last page of the Bible.

Now it is a word to us, beloved friends, always to approach the Word of God in reverence and godly fear, to be careful how we handle it, to beware of treating it lightly. I hope as a congregation all of us bow before the authority, the infallibility, the inspiration, the inerrancy of holy

Scripture, but there is a point that comes closer than that. There are some people who would almost die for the truth that this is the Word of God, but they never read it and they certainly do not obey it. If we are among those who read the Word of God and despise it and do not heed it and do not obey it, if we gloss over it, we need to beware that we do not come under the condemnation of the last page in the Bible.

O but this is the testimony of the eternal Son of God: “I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.” Well, what are the things that have been testified to the churches? Of course, what a vast subject this is, the theme of the Book of the Revelation, what it contains. Really, it is a prophecy of the things to come down to the end of time, and it is written in pictorial language, in figurative language. If you and I are honest, there are many things in the Book of the Revelation we do not understand. I have often thought of the great John Calvin. He was accounted perhaps the greatest of all the divines, the theologians of all time, and he wrote a commentary on every Book of the Bible apart from the Revelation. When he was asked why. He said, “Well, really there is so much in it that I do not understand.” Yet beloved friends, I wonder if you have ever noticed this. In the opening verses (verse 3) of the first chapter of the Book of the Revelation, a blessing is appointed for those who read this Book. So we must not flee away from it. The one who graciously reads this Book has the Lord’s blessing pronounced.

But surely the point for us is this. Though there are many things we cannot understand in the images, the seals and the trumpets and the vials and the dragons and the scarlet woman and all these other things, the theme of the Revelation is very simple, very clear. Always remember it was written to the suffering churches at the end of the first century, about the year 96. They were enduring most dreadful persecution from the cruel Roman emperor. So really the Revelation is to be a comfort to them. Many of them were being martyred for the truth. And it is to be a comfort to the church of God to the end of time. This is what is meant by these things in the churches and the testimony of the Lord Jesus to them.

Simply, the Book of the Revelation sets out a conflict, a conflict between the church and the world, but over and above that, a conflict between Christ and Satan, and the whole theme of the Book is that it is Christ who shall be victorious and the church which shall be victorious at

last. So it is a Book of heavenly comfort, divine comfort, especially to the suffering church of God, and the Lord Jesus puts His own personal stamp and seal upon it all before the canon is finally closed.

“I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches.” And then the Lord Jesus tells us who He is. Now many, many times in holy Scripture the Lord tells us who He is, and here finally before Scripture closes, the Lord Jesus tells us who He is. Throughout the Book of the Revelation, no doubt you have noticed our Lord Jesus is again and again spoken of as the Lamb of God, and what a beautiful title that is.

“Lamb of God, we fall before Thee
Humbly trusting in Thy cross.”

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” In the gospels we see the Lamb slain, but in the Book of the Revelation we see the Lamb exalted. We see the Lamb “all the glory of Immanuel’s land.” We hear the redeemed singing the everlasting song, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,” “and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood.” Now that is the name, that precious name we have so often in the Book of the Revelation: the Lamb of God.

But here, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star.” I have tried to ponder why the Lord Jesus should take these two of His many titles in this final revelation, and of course I think you children here, if we were to ask you, could tell us so many of the names of the Lord Jesus if you tried to think of them: the Saviour, and the Good Shepherd, and so you could go on and on – the names of the Lord Jesus. But here, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star.” One godly divine has made this suggestion: because the whole Book of the Revelation culminates in Christ the Lamb reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords, and fulfilling all those prophecies which were made concerning David and concerning His greater Son. “I am the Root and the Offspring of David.” And then the Book of the Revelation ends with so much on the glories of heaven where as we read “they need no candle, neither light of the sun,” for the Lord is the light of that place. And so, “I am ... the Bright and Morning Star.”

But leaving that, the Lord does not give any account of His matters. The one thing I think you will find, and I hold you here for a

moment, that all these various names that the Lord Jesus bears, they have a blessed suitability to the various states and cases of the Lord's people. William Gadsby wrote or preached on that point once. He said when he was young, he just thought they were interesting things like the Shepherd and the Living Vine and the Resurrection, and all these different names. But he was brought to see how all God's people are brought to feel their need of the Lord Jesus in all these offices He sustains and all these relationships which He bears.

"I am the Root and the Offspring of David" – referring to so many promises and so many prophecies in the Old Testament, almost in this language. "I am the Root and the Offspring of David," which I take to set forth His Godhead and His sacred humanity. In His Godhead, in the divinity of His Person, He was the Root of David. David, great man as he was, eminent man as he was, Israel's greatest king, he sprang from the Lord Jesus concerning His Godhead as the eternal Son of God. The Lord is the Root of David. But it is in His sacred humanity He is the Offspring of David. According to the flesh, He was descended from David. He was born by a human birth, in the line of David.

