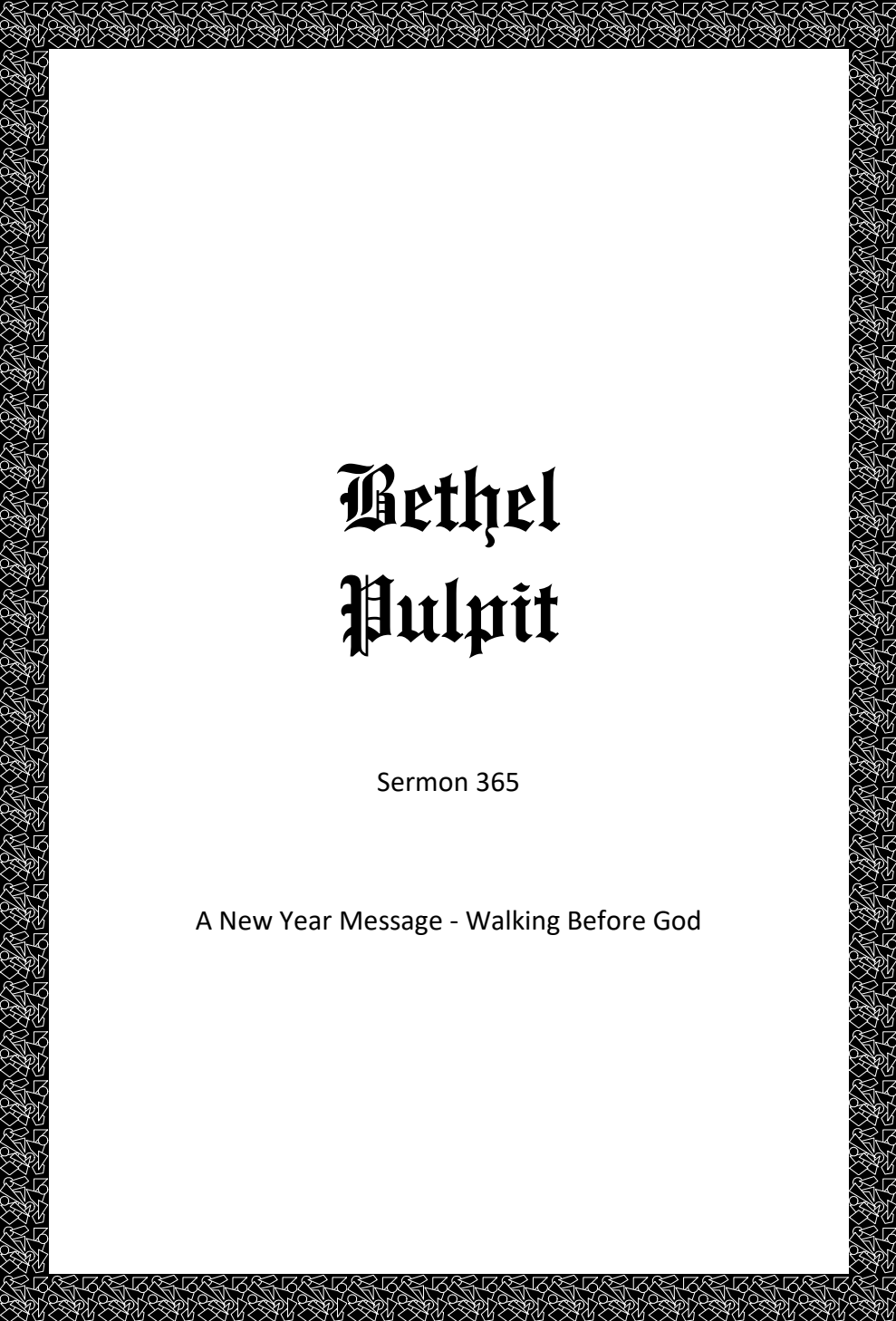




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 365

A New Year Message - Walking Before God

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 4th January, 2015**

Text: *“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17. 1).*

It may seem very strange to us that when the Lord spoke this weighty word to Abraham, we are told how old he was. We might think, What does it matter? We are told he was ninety-nine years old. Of course, one important thing, beloved friends, is this: concerning this commandment to God's people to walk before Him, to honour His name, there is not a time when they have no longer to think about it. If God's people live to be ninety-nine years old, they still need divine keeping; they still need deliverance from Satan; they still need to be upheld; they still need to be divinely kept.

