

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 376

Where is He that is Born King?

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 20th December, 2015**

Text: *"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him" (Matthew 2. 1, 2).*

There are two kings here and two kingdoms, and both are mentioned in these verses. There is "He that is born King of the Jews," and there is Herod: "In the days of Herod the king." Two kings and two kingdoms, and there is a conflict between them, and as soon as the Saviour is born, He who is King of the Jews, this conflict begins. We are told, "Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." Secular history tells us that this king Herod, the one who was known as Herod the Great, was a most evil man and his cruelties were almost unimaginable. But there is a conflict here, and right from the first moment he sought the young Child to destroy Him. But he did not; He never could. Very soon after this Herod was in his grave, and apparently he died a most cruel, a most painful death, so much so that none of his followers were willing to go near him in his dying moments.

But these two kingdoms have always existed, and these two kingdoms exist today, and beloved friends, you and I belong either to one of these kingdoms or to the other kingdom. It is still true: "Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When a work of grace begins in your heart, you will have Satan after you seeking to destroy it. When you begin to pray for the first time, you will have Satan trying to stop you. When you seek to venture on Christ, Satan will put all these obstacles in the way. But Satan will never be able to destroy that work of grace which is in your heart.

These two kingdoms – it is not just at the beginning, beloved friends – all through there will be the conflict between the two kingdoms. You see it in the world at present. You see it this time of the year in England – the enmity, the hatred of the very name of Christ, the desire to obliterate it. There is the conflict between the two kingdoms. But be sure of this: Herod lies in the dust; Christ is exalted in glory for ever. So it will

be with all His people. If you belong to the kingdom of Christ, then you are safe and you are safe eternally.

But there must be a deliverance from one kingdom into the other, because by nature we belong to the kingdom of Satan. We are his blind slaves. We serve him. By nature we do not belong to the kingdom of Christ. So we need that deliverance, and that is what these wise men had. They were Gentiles. Where they came from, we do not know. Traditionally it is thought they came from Persia. But by nature there were heathens, but they knew that wonderful truth, and it will be a wonderful mercy if you and I know it. They were delivered from the kingdom of Satan's darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. That is the great point: to be delivered from the kingdom of Satan's darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Now we are told they were wise men. They tell us the original word is the *magi*. It seems they were some kind of astronomers. There are so many things about them we would love to know that are hidden from us, but we know this: that whatever form their earthly wisdom took, they were made "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." And the mark of their being made wise unto salvation was that they sought the Saviour. Now that is where true wisdom lies. According to the flesh, we are told there are not many wise men that are called, and it seems so in a special way today. Not many among the high and the mighty and the wise are among the called.

O but when the Lord begins a good work of grace, He makes that sinner truly wise. We cannot lay down a pathway, but those who are made wise unto salvation always learn this lesson, either suddenly or gradually, and by what means – we do not know what the Lord may use. But made wise unto salvation, they all feel they need a Saviour. There is a lot of good divinity in the words of Daniel Herbert:

"Let me here begin:
O do I feel my need of Christ
To save my soul from sin?"

Now that is to be made wise unto salvation. But the effect of it was this: they sought Him.

“When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He?” And the reason why they said, “Where is He?” was because they wanted to find Him, and they could not be satisfied until they found Him, and they could not know a resting place till they found Him. “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” So that is it: made wise, feeling your need of a Saviour, seeking that Saviour; and real religion will not stop there. Beloved friends, you will not be satisfied with just being a seeker. There was a man who found the pearl of great price. He could not be satisfied till he possessed it. He had to part with all that he had. He was willing to part with all that he had, and he was not satisfied till he possessed the pearl of great price. So it was with the man who found treasure hidden in the field. He could not be satisfied until that treasure was his. He had to buy the field and he could not find any rest until he possessed that treasure.

And so it was with these wise men. They were delivered from the kingdom of darkness. They were brought into another kingdom, the kingdom of God’s dear Son. And the mark of it was this wisdom with which they were blessed. They saw their need of a Saviour, and they wondered where that Saviour could be found, and they were not satisfied until they had found Him.

But they had to set out on a journey. They had to go on pilgrimage, and it was a long way, and it must have been an arduous journey, a difficult journey. But they had their hearts set on something. Now have any of you got your hearts set on something this evening? “This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind,” and some of those things behind are good things, right things, necessary things, but you have something vital now. “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth” – that is what these wise men did. They were reaching forward, “onward leading, still proceeding.” “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark.” There must have been a lot of pressing toward the mark, because it could not have been easy; it must have been dangerous. “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” This is to be made wise unto salvation.

“There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” Now how did they know? It is always accounted this was the firstfruits of the Gentile church, the first bringing of the Gentiles into the church of God. It would seem that they did not have the written Word of God, though we cannot be certain; they may have had some parts of the Old Testament. But this was a special case, and so they had a special revelation. They saw a wonderful constellation in the sky, a bright star.