So you have a glorious Person here, God and Man in one Christ; Man to suffer, God to save. And so we worship Him, and so we need Him. O there is something very beautiful in the spotless, sacred humanity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! But then to see that spotless, sacred humanity eternally united to His divine Person, to see the Lord Jesus, to see who He is. You say, Does it matter? It is vital. It is because of who the Lord Jesus is that there is value in the work that He has done. If He is not God, if He is not Man, then He is not a suitable Saviour for you and me. As Man He suffered, but as God, the value in His sufferings. As God He could not die; as Man He must die; but He who died is true almighty God. These are things that do matter. "I am the Root and the Offspring of David." So this evening we would worship Him as such, and we would trust Him as such, and we would glory in His Person, who He is.

"I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star." I think you must have noticed that so many of the promises concerning the Lord Jesus speak of this light. One of the first promises that was ever made concerning the coming of the Son of God into this world was mysteriously made by an evil and wicked man. I am

referring to Balaam. But God put the words in his mouth, for they were never found in his heart. He said, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab." Mysterious, isn't it, that such beautiful words should be spoken by an ungodly man who died fighting against the people of God! But more solemn the way in which he introduces them. He says, "I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab." Terrible thing to say, "I shall see Him, but not now." O I hope there is not anyone here in this chapel who wants a *not now* religion. It is an awful thing to have a *not now* religion. You know what is right; you know what is true; you think there is plenty of time, that it will be well. That was Balaam's religion, and he perished in his sin. Beware of that *not now* religion. "I shall see Him, but not now."

O but what about the end: "I shall behold Him, but not nigh." Does it make you tremble, the judgment seat of Christ, when "every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him"? But multitudes shall behold Him, but not nigh. They shall not hear Him say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "I shall see Him," says Balaam, "but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab."

"I am ... the Bright and Morning Star." And the thought as this is opened up again and again in the Old Testament, it is of a glorious Person. It is He who would reveal Himself as the Light of the world, and there are the prophecies one after another. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." We have these again and again. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." "And the Gentiles shall come to Thy light, and kings to the brightness of Thy rising." And then at the time of the Saviour's birth: "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us" – Zacharias. "A Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel" – old Simeon.

This is a beautiful word, "I am ... the Bright and Morning Star," and there is something very, very suitable about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ describing Himself as the Morning Star. The morning star

stands out clearly and it always tells one thing: that the night is coming to an end, the night is over, and the day is at hand, the day has dawned. That is what it means. “I am ... the Bright and Morning Star.” And so this is what our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was when He came to this earth. He was the Bright and Morning Star. He proclaimed that that long night of darkness was now for ever ended. The ceremonial law – well, it was a revelation of Christ, but it was a dark revelation; it was a shadowy revelation. There was much darkness and much ignorance during that Old Testament dispensation for so many years. But the coming of Christ – the night is now over; the day is at hand; and all that darkness of the ceremonial law and all that ignorance is brought to an end for ever. And especially when you think of the Gentiles – they did not even have a shadowy revelation. They were walking in complete darkness.

But, “I am ... the Bright and Morning Star,” and when our Lord and Saviour appeared and when He lived and died and rose again, there was an abolition of the ceremonial law and an ending of the separation of the Gentiles, and it was the dawn of the gospel day, and that gospel day is still with us, blessed be God! It has not ended. Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel, and the glorious gospel of the grace of God as it is proclaimed. There is heavenly light shining in it. To use the analogy here, the Morning Star has arisen and the darkness has ended, and “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

“I am ... the Bright and Morning Star.” And so it is personally and savingly when the Lord works in the salvation of His people. There we are by nature in the darkness of sin and death and unbelief. We do not know our danger; we do not know our refuge. And when the Lord shines in our heart, and He shines in our heart to show us our need, and to bring us to seek after a Saviour and to seek after salvation, you may feel a measure of darkness. When the day star first appears in the sky, it is not like the glorious midday sun, but it means that the night is ended, that night is over. Those of you here where the Lord has shone in your hearts, that darkness of unbelief and that darkness of unconcern and that darkness of death is passed away for ever. The night is gone; it is the dawn of everlasting day. It is the dawn of everlasting life in your soul. You say, But I haven't got

what I want. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

“I am ... the Bright and Morning Star.” So the emphasis there, the Morning Star, marking the ending of the night and the ushering in of the day. But the Lord Jesus says, “The Bright and Morning Star.” In various ways in Scripture this word is used, not to linger too much on that point. In one place the angels are spoken of as the stars, and in another place the king of Babylon was punished because he wanted to be the morning star, and then you have the pastors of the churches spoken of as the stars.

