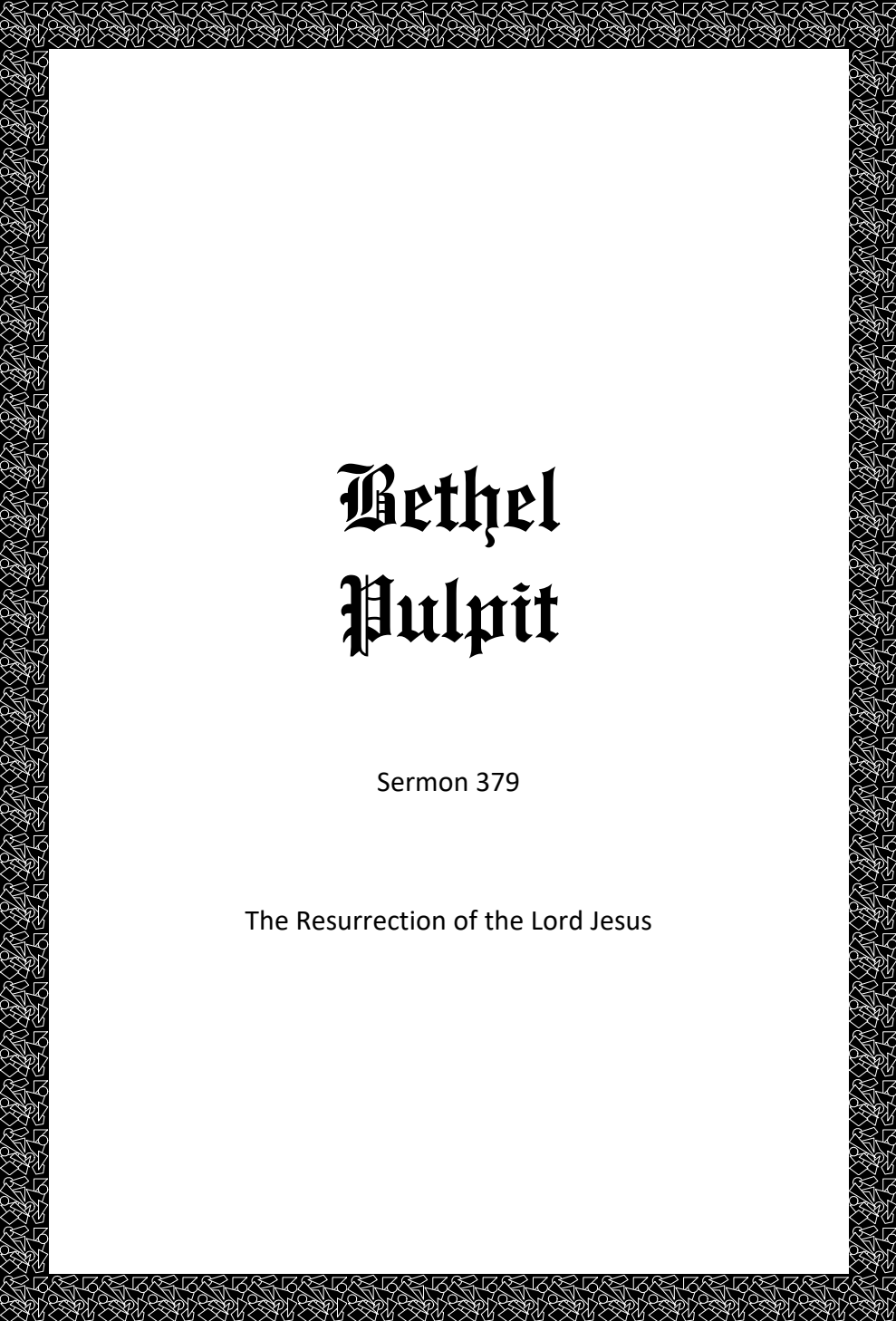




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 379

The Resurrection of the Lord Jesus

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 5th February, 2017**

Text: *"But God raised Him from the dead" (Acts 13. 30).*

This is a very short, very simple word. There is not a more simple word in the whole of the Word of God. But beloved friends, it is vital. The sacred truths included in it are vital: that there is a Saviour, that He is the Son of God, that His Father sent Him, that He came from heaven, that He lived, He died, but He rose again, He lives eternally, and apart from this, no hope, no salvation. This is the foundation of our hope. This is the only way to heaven. We need to have a personal knowledge, a personal interest here.

