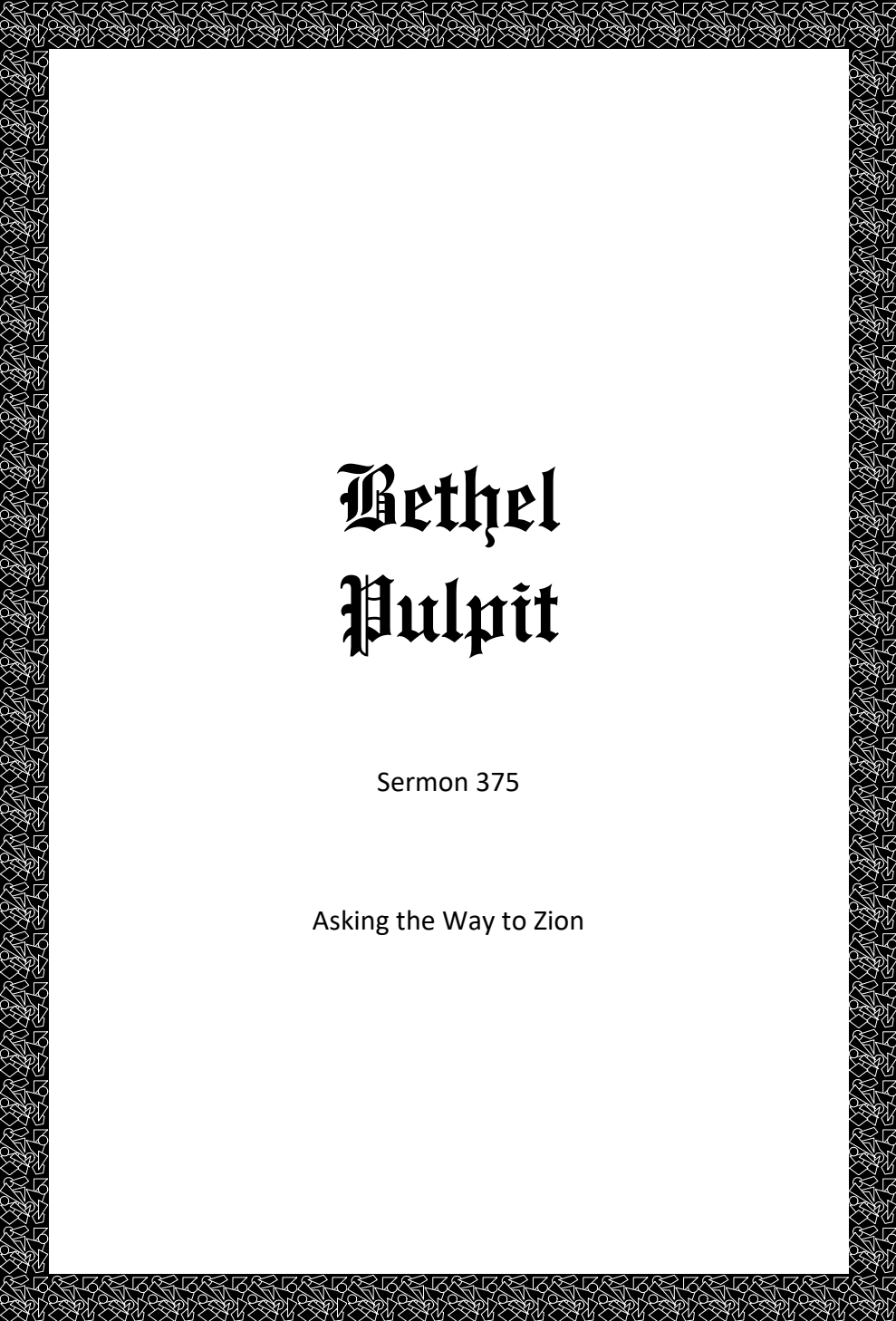




# Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 375

Asking the Way to Zion

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,  
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,  
on Lord's day morning, 28th August, 2016**

**Text:** *"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward"*  
(Jeremiah 50. 5).

Literally this speaks of those who had escaped from the captivity in Babylon at the end of the seventy years and were trying to find their way back to Jerusalem. It was the holy city. It was the place where the temple had stood. It was the place where the Lord's people were found, where they worshipped, and here is this Israelite who had been in captivity in Babylon, but now he is redeemed, he is set free, and his great point is to reach Jerusalem, to reach Zion. He cannot be satisfied till he arrives there.

