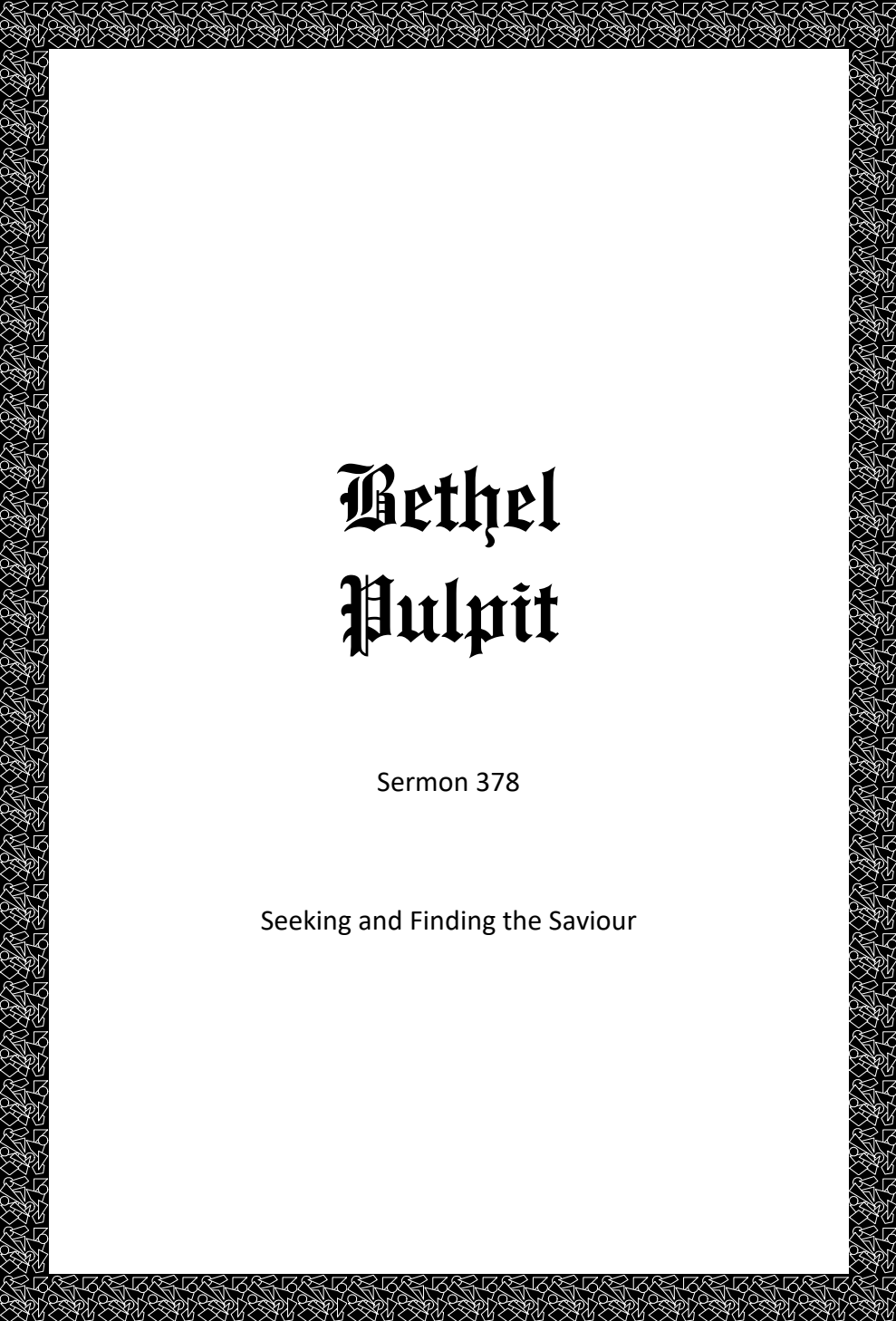




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 378

Seeking and Finding the Saviour

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 18th December, 2016**

Text: *“By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him whom my soul loveth: 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” (Song of Solomon 3. 1-4).*

I suppose many of you, perhaps most of you here this evening, count yourself as seeking souls. Never take it for granted that you *are* a seeking soul. But beloved friends, if you really can account yourself this evening to be a seeker, I have an important question for you, and the important question is this: are you a seeker belonging to verse 1, or are you a seeker belonging to verse 2? They were both seekers, but what a difference! In verse 1, she was lethargic; she was cold; she was half-hearted. In verse 2, she was not. She knew something of this: “Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.” Now they were both real characters, but sadly all of us so often in seeking the Lord slip into that first character: “By night on my bed I sought Him” – dreamily, sleepily.