"But God raised Him" – that is, of course, our Lord Jesus – "from the dead." There are really two vital things I want to speak to you about from this verse this evening, and the first is *the finished work of Christ in His death and glorious resurrection*, and the second, that is bound up with it and flows from it: *a living Saviour*, a living Saviour who is almighty to save.

But before coming exactly to that, I want just to speak for a little while and make a few comments on the first two words in this verse: *"But God."* Now there are many of these *but Gods* in holy Scripture. I remember talking to a friend some years ago on this point, and he produced a list of all the places in Scripture where it says, "But God." You have a look at some of them at your convenience. Really it is this: Almighty God will always have the last word. There are so many things, and then, "But God." He is having the last word – not sin, not Satan, not unbelief, not wicked men, not trouble. "But God." He is the first and He is the last.

There are really so many places in Scripture like this. What do I mean by *like this*? Well, in the context it seemed that Satan had triumphed. The Lord Jesus was dead. It seemed that that was the end. It seemed that the powers of hell were in control. "But God" – this wonderful deliverance. I am sure you can trace it right through Scripture. You can think of Israel on the banks of the Red Sea – no way forward, no way back, no deliverance. "But God." You can keep on right through:

Hezekiah, when Sennacherib threatened him and that was the end. “But God.” It was not Hezekiah lying in the dust; it was Sennacherib’s army.

You can come to the New Testament, all these people. You think of poor, weeping Jairus with his little daughter dying. “But God.” You can think of that woman with the issue of blood, and she had come to the end, and all these people could not help her. She had spent all that she had on physicians. She grew worse rather than better. “But God.” We could go on all evening, the Old Testament and the New, on this: “But God,” when it seemed black despair, when it seemed the end, when it seemed that Satan was triumphing, when it seemed that the people of God were overthrown.

“But God.” I am sure some of you here this evening know this little word, perhaps not in the letter, but in the experience of it in your own lives. There was that time when you were first concerned spiritually. “How shall I stand the trying day?” You could not find relief and you could not find a resting place. “But God.” But Almighty God did. And then those times in your life when you were brought into real trouble. You could not see any way out of it or any way through it. “But God” did, and He brought you safely through. As we look back this evening, you can look back over your life, and all your sins, and all your sorrows, and all your fears, and you see how they could have sunk you, how they could have overthrown you, but they did not. “But God.” It was not Satan in control; it was God who was in control.

When you look to the future – tomorrow, this week, the coming year, and those things you fear and you shrink from, and then to see it: “But God.” He is there. He is still there. He is with you. He is not going to leave you nor forsake you. He is almighty. He is all-wise. He is full of compassion. And then you look at that last great day. “How shall I stand that trying day?” And if it was left to *you*, if it was left to *me*, then we must perish. “But God.” So there is a lot of good divinity in two words. It is not how much religion; it is the reality of it. May these two words abide in someone’s heart.

I said there were a lot of them in the Word of God. Let me be permitted just to mention one to you this evening: Ephesians chapter 2. There you have such a dark, black background of man in his lost, ruined,

fallen condition, “having no hope, and without God in the world.” Now this is it: “*But God*, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved.)” Now whatever other *but God’s* there are, may we have a personal, saving interest in that one.

“But God raised Him from the dead.” Of course, you remember what has just gone before. “They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre.” That was a sad, solemn day to those original disciples. You think of Mary Magdalene weeping. Was this the end? Had they been mistaken? Was it not really true? What of their hope? What of their sins?

“But God raised Him from the dead.” So here you see, we have *the finished work of Christ* in the Saviour’s death and resurrection. Now first of all, there is the *fact* of it. This is put forth just as a simple, true fact. “God raised Him from the dead” – the *fact* of the resurrection. Now you young ones, you girls and boys, always stick fast to that, that we have a *fact* here, and that fact is the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I think I have told you over the years, there were some young men speaking, I think at Hyde Park Corner, years ago, and somebody passed a note to them: “What has your religion got that the religions of Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, atheism, and all these others have not got?” And the man took out his pen and wrote at the bottom: “An empty tomb.” Well, we have got that and it cannot be controverted.