But the point was this: the Lord was making them wise unto salvation, and He was graciously teaching them, and He showed them what it meant, that there was One born, a great and glorious King. “He that is born King of the Jews.” Now it must have been revealed to them that He was not an ordinary king, because they said, “We ... are come to worship Him.” Now you cannot worship the greatest king on earth, can you? There is only One who can be worshipped, and that is Almighty God. So they had a realisation that this new-born Babe was born a King, and they realised He was more than an earthly king, that this was One who must be worshipped. He was God.

If your religion is real and you are made wise unto salvation, you will want a Saviour who is true almighty God. You love His sacred humanity, as He “takes the dying traitor’s place, and suffers in his stead.” But you want one who is incarnate God, God in our nature. Didn’t we used to love it in our early days:

“Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred Three,
Are terrors to my mind.”

O, “But if Immanuel’s face appear.” That is it! “If Immanuel’s face appear.” May it appear in our midst tonight. “My hope, my joy begins.” It is all centred there in a Person, the Person of our dear Immanuel. “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

“Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.” Now made wise to salvation they were *divinely led*, and if your religion and mine is real, we

shall be divinely led. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” These wise men were led by the Spirit, the star of Bethlehem shining on their way, leading them. We are not to expect to be led by some kind of constellation in the sky, but what is it with those now who are truly wise men, wise women, wise boys, wise girls? It is this: to be led by the Word of God and by the Spirit of God; not the Word of God without the Holy Spirit; not the Holy Spirit contrary to the Word; but the Holy Spirit through the Word will teach you your need, made wise unto salvation.

The Lord Jesus often spoke of those who were made wise unto salvation. We think of the wise virgins. They were right; they were ready; they were prepared. We think of the wise man. He built his house on a rock. He wanted a solid foundation. So we will be divinely led. We want to be prepared. We will feel our need as sinners. We have to die; eternity before us. We are unfit, unworthy. We cannot make ourselves ready. We cannot make ourselves right. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” How will you and I stand in that great day when God is our Judge? It is one thing to speak of it in a chapel tonight, but another thing when you and I stand there. O to be made right, to be made ready!

But the Holy Spirit’s leading, the leading of the Spirit by the Word, will always lead you, as the star of Bethlehem led these wise men – it will lead you to the Saviour. We do want to be divinely led. There are some good prayers in Scripture to be led. You young ones, if you could pray some of those prayers. What about this: “From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee.” Perhaps some of you are there. “When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” And another word: “Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day.”

I am sure of one thing: if you really are enabled in humility and dependence to pray that the Lord will lead you, that the Holy Spirit will lead you, then He will. O but do beware of chalking down lines for Him to walk in between. Some of us have fallen into that. The Lord will not allow you to chalk out the way for Him to walk in. He is sovereign. His way is better than yours and mine. But this is the mark of it: it will always lead you to Christ. You will not find any peace, any rest, any contentment,

neither did these wise men, till they came even where the young Child was.

Now they had their disappointments. You so often find that when a young person begins to seek the Saviour, things seem to go wrong and things seem to go contrary. One thing is clear to me: that the star of Bethlehem never led these wise men to Herod's palace. When they were nearly there, they went the wrong direction. It seemed they took their eyes off the star. It seemed they used their common sense. Well, nearing Jerusalem, surely this is where the king's son is to be found. Jerusalem is where the king is. It must be in the king's palace. The Holy Spirit never led them to Herod. You need to watch that. You take your eye off the Lord when He is leading you, when you think you know enough, when you think you can manage yourself, when you think you are getting near, when you think you have got the answer, and you may have a sore disappointment.

Now Herod gathered his wise men together, and they all knew where the Messiah was going to be born, the promised Saviour, where He was going to be born. They had not the slightest doubt. Yet we do not read that a single one of them showed any interest in going to Bethlehem to find Him. That is the wisdom of this world. A lot of people can talk about religion or argue about religion, and know the answers in religion, but there is no living desire:

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

They did not go to Bethlehem. They were satisfied without going there. But the wise men were not. They must have been bewildered for a time. Sometimes in our early beginnings we are bewildered. I sometimes try to think of my beginnings. You read in the books and the obituaries and it is all set out so nicely, but I do not think at the time we altogether knew what was happening or what was not happening. There was a lot of conflict, and trying to settle down in the world, and confusion. But the Lord never leaves His work unfinished. He did not with these wise men.

“They said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that

shall rule My people Israel.” We have this amazing word: “Then Herod ... sent them to Bethlehem.” Well, sometimes “Satan works what God designs,” and sometimes even the plans of Satan fire back against him, and they send you away from him, and away from the world to the Saviour.