Now then, beloved friends, the whole of the chapter makes it clear that there is something more than just literal things here. How did you feel when we got to verse 20? It is not a very well-known verse, but it is one of the most blessed verses in all Scripture on the glories of redemption as fulfilled in Christ. Did it touch any of your hearts? "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found." And then as we came to the close of our reading: "Their Redeemer is strong." This is not just thinking of Cyrus, or anyone who sets them free. These verses are looking forward to gospel times, to the Person and work of our Lord Jesus, to the blessedness of His redeemed people in Him.

So *they*, the ransomed of the Lord; *they*, the Lord's people in all ages; *they*, who are loved with an everlasting love; *they*, who one day will be in heaven for ever and ever – "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." And it is your mercy and mine, beloved friends, if this morning we are found amongst them. May we through grace be a congregation asking our way to Zion with our faces thitherward, whether you take Zion as sometimes it is expressed as meaning heaven at last, or whether you think of Zion as being the place where Christ ever lives and reigns as King, or whether you think of Zion as the place where the Lord's people redeemed by blood are found. But if our religion is real, we want

to be found there and we want to come there, and the only way is to be brought there.

They have been set free. They are travelling Zionwards, and they have their faces thitherward. Well, you know what that means. It means a lot of things, but it means two things especially. The first is this: the intensity of your desire. They are not looking round here and there. They are not like Lot's wife, looking back. They are not double-minded. The great point is to get there, to get to heaven at last, but in gospel days, with their souls' need and their sin, to find the Saviour. They have their faces thitherward, and if the Lord deals with you and me savingly and graciously, you will have your face thitherward.

Perhaps no-one expressed it more clearly than the Apostle Paul. He had his face thitherward. "This one thing I do." Well, there might have been many things he could do, but "one thing" – he was a man of one thing. He had his face thitherward.

"I must have Christ as All in all,  
Or sink in ruin, guilt, and thrall."

"This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." It is something real. It is something that matters. It is not something that is haphazard.

But the second thing, "with their faces thitherward": they had the world behind their back. There is real repentance here. They know where they are going. They have left Babylon. They have left the world. They have left it for ever. If you want a good little explanation of this: John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian when he was awakened, well, he had the world behind his back. You remember he had his fingers in his ears. He would not listen to those who wanted to bring him back to the City of Destruction. So he ran. He was in earnest, and his cry was, "Life, life, eternal life."

"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." There is just something I want to interpose here for a moment or two. Pondering over this word, I have thought of so many of our young people here at Bethel. You have had the exams; you have had the results; you

have your new things before you. Next month, if the Lord will, many of you will be starting new places, new things, and I felt a prayerful desire for you that as you go, you might know something of this spirit: asking your way to Zion with your faces thitherward. That is, not forgetting what you have heard here, putting the things of God first. In the language of our Lord Jesus, “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” Do not forget what follows: “And all these things shall be added unto you.” But, “seek ye *first*.” If the Lord Jesus is not first in our lives, He will not be second. O to be found asking your way to Zion with your faces thitherward.

Now, “They shall ask.” Why? Because they are not sure of the way. Why? Because they do not know all the answers. If you are going to a place you have never been to before, and you are not sure of the way, the best thing you can do is ask. I know, beloved friends, in the past we had our atlases, and there are these things like satnavs now, but I have found so many people who thought they knew the way, going somewhere and they have got lost. But spiritually, it is not to think that we know everything, not to be sure that we are right, not to be certain we are in Zion’s ways. That person who is not sure and keeps on asking gets there in the end. He is brought safely through. This is solid ground, asking your way, to keep on asking; asking your way to Zion with your faces thitherward.

I once had an experience of this, and it has always remained with me, and it taught me quite a few lessons. I was going to preach at some services at a chapel I had never been to before. I cannot remember whether it was a village or a small town, but all I knew from the *Gospel Standard* was the address, and the address was Zion’s Hill. So I came as a stranger. I did not know anyone there. I started asking, “Can you tell me the way to Zion’s Hill?” It was not the name of the chapel; it was the name of the street it was in. “Can you tell me the way to Zion’s Hill?” “No, we don’t know where Zion’s Hill is.” I had to find Zion’s Hill, because I had to preach there, and the time was getting closer. In the end I said to someone, “I wonder if you can help me. Can you tell me the way to Zion’s Hill?” Do you know what the answer was? He said, “You are actually standing in Zion’s Hill.” I did not know I had got there, but I had arrived! I have thought about that a lot since, and you can think of quite a number of lessons from it.