“But God raised Him from the dead” – the fact of it. This was a display of divine, almighty power. Divine power in all its fulness had only once been shown before, and that was in the creation of the world. Almighty power appeared there. Then of course there were these wonderful deliverances now and again, but then to see the lifeless body of the Lord Jesus in the grave.

“But God raised Him from the dead.” That speaks of His almighty power. But let us be clear – I think you all follow me in this – it was not *only* an act of divine, almighty power; it was not *just* an act of divine, almighty power. It was an act of divine justice. All the sins of God’s people had been laid on Christ as the Saviour, and He bore them, and as they were laid on Him, and as He made the atonement, He died. Now if His work had not been complete, if there had been any fault or failure in it, if there was any sin that had not been put away, it would not have been *just* for God to raise Him from the dead. But divine justice was completely satisfied, and it agreed with mercy, that the resurrection must take place. God in raising His dear Son from the dead openly displayed His justice as well as His love and as well as divine power, that He was completely satisfied. You see the terrors of law and of God, and then you see this: “But God raised Him from the dead.” So you could go on and sing,

“The terrors of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour’s obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.”

That is the *doctrine* of the death of Christ as well as the fact of it.

There is another doctrine. In God raising Him from the dead, He “declared” Him “to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead.” His resurrection did not make Him the Son of God. Some people have believed that Christ’s Sonship dates from His resurrection. It dates from eternity. But He had openly claimed He was the Son of God. His claim had been mocked; it had been derided. This is the Father’s will and testimony: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

“God raised Him from the dead.” There is another resurrection. “Our resurrection’s sure, through His.” “Now is Christ risen from the dead” – there is not a full stop there – “and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” You know what the firstfruits were. Before the harvest, the first suitable sheaf of corn was gathered. The whole harvest was not gathered in; just one sheaf gathered in, and it was taken and offered before the Lord in thanksgiving. But it was a token that one day the rest of the harvest would be gathered in. “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and

become the firstfruits of them that slept.” That is all them that sleep in Him. “Now is Christ risen.”

“God raised Him from the dead.” So there is that solemn reminder that the Lord of life and glory was once dead. He must die that sinners might live. O but in His death, the work He had come to accomplish was finished, and there was that dying, triumphant cry, “It is finished.” There is a resting place here for faith – the finished work of Christ. But He must die, and His burial was the evidence that He was dead. But death being the wages of sin, and Christ taking the sinners’ place, He must receive their wages, and so He must die. O but our hymnwriter sings,

“I sing my Saviour’s wondrous death;
He conquered when He fell.”

“But God raised Him from the dead.” In the Epistle to the Romans we have it: “Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more.” It is not like the ceremonial law where the sacrifice had to be repeated. He made an end of sin, and He brought in an everlasting righteousness, and that deep, solemn, wonderful word: “He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

“God raised Him from the dead.” There is the doctrine; there is the fact, and there is the *experience* – that is, being led into it by the Spirit of God, as a sinner feeling your need and being brought to this:

“Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.”

That is the religion that takes a guilty sinner to heaven, that resting on Christ, that hanging on Christ, nothing in self, everything in Him. There is the experience of it, and then His glorious resurrection. “If ye then be risen with Christ.” It is the power of His resurrection that brings a sinner from that sleep of death into the possession of eternal life. It is all in Christ, Christ risen from the dead, that beautiful word: “Not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life.” O then, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.”

“God raised Him from the dead.” So we pass on now to a *living Saviour*. The act of the resurrection: “God raised Him from the dead.” It was a divine act and it was an act once and for all. It took place those many years ago. “God raised Him from the dead.” But this is something that is continual.

“The Saviour lives no more to die!
He lives, the Lord enthroned on high!
He lives, triumphant o’er the grave!
He lives, eternally to save!”