“When Abram was ninety years old and nine.” But surely the special thing is this: the chapter before ends when Abraham was fourscore and six years old, and then this, the next verse, he was ninety-nine years old. Thirteen years had passed between one verse and the next, and what had been happening, graciously, in Abraham's life? As far as we can tell, *nothing*. In the chapters before there seemed to be more going on with Hagar the Egyptian maid than there was with godly Abraham. His wife came up with this awful suggestion. She had no children. The Lord had promised her children, but doubting the Lord's word, Abraham doubting the Lord's word, there was this device, taking her maid for his wife. Half the trouble in the world today comes from Ishmael's seed, his descendants! We do not read that Abraham prayed about it. It seems that these were barren years and that the Lord was silent.

There is a lot of teaching for each of us here – both ways. In a way of solemn warning: if ever there was a godly man in the Old Testament, surely it was Abraham. The father of the faithful he is called; he was called the friend of God. Yet there seem to have been thirteen barren years in his life. Now may that be a warning to you and me. We cannot live on past blessings, and we need to walk carefully, and we need to watch we do

not disobey and fail to walk in the Lord's fear, and be left to ourselves to dishonour Him, and for the Lord to hide His face. There is a solemn warning in this, these thirteen years that we have between one verse and the next.

But the other side: the encouragement. The Lord did not leave him. The Lord still loved him. The Lord had not forsaken him. This seems a beautiful word: "When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram." He had not forgotten to be gracious. And there are a lot of very blessed things in Abraham's life after this, because he lived a long time after he was ninety-nine. There was the birth of Isaac and all these things that took place – Mount Moriah, when he was commanded to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice, and then that long chapter when Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. There were many things after this; it was not the end.

But as we pass on from one year to another, I wonder if there are any of you here and you are something like Abraham, and you are not happy about it. There has not been much going on between your soul and God, and perhaps for thirteen years. You are longing that the Lord will do for you what He did for Abraham.

"When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram." There must have been with Abraham this consciousness that there was a reason for the Lord hiding His face. Divine sovereignty is a mystery. Some of the Lord's most eminent servants walking tenderly in His fear have known the hiding of His face. But sometimes the Lord's people know the reason for it. There has been a slip; there has been a fall, disobedience. Abraham had known that clear promise that there was going to be the birth of the promised seed, and really he would not leave it with God to do it. But it was not the end. When you come to Romans 4, Abraham believing what God "had promised, He was able also to perform." There was a restoring of faith and an increasing of faith and a walking in obedience. But this appearing to him was in a way of mercy, and it was in a way of grace, and in a way of blessed restoration, because there were some very precious promises here concerning the everlasting covenant.

"When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abraham." I think some of us this first Lord's day of the new year can

come with this as our prayer, in the church of God and in our homes and in our circumstances and especially personally and savingly in our souls: *Lord Jesus, appear for me; appear to me.* We know the Lord Jesus has once appeared in the end of the world “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” We know that tonight He appears in glory to make intercession for us. But we want Him to appear as He did to Jeremiah when Jeremiah said, “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me” – me *personally*. “The Lord hath appeared of old *unto me*, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

“When Abraham was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” And that was not just a word to Abraham alone; it was a word to all the spiritual seed of Abraham to the end of time, that Almighty God comes and He says, “Walk before Me.” And so this is a solemn word, a close word to you and me, all of us as a congregation at the beginning of this year when the Lord appears and He says, “Walk before Me.”

Of course, I am sure all of you know what this expression means in Scripture: to *walk*. We have it all through the Bible. It has become an expression amongst us. Perhaps we say, That person does not say much, but there is nothing wanting in the way they walk. It is a synonym for the whole of our behaviour, the whole of our conduct, the whole of our profession. “Walk before Me” – in our homes and families, with our children, with our friends, when we are at chapel, when we are mingling with the world, the things we do, the places we go, the decisions we make, things in the church of God, everything. Doesn’t one of our hymns say,

“In the whole of your behaviour,
Own Him” – that is, the Lord Jesus –
“Own Him for your Sovereign Guide”?

So there is a high standard set here for Abraham and there is a high standard for you and me.

“Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” There is so much in those two words: “Before Me.” And that is the essence of real religion and vital godliness. It is a religion in the sight of God. It is a religion before Him. It is a religion very conscious that His eye is upon us, and not in a legal way, not in a frightened way, but a loving Father, a loving God, a loving

Saviour. We do not want to sin against Him. We do not want to dishonour Him. We do not want to grieve Him.

“Walk before Me.” That is the mark of real religion and the difference between just an empty religion and a right religion. I think one clear mark when the Lord begins with us is always this: we have a religion before God, a religion in God’s sight. I think I have often told you that story of a man who had a corn shop down in Sussex and he later became quite an eminent minister [Eli Page]. He had this little corn shop, and somebody came in and ordered so many bushels of corn, and he went to his outhouse to weigh it, and it came into his mind – it was a dreadful thought; he knew it came from Satan – that if you do not give him the full weight, he will never know; he will never check it. And he said immediately that thought came over him: it was in the sight of his God, all his actions, all his thoughts weighed by the most high God. And he said, not in a legal way, but in a loving way, “I don’t think anyone got a better measure, better weight, than that man did that day!”