“Herod ... sent them to Bethlehem.” O but weren’t their hearts glad when once again they saw the star! “Lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding joy.” They had a sweet confirmation they were in the right way. You value that, don’t you, some of you! They had not got there yet, and perhaps you have not got there yet, but to have a little sweet confirmation you are in the right way!

“And when they were come into the house.” Of course, this was not the stable. Joseph and Mary would not have stayed long in that poor stable, and this obviously was some time afterwards, because Herod, when he had enquired what time the star appeared, thought it necessary to slay every child under two years of age. So when they were come into the house, were they disappointed? They had had a wonderful revelation. They were going to see a great King. They had been shown it by a star in the sky. They had heard the prophecy from Scripture confirmed to them. And this is the end of their long journey, and they see a poor man and a poor woman and a helpless Child, and they “fell down, and worshipped Him.” Now that is living faith. They were not disappointed, and that was one of the greatest acts of faith you ever find in the whole of the New Testament, after this long, arduous journey, this wonderful revelation, just to come to a poor little home and to see a poor man and a poor woman there. They were not disappointed. They had found what they wanted. You will not be disappointed. You will be disappointed in yourself; you will be disappointed how little you know; you will be disappointed with your lack of zeal, your lack of faith; but you will not be disappointed in the Saviour, and you will fall down and worship Him. They had got what they wanted. It was worth journeying for. They had found a resting place for their faith.

“When they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and

frankincense, and myrrh.” Apart from the mystic, symbolical meaning, here was a poor man and a poor woman. We are told that. Did you notice this morning in the reading (Luke 2) that when they came to the temple in Jerusalem, they offered a turtle dove or a young pigeon? It was the poor man’s offering. The rich man – what could he bring? And a person of normal wealth – what could he bring? But for the very poor this was permitted: they could just offer the turtle dove or the young pigeon. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor” – even from His birth – “that ye through His poverty might be rich.” I take it that as the flight into Egypt was immediately afterwards, this was His loving Father’s full provision for that journey, and that stay in Egypt.

But I do like to think of the symbolical, mystic meaning. The gold – a King; the frankincense – frankincense is only used in worship – a God; and the myrrh – a strange thing to give a young child. Myrrh – it speaks of suffering; it speaks of death. And that is why He came. He came to Bethlehem that one day He might go to Calvary.

But you say, Are we called to bring gifts to Him? Living faith is brought to devote its all to the Saviour, to lay everything at His feet.

“Emptied of earth I fain would be,
The world, myself, and all but Thee;
Only reserved for Christ that died,
Surrendered to the Crucified.”

Not in legality, but I think some of you know what it is, sweetly constrained by the love of Christ to give up yourself to Him.

They “fell down, and worshipped Him.” Now it just remains to say one or two things on the question that was asked: “Where is He?” It is an important question now, as it was an important question then. But the reason they asked it was not curiosity. The reason they asked it: because they wanted to find Him. And that is a wonderful thing: that the Saviour is still to be *found*, and seeking souls still find Him, and living faith still finds Him.

Now, “Where is He?” He is no longer in Bethlehem. “Where is He?” He is no longer on the cross, though of necessity He must go to the cross, the purpose of His coming, to make atonement for sin and to save

His people, a number that no man can number, with an everlasting salvation. "Where is He?" He is no longer in the grave. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." It is vacated for ever. "He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." That is where He is this evening, beloved friends. He is risen, ascended, glorified. He is on the throne. It is a throne of grace. He is there almighty to save. He ever lives. He is ever interceding. "This Man, because He continueth ever, 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 to make intercession for them."

"Where is He?" Well, He is there in heaven. He is there on the throne. O but He is present with His people. Dare we say it: "As 'God with us' He's present now"? "Where is He?" He is there in His holy Word. "Where is He?" He is there in the glorious gospel of His grace. And He is there, there in the sweet invitations to those who feel their need, to venture on Him and find a resting place. He is there in the exceeding great and precious promises. He is there that He might be sought. And the wonder of the gospel, that He encourages poor, lost, ruined, unworthy sinners to seek Him, and what delight when they find Him! O may there be some here this evening who shall be able to say with the church in the Canticles, "I found Him whom my soul loveth." Well, before that she was saying, "Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?" and she could not find Him. But at last she did! She said, "I found Him," and she said, "I held Him, and would not let Him go, until I had brought Him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me," which I take to mean an open profession in the professing church of God.

O but what a subject! The glorious coming of the Son of God, His humble birth at Bethlehem, sinners made wise unto salvation going forth on the venture of faith, seeking Him, finding Him, being satisfied with Him, but the glory, that this is not the end. This is what has been going on in the centuries that have followed, sometimes more at a time: "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" Sometimes just a few here and a few there. But what a mercy, that risen, exalted, glorified, He can still be sought, and by those who are unworthy, and He can still be found, to the praise and the honour and the glory of His name.

“Where is He that is born King of the Jews?”