It is a wonderful truth, a living Saviour. But as we so often quote it, our hope is in a once-crucified, but now risen Saviour. And that beautiful word that He whispers to His poor, tried, trouble people: “Because I live, ye shall live also.” O but this living Saviour! He lives for ever exalted at the right hand of God. He lives to intercede on behalf of all who come to God by Him. He is their living Saviour, the sinner’s Advocate with God. What could you do without an Advocate, somebody to speak on your behalf when you cannot speak on your own behalf? And what can you say for yourself? But it is what the Saviour says for you, and He bases it all on what He has done. The Father Himself received His well-beloved Son.

He ever lives as that great and glorious High Priest. O don’t we love His priesthood! And He ever lives as the Mediator, the “one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” So when you approach, begging for mercy, with all your sins and guilt and unbelief and all your sorrow,

“’Tis He, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God.”

It is a wonderful truth, a living Saviour, and His love is as great as when He died on the cross. He never forgets Calvary. That is why you and I come to the Lord’s table, because the Lord Jesus still remembers Calvary and what He suffered and what it cost Him. And He lovingly asks us likewise to remember Calvary. But you see so many things in the living Saviour.

“With heaven and earth at His command,
He waits to answer prayer.”

And He says, “The cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” A living Saviour on the mercy seat, able, willing to hear and answer prayer. It is this living Saviour who says, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” It is this living Saviour who say, “I will not leave you comfortless.” If words mean anything at all, that suggests that His people often are comfortless, but He says, I will not leave you there. “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”

It is the living Saviour who is the great Shepherd of the sheep, who goes before, who says, “I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron.” You feel so weak and helpless. How can you carry on? It is this living Saviour who gives you strength equal to the day. And then when you are ready to sink, it is this living Saviour who upholds you. “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

“God raised Him from the dead.” But that is not the end; that is just the beginning. It is this risen Saviour who still lives and who ever lives, and above all, this risen Saviour is almighty to save.

“God raised Him from the dead.” Now Almighty God does not leave it there, and the apostle in his preaching on this occasion did not leave it there, and the Word of God does not leave it there. There is an application, and of course you might say there must be many applications, and many different applications, and many sacred applications of this divine truth that “the Saviour lives no more to die.” But this is the apostle’s application. He has opened a few things up following the verse I have read to you concerning the resurrection. Now this is his application. It is a lovely word: “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” – this dear Man who died on the cross, this Man whom God raised from the dead, this Man who lives for evermore, the One of whom the prophets said, “This Man shall be the peace.”

“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren” – that is in that far-off day in the Acts of the Apostles; that is this evening in Bethel Chapel. “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” It is a Person we

preach, and He is a glorious Man, the Son of God from all eternity, but He became a real Man to suffer, bleed and die.

“But God raised Him from the dead.” And “through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified.” Now that is forgiveness, but it is more than forgiveness. A man might be forgiven, and he is just a vile wretch. Nobody wants him. This is it: through the death and resurrection of Christ the sinner is accounted righteous; he is accounted just, as if he had never sinned, because he is found in Christ. “By Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

“God raised Him from the dead.” That is the Holy Spirit’s application in the gospel. But it is not just the end. There is a solemn application that immediately follows: “Beware therefore.” You say, What! Beware after hearing that glorious truth? “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.” So there is a glorious application, and then there is a solemn warning. This was so confirmed a chapter or two later when Paul stood on Mars Hill. He refers to this Man, this glorious Man, and he mentions this identical text, that “God raised Him from the dead.” But doesn’t he impress on those who stood on Mars Hill the solemnity! Really the point is this: “What think ye of Christ?” The Saviour has lived; the Saviour has died; God has raised Him from the dead; but does it mean anything to you, and does it mean anything to me?

This is the word with which we close. May it not be the end of the service for us as we go home. “He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by *that Man* whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.” We speak a lot about this point of assurance, and we say, “I wish I had some assurance”; “but I lack the assurance”; “I have not got any assurance.” Well, we are told here that everybody has assurance. What kind of assurance? That God has raised His Son from the dead. “He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.” O but the point is, He has given them the assurance of a risen Saviour, that one day He will be our Judge. What a wonderful mercy to some of you here that when you meet your righteous Judge, it is your Saviour who will be your Judge. But it is a solemn thing if we never knew

Him, never trusted in Him. “Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.”

“But God raised Him from the dead.”