There is something very beautiful about a starry night. Perhaps you can think of occasions, perhaps when you were young or you have gone out one night in the winter and you look up in the skies and there is something almost awe-inspiring, the special beauty of a starry night, and sometimes there is one star shines more gloriously than the others. This is the point here. It is through the Lord Jesus in His divine Person. If you read the opening verses of Hebrews chapter 1, He is the brightness of His Father’s glory in His Godhead. But then you come to His sacred humanity. “Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” You see this glorious Person and the glory of His grace and the glory of His love and the glory of His great salvation and the glory of His revelation in the gospel.

“I am ... the Bright and Morning Star.” But the point here is not just the glory of the Star and how beautifully it shines, but the light that it gives, pointing out the way of salvation, revealing the way of forgiveness, the way to heaven. O but this Star, it shines into sinners’ hearts! And beloved friends, isn’t this something that some of you long for tonight? Does that prayer ever touch you: “Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth”? You want the Lord to shine in your heart. You want Him to dispel the darkness of sin and the darkness of unbelief. You can pray that prayer:

“Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
Triumph o’er the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near,
Day-star, in my heart appear.”

O that word, the Dayspring! That is the Morning Star appearing; that is the dawn. “The Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Now isn’t this your prayer this evening? You want the Morning Star that shone forth in the life and work of our Lord Jesus, that shines forth in His resurrection, ascension and exaltation, that shines forth in the gospel, you want it to shine in your heart, and that is your prayer. You want the Lord to appear. You want the Dayspring from on high to visit you personally. Perhaps you feel you are among those who “sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” O but you want Him to guide your feet into the way of peace. So that beautiful promise: “Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.” And of course by the *wings* of the sun, we understand the sun’s beams. “Arise with healing in His wings.”

“I am ... the Bright and Morning Star.” But then there are some of you and perhaps many of you this evening who are walking in darkness in this sense: not just the darkness in your soul, but trouble and illness and sickness and affliction, yourself and those you love. You can fill your piece in here. You do not need me to go on opening up some of these forms of darkness some of you are walking in, and the clouds hanging over you, and the things in the future, and the things you fear. “I am the Bright and Morning Star.” O may He shine, shine in our circumstances, light shining in darkness, light dispelling the darkness or light explaining the darkness. As Cowper entitled his beautiful, well-known hymn, “God moves in a mysterious way” – “Light shining out of darkness.” But always remember this: “God moves in a mysterious way” – it is not mysterious to Him, however mysterious it is to you and me. “Light shining out of darkness.”

“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace.”

“I am ... the Bright and Morning Star. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

“The Bright and Morning Star.” And then this Star shines, but this Star leads; it guides. Of course, we can think of an analogy: the star of Bethlehem – how perfectly it led the wise men. Or you think of Israel in

the wilderness. It was not a star, but they had a fiery pillar above them. It cast light on them by night and it guided them the way they had to go. I do not know much about this kind of thing, but I understand in former days before there was all this modern technology and even before there were the best compasses, so many at sea, especially in the dark and in dangerous places were guided by the stars. O we want the Lord to shine upon His Word and we want the Lord to shine upon our pathway, the way we are to go in providence, the way we are to go in grace; especially to lead us to Himself. And above all we want the Lord to shine in our hearts.

“Lord Jesus, shine, and then I can
Feel sweetness in salvation’s plan;
And as a sinner, plead for grace,
Through Christ, the sinner’s Hiding-place.”

Beloved friends, what a word this is, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ telling us who He is! “*I am ... the Bright and Morning Star.*” He is the great and eternal, glorious I AM who revealed Himself to Moses at the bush: “I AM THAT I AM” – the self-sufficient, all-sufficient, eternal, unchanging God. “I AM THAT I AM.” And in the gospels He says, “*I am the Resurrection, and the Life*”; “*I am the true Vine*”; “*I am the Good Shepherd*”; “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.*” He joins His glorious, eternal Person to these things. And now just before Scripture closes for ever, “I am” – the eternal I am. O but He says, “I am ... the Bright and Morning Star.” What matchless condescension!

I said all these beautiful figures and relationships have so much to do with the Lord’s people in all their needs, and they have such a blessed suitability in them. Well, if you are walking in darkness, whether spiritually or in providence, may you know the glorious shining of this light. It will never lead you astray. There are so many false lights in the world and these lights that would lead a sinner away. The world is full of attractive lights, and where do they end? In despair, in destruction. O but this is the true light, and down the ages it has lightened the people of God, led them along and brought them safely through to that place where there is no need of the light of a candle, for the Lord is the light thereof, where the Bright and Morning Star shines eternally.

“I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star.”