“Walk before Me.” There is one person in Scripture I always think of who in an eminent way walked this out, and it was the secret of his life, and I am thinking of the prophet Elijah. When he first appeared suddenly on the scene, we hardly know where from, his first words were: “The Lord God of Israel ... before whom I stand.” He was answerable to Him alone. He did not see King Ahab – he saw a greater King – and that is why he could defy him, that is why he could defy all the priests of Baal, and that is why he could stand when he thought he was the only one left in Israel. May we know something of that. “The Lord God of Israel ... before whom I stand.”

We are reminded of that great and godly man Hugh Latimer, who was one of the martyrs who suffered in the reign of Queen Mary. When he was called upon to preach before King Henry VIII, he felt he had to reprove him openly before all the people for his sins personally, and he knew what that meant: he was likely to lose his head, like some of Henry VIII’s wives did. Some of you know his sermon. He said, “I stand here and I can hear a voice saying, ‘You are preaching before the King of England; be careful what you say that you do not offend him.’ But,” he said, “I can hear another voice that says, ‘You are preaching before the King of kings; be careful you do not offend Him.’” He said, “It is clear I

have to obey the voice of Almighty God.” Then he preached his sermon and openly rebuked Henry VIII for his sins. Everyone wanted him to apologise afterwards, but he would not. You hear all the bad things about Henry VIII, but Henry VIII said to Latimer, “No-one will ever touch you or your life as long as I live.”

It was the spirit of Martin Luther when he appeared all alone at the Diet of Worms before all the powers of Europe – church powers and state powers. He could stand alone with his declaration, “Here I stand; I can do no other; so help me, God.” These are the kind of people who have been made a blessing in the church of God, and not only that: these are the people who have been made a blessing in England. O may the Lord raise up more! O to be kept from a dissembling religion! Elijah was before his God. “Before whom I stand.” It does not mean we have to be insulting to people or rude to people, but it is not so much what they think, but what the Lord thinks. It is not what they would have us to do; it is what the Lord would have us to do.

“When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” So really it was a solemn command that the Lord gave to Abraham, and that He gives to us. “Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” But beloved friends, before the Lord gave this clear, solemn commandment to Abraham, He reminded Abraham of who He is. He said, “I am the Almighty God.” So that means whatever impossibilities you have, I am still with you. Whatever hard things there are, then I can help you. I wonder if Abraham remembered the occasion when the Lord said to him, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” And Abraham knew the answer. Perhaps you and I know the answer; I trust we do. “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” Well, “Walk before Me,” Abraham. You have this to walk out. There were a few hard things in Abraham’s life, a few trials, but do not forget who your God is, and He is your Friend. He is the almighty God, and He is with you to defend you and to protect you and to answer your prayers and to supply your needs. That is it, beloved friends, for this year before you. “Walk before Me,” says your God, “and be thou perfect.” But do not forget who your God is.

“I am the Almighty God.” Those who are experienced in the Hebrew language (and I gather it is such a difficult language that there are

not many who are), the real experts like Dr. Gill and people like that say this word here in Hebrew is El Shaddai, and in all its fulness it does mean the Almighty God but in this sense: God all-sufficient. They say this Hebrew word has the sense in it, the importance of it is that He is *all-sufficient*. That is a beautiful thought as you and I venture forward and we listen to this command: “Walk before Me” in this year in all that lies before you. “Be thou perfect.” But do not forget, “Almighty God” – all-sufficient God. That wonderful fulness in Christ; that all-sufficiency of grace and wisdom and mercy and love. “Whate’er you need in Jesus dwells.” Here are these riches in glory by Christ Jesus of which he says, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” – all-sufficient grace. And you can lean on it. Some of us have proved that for many years: “Leaning on all-sufficient grace.” It will never fail you.. It will never give way. “All my springs are in Thee” – an ever-flowing fountain, all my springs, everything. It will never run dry. “I am the Almighty God” – the all-sufficient God.

And as you and I venture on, we so often find this: that we are the very opposite; we are not all-sufficient. We have to ask the question that Paul once did. He said, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Who is? We have so many things in our lives: family, church, friends, loved ones, what to do, what not to do, problems, perplexities, ill health, concern about those with ill health. “Who is sufficient for these things?” How are you going to walk it out? “I am the all-sufficient God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” And Paul answers that question a few verses after. “Who is sufficient for these things?” He says, “Our sufficiency is of God.” That is the answer. But Paul had to prove that word, and when he came into it, he did not know how to handle it, and the Lord reminded him. Can you remember what He said? He said, “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

“When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply.”