I do not want any of you to think of seeking souls just as a young person or just as something at the beginning. If our religion is real, we are seeking souls all the days of our life. In the beginning sometimes when the work of the Spirit is gentle, there is something of the first verse. But often in the beginning of a work of grace, it is rather this: “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” As Mr. Gosden used to say, you will not get to heaven *because* you strive, but you will not get to heaven if you do not strive.

But it is not just at the beginning. In the middle of our lives, perhaps things seem to go well. Perhaps we have made a few attainments

in our homes and families and lives, in the world and even in our religion. And then there comes a time – it is that taking things for granted, and that coming and going, and going and coming – and you all know what I mean. The old people used to talk about having your neck on the stretch, but we do not always have our necks on the stretch. O to be delivered from this dark, dull condition of soul, where there is not much life and not much love and not much light and not much liberty, and yet still counting ourselves seeking, and in reality still seeking, but “by night on my bed I sought Him.”

And then there is old age, and that prayer people put up so much: may their last days be their best days. Sadly, solemnly, so often with the aged, our last days seem to be our worst days. So all along there is this vital need through grace to be seeking the Lord. O the many exhortations the Lord gives! “Seek, and ye shall find.” And the precious promises to those who are enabled to seek, because that is a mark of grace: seeking the Lord.

But the great point here is this: we have a living, godly character, but she cannot get what she wants. She has known better days. She has known things to be different. It is night-time now, not the Sun of righteousness shining on her, but she cannot be satisfied. You cannot be satisfied, if your religion is real. It seems as if the Saviour was not near. It seems as if He was afar off. She wanted to know His gracious presence. She wanted His love shed abroad in her heart. She wanted to know union and communion with Him. She wanted to know something of that closer walk with God. She could not be happy being afar off. It was the Saviour she wanted, the Saviour Himself, and she wanted Him in His great salvation, and she had come to that point, that

“Nothing else will satisfy;
Give me Christ, or else I die.”

I hope there are some of you, many of you here coming into these things, whether from the right hand or the left, but it is the Saviour you want and you cannot be satisfied without Him. Now this is a busy season of the year. But may there be that desire to press through it all, seeking the Lord, if only we might draw near, if only we might come where the Lord Jesus is, if only we might be brought to His feet.

Like those three mighties of David, when they heard him cry, “Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!” They pressed through. Bethlehem was in the hands of the enemy and Bethlehem’s well was securely guarded, but they fought their way through, and they came, and they drew water from Bethlehem’s well. The Puritans used to compare those three mighty men to living faith – that pressing through, that breaking through.

It is that little word *even*. “Let us now go *even* unto Bethlehem.” I wonder if you have ever got there! I mean in a real, special, vital, feeling way. Now I really got there once in my life, and it was when I was quite young, in my early days. I was preaching up at Willenhall. It was the first time I had gone there. I knew what Willenhall was. They had formerly gone fifty years and would not allow anyone in the pulpit. I tried to speak, and my heart was hard, and I could not get into the subject at all. It was not a good sermon at all. It was one of those chapels where they used to line the hymns out verse by verse, and the old clerk, dear old John Burns, announced hymn 418, and said, “We will begin at the third verse,” and the tears ran down his face.

“He left His radiant throne on high!
Left the bright realms of bliss!
And came to earth to bleed and die!
Was ever love like this?”

They sang it to the tune *Twyford*. I do not think I have ever heard it at Bethel. I do not think I have ever heard it from that day. But if you look at it in your tune books, it ends up like: “Was ever, was ever, was ever love like this?” So that was one time I did manage to get “even to Bethlehem.” I hope some of you will get there. Even better if through precious faith you get to Calvary and there you know something of “mercy’s streams in streams of blood,” and your own personal interest.

“By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth.” Four times she says, “Him whom my soul loveth,” and I take it here she is speaking of the love of desire rather than the love of possession, because there is a difference. I believe there are some of you here this evening, and you have not got the love of possession, but you cannot deny you have the love of desire.

“By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth.” She could not be satisfied without His presence, without a touch, without a taste, without the knowledge of His love. So she sought Him, but it was on her bed by night. Now let us be clear, beloved friends: in a literal sense it is a good thing on your bed by night when you are quiet, to be seeking the Lord, but I take it here it is more that she was in a sleepy condition. She had gone to bed. She had this desire, but she wanted to go to sleep. It would do the next day. It would do in the morning. The whole picture is someone who is not really knowing that spiritual eagerness in the things of God.