“They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.” I do like a religion where someone is humble, and where someone asks, and when they are not so proud to think that they never make mistakes. It is a good religion when we keep on asking, and the Lord is not offended. If you read through the Book of the Psalms, you know what David was doing. In Psalm after Psalm, he was asking his way to Zion with his face thitherward. He was a good man; he was a king; he was eminent in Israel. But he did not think he knew it all. “Shew me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths.” There are so many parts of Scripture, so many parts with David in the Psalms similar to that, where he is wanting the Lord to show him and teach him and tell him. We do want the Lord to teach us, tell us – if we are right to confirm us, if we are wrong to correct us – but to teach us the way we are to go, spiritually, of course, vitally, but in these providential things, in these little matters, not to be left to our own wisdom.

Now you girls and boys again, you young people, “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” That is a good text for September. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” Where have you got to lean? Do you know? Living faith, God-given faith leans on Christ.

I understand that years ago they were translating the Word of God into a native language. It had not got a very good vocabulary, and they could not find a word for *faith*, a word for *trusting*, a word for *believing*. The people could not get the sense of it. In the end they used the word *leaning*. That is it. That is what trusting is. That is what believing is. “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, *leaning* upon her Beloved?” “Lean not unto thine own understanding.” That is a good religion that leans on Christ. You cannot lean too hard, and you cannot lean too often, and you will never lean in vain. It is an almighty arm and it will not give way; it will not let you go. “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?”

So, “They shall ask the way.” They are leaning on their Beloved. They have their faces thitherward. They are looking to Him, looking to Jesus – looking to Him in dependence, looking to Him as the ground of their hope, looking to Him for teaching and guidance, looking to Him for help.

“They shall ask the way.” I often think of the beautiful word in the opening chapter of the Song of Solomon: “Tell me, O Thou whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon.” It is the bride of Christ. She does not know she is the bride of Christ, but she is. But she does not think she knows all the answers. She wants the Lord to show her, to tell her, to teach her. She knows He is the Shepherd of the flock. She knows He has His flock that He loves. She knows they have a resting place. But she does not want to be left out. She does not want to be passed by. She wants to be found among them. “Tell me.” Have you got a religion like that? Do you have to pray your way along? You do not get past that first prayer, do you? When the Lord first began with you, you had to ask your way. You had to ask your way in providence, ask the way of salvation, ask the way to Christ, because Jesus says, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”

“They shall ask the way.” So you see, they are travellers. They are pilgrims. They are on a journey. They are journeying from Babylon to Zion. And you will never get to heaven unless you travel heavenwards. You will not get to heaven if you have still got one foot left in Babylon, signifying the world. It is that bringing out. It is that separation. It is that repentance. What did we read (verse 4)? “In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they *shall go*.” It is a divine mark. It is the mark that they are eternally chosen, redeemed by blood. It is the Holy Spirit’s work in the heart. “They shall go” – the children of Judah, the children of Israel, going and weeping. People often speak about weeping over your sins. I wonder if some of you inwardly weep at times because you are seeking the Saviour and you cannot find Him. You are inwardly weeping, because He is hiding His face. You are inwardly weeping:

“Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?”

You are weeping because you cannot find any happiness in Babylon; you cannot find any happiness in the world. You want to find it in Christ.

“They shall go, and seek the Lord their God.” So if words mean anything at all, asking their way to Zion with their faces thitherward and seeking the Lord are two of the same things, and there is so much in Scripture about seeking. “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

“Our seeking Thy face was all of Thy grace;  
Thy mercy demands and shall have all the praise.”

“They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.” So then this implies one thing: they are a praying people; that as they journey, they are a praying people. There are many things they are praying for. Of course, the great thing they are praying for here is that they might come to Zion in a spiritual sense, or praying that we might be brought safely to glory at last, or even now praying, longing like Ruth, that she might be found amongst the Lord’s despised people. Ruth was one who had her face thitherward, asking her way to Zion.

That would be an interesting thing to think about: the various characters in Scripture who asked their way to Zion with their faces thitherward. You can think especially of people like Abraham. He came out of Ur of the Chaldees and his life was asking his way to Zion with his face thitherward. Ruth came out of Moab. She could not be satisfied till she reached Bethlehem. She wanted food. She had to glean in the harvest field. She found a redeemer. She found a bridegroom. You could think of so many. Even the dying thief – it was a short journey with him, very short, but through the teaching of grace he suddenly started asking his way to Zion, and he had his face thitherward. He said, “We indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss.” “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” That is asking your way. Can you pray a prayer like the dying thief? “Lord, remember me.” “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation.”