“My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” You find it so often in holy Scripture: when the Lord gives a commandment, at the same time He either gives a

promise or He gives the sweet assurance of who He is and what He will do. “I am the Almighty God” – God all-sufficient – “walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” So really this is a call in our little lives to seek the honour and glory of God, and to put that first, and to seek grace to walk worthy of our high calling, and to walk tenderly in the fear of God, and to put the things of God first, and not to dishonour Him.

“Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” So what is it to walk before the Lord? Well, first of all, to walk *in obedience to Him and to His holy Word*. That is what it was going to be with Abraham after this. He was going to be called to walk in obedience and it was not always easy. When the Lord told him to get up to Mount Moriah and sacrifice his son – “Walk before Me – and Abraham through grace was able to obey it. You wonder if any other person would, but it was grace that enabled him; it was because His God was almighty, all-sufficient. “Walk before Me” in loving obedience, in willing obedience. God’s Word, the standard of God’s Word, the revelation of God’s Word, the commandments of God’s Word. “Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.”

“I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” “Walk before Me” *in complete dependence*, knowing that your God loves you, and that He is all-sufficient, and that He is almighty, but knowing that you are not, knowing that you are ready to falter and fail. “Walk before Me” in complete dependence, resting on the Lord, trusting in His wisdom, leaving Him to order all your ways. And as you are enabled to rest on Him and hang on Him, He will not fail you. “The Lord, He it is that doth go before thee; He will be with thee, He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.” “Walk before Me” in dependence. O to walk in dependence, dependence on the grace of God, in providence and in grace.

“Here when thy feet shall fall,
Believer, thou shalt see
Grace to restore thy soul,
And pardon, full and free;
Thee with delight shall God behold,
A chosen sheep in Zion’s fold.”

This all-sufficient God will not forsake you as you are enabled to lean upon Him, neither will His grace fail.

“I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” “Walk before Me” *in prayer*. You will have to pray your way along in the new year, morning by morning, evening by evening, looking to the Lord for help in everything, thanking Him for His mercies, thankful that there is a throne of grace, a mercy seat sprinkled with blood, an almighty God and Saviour there, a gracious promise, a loving welcome for sinners. “Let us therefore” – day by day, throughout the year, as enabled, as divinely led – “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” You will have to pray your way along.

“I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” “Walk before Me” *in your problems, and in your difficulties, and in your troubles*, because you are sure to have them in greater or less measure. You know that, don’t you? Things will not always be smooth. At times there will be difficult things, things you cannot manage. “Walk before Me” in your troubles, looking to Me and never forgetting that word: “The cause that is too hard for you, *bring it unto Me*, and I will hear it.”

“I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” And O that we might know

“that closer walk with God,
That calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb.”

“I am the Almighty God” – God all-sufficient – “walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” Now that sounds strangely on our ears at first. It almost frightens us: “Be thou perfect.” Now let us try to be clear: it does not mean be sinless, because that is an impossibility whilst we are in the flesh. The Lord’s people *would* live without sin, and they *would* be perfect, but we know that, “In me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing,” and there is a conflict between sin and grace. What does it mean, then, when the Lord says, “Walk before Me, and be thou perfect”? Well, if you think about it, when we use this word *perfect*, we do not always mean sinless; we do not usually mean sinless. This is one way we use this word:

we talk about someone and say, He is a perfect stranger. I think all of us have used that expression or heard it. We do not mean he was a man who never sinned; we mean he was completely unknown to us, entirely unknown to us. Sometimes people talk about a man like Hitler and say he was perfectly evil. They certainly do not mean free from sin, but completely, entirely evil. I take it this is the meaning of the Lord here: “Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.” That is, let your life, let your witness, your profession day by day be given entirely to Me, completely to Me, or in New Testament terms, “These are they which follow the Lamb *whithersoever* He goeth.” Or again, the words of the Lord Jesus: “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” “Be thou perfect.” Toplady says,

“Emptied of earth I fain would be,
The world, myself, and all but Thee.”

Now this is it, “Be thou perfect”:

“Only reserved for Christ that died,
Surrendered to the Crucified.”

I know years ago the old Keswick Arminians spoke so much on making “the full surrender” and receiving the second blessing, but leaving all that, there is a right sense, a New Testament sense. Romans 12. 1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice” – the full surrender. It is not to be a half-hearted Christian. It is not to have one foot in the world and to try to have one foot with the people of God. It is not to be like Mr. Facing-Both-Ways. This is the reality of a religion lived in the tender, holy fear of God, in the sight of God, seeking His glory. “That in all things He might have the preeminence.”

Well, you say, what a standard! And this is a new year’s message for our congregation. What a standard! But then what a God, and what a Saviour, and what a complete sufficiency in Christ!

“When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God” – God all-sufficient – “walk before Me, and be thou perfect.”