“By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not.” Now she was honest, and may grace make you and me honest. She knew what she wanted, and she did not take it for granted she had got it. She said, “I found Him not,” and she was not satisfied. Now Almighty God is a sovereign. In one place He says, “I am found of them that sought Me not.” The Lord is very merciful and gracious, but so often when it is this half-hearted seeking, this careless seeking, the Lord does not allow Himself to be found. The Lord does not in love and mercy appear and make Himself known.

“By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not.” So what did she do? Give it all up? Go to sleep again the next day? Forget about it? Say, “Once in Him, in Him for ever; thus the eternal covenant stands”? “I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.” So she uses the very language the prodigal son used: “I will arise.” You remember the poor prodigal. He began to be in want, and he could not be satisfied. He had his hunger and that was driving him, but he knew there was bread enough and to spare in the father’s house, and that pressed him on. “I will arise.” But it is the Holy Spirit’s work. We do need the power of the resurrection. “I will rise now.” She is in earnest now. There is a difference. She is still seeking; she is still seeking the same things; she is still seeking the same glorious Person. O but, “Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.” There is the reality now.

So I read to you this evening those two passages (Job 23. 1-10; John 20. 1-18). What about Job? Job was in trouble. Was ever anyone in

the Old Testament in such trouble as Job? But Job was not in verse 1; Job was in verse 2. “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!” And he had to wait a while. He did find Him, because one day he sang, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” But until then, “He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

And then Mary Magdalene. O she could not be satisfied till she found the Saviour. She had had angels talking to her. What would people say if an angel from heaven came and began to talk to them? They would glory in it! Not dear Mary Magdalene. She thought the Lord her life was gone, that He had gone for ever. Was she deceived? Had she made a mistake? Was He not truly the Redeemer? Was He not the Son of God? And if so, what of her sins and her soul and eternity? She came with that same desire as Job: “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!” And she did find Him, and what a word that was: “Jesus saith unto her, Mary.” I have often quoted Krummacher on the point. He said that Mary has been in heaven nearly two thousand years, but she has never heard a sweeter word in heaven than that word “Mary” on the resurrection morning. The Lord came and claimed her as His portion and allowed her to lay claim to Him. “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.”

“I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.” Now I do not want to try to make this mean that, and that mean something else. You have to be careful with the Song of Solomon. The old, godly divines always applied the city here to the church of God. But the point is, there was now some holy activity of her soul. She was going about the city. She was not neglecting the prayer meeting. She wanted to be found with the Lord’s people. She did not want to be with the world. She wanted to listen to the preaching of the Word. She was going about the city in the streets and in the broad ways, if any way she could get a glimpse of the Saviour, in the places where He had promised that He could be found.

It is something like the seventy-third Psalm. Asaph – O wasn’t he in trouble! He was vexed because of the prosperity of the wicked. Everything was going wrong with him; everything was going right for the ungodly. “Until I went into the sanctuary of God.” This is what Asaph did. He rose and he went about the city, in the streets and in the broad

ways seeking Him whom his soul loveth. “Until I went into the sanctuary of God.” It is the place where many a poor, longing soul has found the Saviour, and been abundantly satisfied with the fatness of His house, and made to drink of the river of His pleasure.

“I will rise now.” She is here:

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

She wants the Saviour. She wants to find Him and His presence, and she is not half-hearted now. She is not lying sleepily on her bed. “I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.”

Now she is honest. “I sought Him, but I found Him not.” That is a trying experience. The Lord gives no account of His matters, but He does try faith, and really, beloved friends, the Lord will not have it that you and I can just go along in a sleepy condition, and then one day we want the Saviour, and there He is. He is very merciful; He is very gracious. We think of that poor Syrophenician woman who prayed, “Lord, help me,” but Jesus “answered her not a word.” She “found Him not.” And the disciples said, “Send her away; for she crieth after us.” She “found Him not.” And then when the Lord Jesus did speak, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.” She “found Him not.” But there was that perseverance of faith. The Lord upheld her. The Lord held her fast. She could not give up, and really you will not be able to give up if your religion is real, even if you have been at the pool of Bethesda more than thirty-eight years.

“I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not. The watchmen that go about the city found me.” Now without pressing things, it is very clear that the watchmen are the ministers of the gospel. There is so much in the Old Testament about Zion’s watchmen. The prophecy of Ezekiel – the “watchman unto the house of Israel,” the one who had given the warning, the one to protect the people – Zion’s watchmen. The solemn thing is, they are not supposed to be lying on their bed asleep. It is night time, but night time is the time when the watchman is specially needed. O to enter into that word concerning which

we seem to come so painfully short: to watch for your souls as one that must give an account.

“The watchmen that go about the city found me.” In the fifth chapter, in a somewhat similar condition, the watchmen dealt quite hardly with her. It does not seem they did here. It seems they were a help to her, they were an encouragement to her, because when they found her, she was pleased to meet them, because she had a question: “Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” Now that was the question she put to the watchmen. I wonder when you come through the chapel doors and the service begins, if this is the question you put to the watchman in the spirit of it: “Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” Can you tell us something about Him? Can you tell us who He is? Can you tell us where He is gone? Can you tell us what He has promised to do? Can you tell us where He is to be found?

“The watchmen ... found me: to whom I said, Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth.” Some people have mottos at the end of the year. This would be a good motto before the end of the year for each of us, to know something of this spirit, this question, this enquiry: “Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” People go about a busy life, going to the shops, buying presents, but they are not looking for Him, and they are not seeking for Him, and they are not finding Him, and neither do they want to find Him. But is there one soul this evening and this is the burden of your heart: *Him*?

“Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” And you must have noticed this, beloved friends. She did not even tell the watchmen what His name was or who it is she is seeking, because there was only one *Him* for her. It was just the same with Job. “Oh that I knew where I might find *Him*!” You say, Who are you talking about, Job? And so Mary Magdalene: “If thou have borne *Him* hence, tell me where thou hast laid *Him*.” You say, Mary, who are you speaking about? There is only one *Him* for Mary. There are times in the life of a believer, not always, but times when there is only one *Him*. “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.” “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.”

“The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” Having the watchmen is not *Him*.

Why? Because she wants to see Him. Her desire is this: “We would see Jesus.” O that desire, that longing, that prayer! “We would see Jesus.”

“While walking on the gospel-way,
I would see Jesus every day,
And see in all His grace;
See Him my Prophet, Priest, and King,
See Him by faith, and praises sing;
Then see Him face to face.”

There is a blessed answer. It is this: “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.” We have a glimpse of the King in His beauty. We see Him as our only hope. We see Him as our only plea. We see Him as our only foundation. And this is what she longed to see here. She wanted to see Him as her Saviour. She wanted to see Him as her Lord.

“Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth.” She could not be satisfied till she saw Him. She could not be satisfied till she knew His presence. We think of that beautiful hymn 171. Almost every line speaks of *Him*.

“In *Him* my treasure’s all contained;
By *Him* my feeble soul’s sustained;
From *Him* I all things now receive;
Through *Him* my soul shall ever live.”

“Saw ye *Him* whom my soul loveth?” Well, she did see Him, and she did find Him, and the Lord has promised that they that seek shall find.

“It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him.” O that is it! We used to sing it in our early days:

“Now I have found the ground wherein
My anchor, hope, shall firm remain,
The wounds of Jesus, for my sin.”

She found Him, but she had to pass a little from the watchmen. He was near the watchmen; He was the subject of the watchmen’s ministry; but she could not be satisfied just with the watchmen, or just talking to the watchmen, or just listening to the watchmen. She wanted the watchmen to “point out the place where grace abounds.” She wanted the watchmen to

lead her on a little further, to send her on her way to the place where the Saviour is to be found.

“It was but a little that I passed from *them*, but I found Him.” O may some of you be able to say it by faith, you longing, seeking souls: “I found Him.” Like those in chapter 1 of the Gospel according to John. They said, “We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write.” We have found the Saviour. We have found Jesus. Now there was a watchman there, a blessed watchman, John the Baptist. He pointed them to the place where the Saviour could be found. He said, “Behold the Lamb of God.” That is the Saviour. That is where He is to be found, the Lamb of God in His sweet, atoning sacrifice. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” And they left John. They went a little further from the watchman, “and they followed Jesus.” And that testimony they bore: “We have found Him.”

“It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him whom my soul loveth: I held Him, and would not let Him go.” You know how easy it is to see the Saviour and to let Him go, to find Him and to let Him go. The world intervenes, unbelief, carnality, Satan’s temptations. We need the Lord to hold us fast that we might be enabled to hold the Saviour fast in the arms of faith, like old Jacob: “I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.”

“I found Him ... 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.” Now we do not want to be fanciful here, but Scripture speaks of “Jerusalem which is above,” the church of God, “which is the mother of us all.” So what is this spiritually? It is this: she could not let Him go until she had brought Him among the people of God, those she loved, those who prayed for her. She could not be satisfied till she had spoken to them. She could not be satisfied till she had borne that witness: Here is the Saviour. I sought Him; I found Him; He is mine; I trust He is mine for ever, and I cannot let Him go. I believe He will never let me go. O but she had to come forth in that loving testimony, that loving witness to the people of God of what the Lord Jesus is, what He meant to her, what He had done for her, how she had sought Him, how she had found Him.

“I found Him whom my soul loveth: 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.”