“They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward.” These are the redeemed people of God, and so they are a praying people.

They are asking their way. Now then, what are they asking for? What are you asking for as you are journeying along? Well, so many things. I wonder if this will touch a few cases this morning. “They shall ask the way.” You are asking for help, because often you need it. “Lord, help me.” You feel your weakness. You feel your helplessness. He is an almighty Saviour, an almighty Helper. As you go along you are begging for Him to help you. You are sad; you are in trouble. “Send me help from the sanctuary.” And especially, as I continually remind you, help in all its fulness in the Word of God is not just a little aid, a little assistance. It is salvation. So that is what you are asking for. You are asking it from the Saviour. You know that His name is “Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.” So as you are asking your way, you are asking the Saviour to help you, because you feel your helplessness, and you are asking the Saviour to save you. You are asking Him to forgive you. You are asking Him to make you right and make you ready. You are asking Him to bring you safely through to Zion at last. You are asking Him to wash you in His precious, sin-atoning blood. You want to be “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.”

This is the life of God in a sinner’s soul. This is the mark of the redeemed. They had not got all they wanted. They are like the great apostle: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after.” We have not attained. Surely nobody here thinks they have attained. You have not got everything. But this is the following after: “That I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

Now perhaps some of you children think this word *apprehend* is a big word. We do not use it much. Usually today the only time we use this word *apprehend* is speaking of a policeman arresting someone. The papers say that the police *apprehended* him. Paul says, “That I may apprehend.” He could see these blessings and he wanted to apprehend them; he wanted to lay hold on them; he wanted them to be his. It is like that man who had heard there was a pearl of great price and he wanted it for himself. He wanted to apprehend it and he was willing to give everything that he might have it. Is that your desire?

What about that little word in Obadiah: “The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions”? If your religion is real, you have a possession



in Christ and it is described like this: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Child of God, they are all yours, but you do not possess them all feelingly. You do not possess them by faith. O but to apprehend! So, “They shall ask the way,” and as they ask their way, they are continually asking for help, but especially in that great matter: “To Christ for help I fly.” Let me hold you here: can anybody in this chapel say what I am saying this morning?

“To Christ for help I fly,  
The Friend of sinners lost,  
A refuge sweet, and sure, and nigh,  
And there is all my trust.”

If you can say that, you will get to heaven; you are amongst the redeemed here.

“They shall ask the way,” keep on asking the way. They shall ask for daily strength for daily needs. We need it continually, for the Lord to strengthen us, to fulfil Asher’s promise: “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” So they keep on asking for this. They are praying their way Zionwards. They shall ask for the supply of all their needs. So many things they need – in grace, in providence, little things, great things. But they know there is a word: “Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide,” and they know there is another blessed word: “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” So they keep on asking for it.

On what ground do they ask for it? Well, on the grounds of mercy, because they painfully feel they do not deserve it. They feel unworthy. They feel they have failed in so many ways; they are guilty. But they must have these things. They need them, so they keep on asking. They keep on praying on mercy’s ground. But there is another ground as well as mercy, and that is the promise, and the Lord has promised to help, and He has promised to give strength equal to the day, and He has promised to supply all His people’s needs. So there is that resting on the promise, that pleading of the promise.

And so they go along, praying their way day by day. It is a solemn thing if we cease to pray. It is a terrible thing if we think we have nothing

to pray about. And the Lord is hearing their prayers. What about that word that comes later? He is going to fulfil that: "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found." These are the things they are asking for.

And then what a word was that we read at the end! "Their Redeemer is strong." These are poor pilgrims and they do not feel strong; they feel weak. That is why they keep asking their way. But, "Their Redeemer is strong," and He helps them, and He is determined to bring them through. "The Lord of hosts is His name: He shall thoroughly plead their cause." That is a lovely word. You try to plead your cause; you plead for help; you plead for mercy; you plead for forgiveness. But then the great Redeemer taking our case in hand and pleading it for you, the "sinner's Advocate with God." So it must avail.

"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." There is only one last word, and you know what it is. *They shall get there.* They shall get to Zion. They cannot fail to reach there. There will be difficulties. They will sometimes wander out of the way. They will sometimes sink and stumble in the way. But they shall get there, because the Lord will safely bring them through to Zion, amongst His beloved people; to Zion, where the King is. "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." They are going to be brought safely to heaven. "The ransomed of the Lord *shall* return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

"They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward."