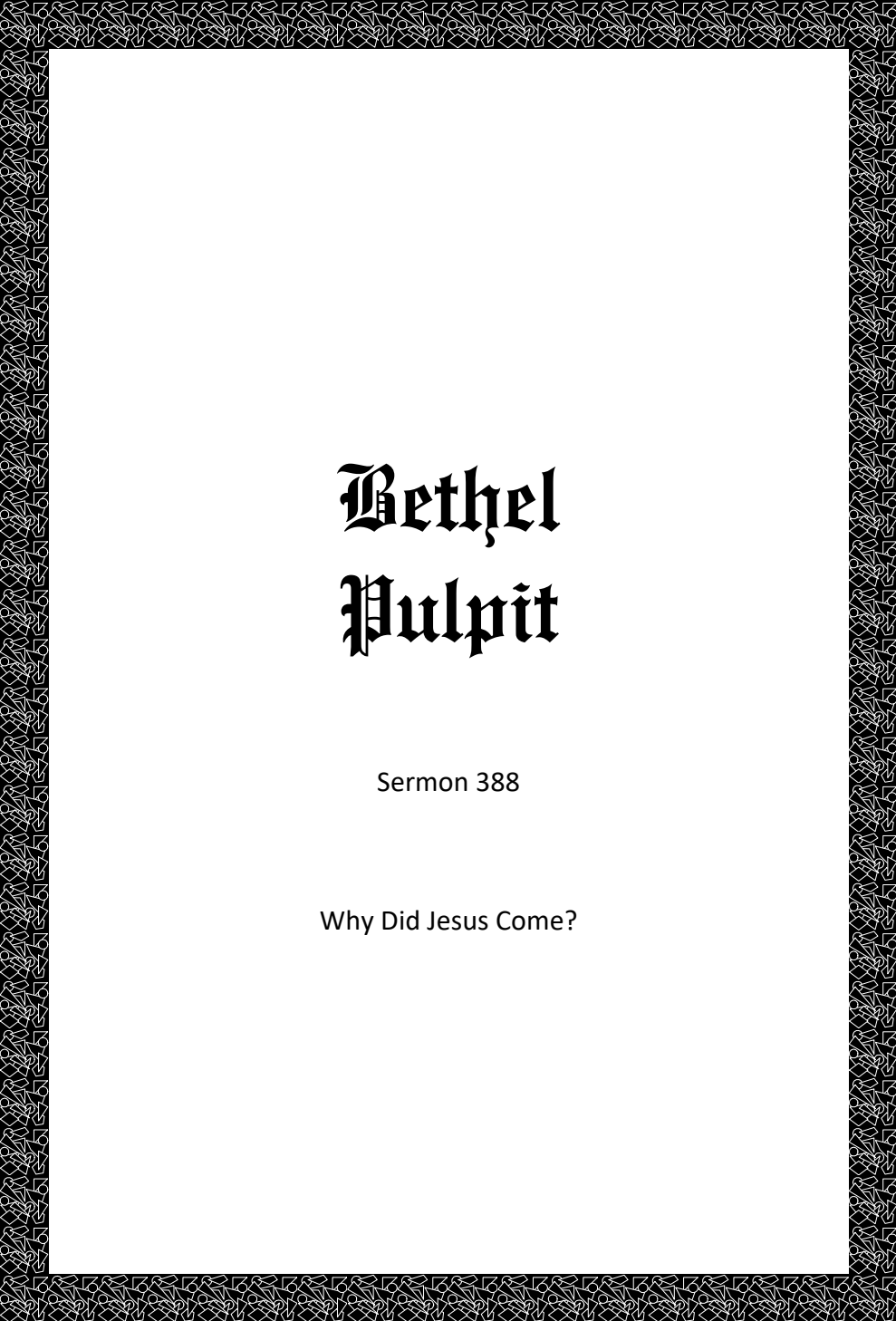




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 388

Why Did Jesus Come?

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 25th December, 2016**

Text: *“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3. 4-7)*

Recently we have been thinking so much of that very sacred subject, the Saviour's birth, the Saviour's coming. “And we know that the Son of God is come.” But beloved friends, we do not want to stop there. We do not want to leave it there. The Word of God does not leave it there. The gospel does not leave it there. So leaving our thoughts about shepherds and angels and wise men and stars, what does it all really mean? Why did the Son of God come? What was the purpose of His coming? What happened *after* He had come? And above all, what does it mean to you and what does it mean to me this evening as we meet together on this day?

Really, these four verses that I have read this evening very simply, very beautifully, very clearly give us an answer to all those questions. They explain why the Son of God came, and what took place then, and what followed after, and what was the purpose of His coming, and that great question: what it means to you and me. Because the verses before show lost, ruined mankind in a most wretched state, lost and ruined in the Fall, and not just mankind, but you and me by nature, and that is why the verses I have read begin with the word *but*. You see man in his lost condition, his helplessness, his unworthiness, his guilt, his unconcern, liable to divine wrath, and then this *but*. Really these verses take the whole plan of salvation in from eternity to eternity. They begin with the eternal plan of God, that there would be a people to whom He would show mercy, and the verses end with that people landed safe in heaven. May you and I be sweetly helped by the Holy Spirit, by faith, to creep in somewhere in these verses. Wouldn't it be lovely if we could creep in something like this: pondering these vast, eternal truths, and if at the end of the day we could say,

“Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast;
There by His love o’ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest”?

“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour.” This is speaking of the eternal Father. “After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.” You see the faithfulness of those eternal purposes of love and mercy, and then to see it, the dawn of redemption, when our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem. What do we see there at Bethlehem, in the manger? That the love and kindness of God our Saviour has appeared. It had been prophesied, but now it appeared. The fulness of the time has come, and in that dear Babe of Bethlehem we see that God has “sent forth His own Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

This is a lovely word: “The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,” in sending His dear Son, and in all that happened at Bethlehem. But these words: “The kindness and love.” I take it we can take them together in that well-known expression, *lovingkindness*. It is one of the great themes of the gospel. “How excellent is Thy lovingkindness, O God!” And never more excellent than when He sent His dear Son to be born at Bethlehem, and when He sent Him to die. O that lovingkindness of God in Christ, that lovingkindness to unworthy sinners, that lovingkindness that planned redemption’s work and that lovingkindness which accomplished it!

“After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.” So really this is explaining to us all these things that took place *after* the Son of God had come, *after* the Lord Jesus had been born at Bethlehem, “*after* that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared.” O the wonder of it, the riches of free grace, that it appeared towards sinful man!

Now the next verse clears up one vital point: that man has no claim, he has no just desert, he cannot claim these blessings for himself. Everything that God has done in love and mercy, everything the Saviour has accomplished, everything the Holy Spirit makes known, it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy,”

because this verse is speaking of *salvation*. If you will, the crux of the four verses is this: “*He saved us.*” It is a wonderful thing when a sinner through grace can say, “He saved me.” O but it is this truth, that it must be entirely of God’s grace. It is entirely undeserved. It is not something we can merit. It is not something we can do. It is not according to our works. It is “not by works of righteousness which we have done.”

Of course, the enemies of the truth have always contended, if we believe salvation is all of grace, that the sinner is helpless in it, then it will lead to carelessness and immorality and unconcern. Well, it never has done with the Lord’s people. Shall I tell you why? Because the grace that saves, it sanctifies, and the grace that saves, keeps. If the Lord really blesses you tonight and shows you that you are saved with an everlasting salvation, and you do not deserve it at all, it is entirely of the grace of God, you will not go out and commit sin tomorrow, deliberately doing it. You will never walk more tenderly in all your life.

It is “not by works of righteousness which we have done.” Then what is it by? And another very simple answer – two words – “His mercy.” “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” God’s standard in dealing with His people in salvation is not what they have done. It is His mercy. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy.” That is where salvation is. It all goes back to the birth of the Lord Jesus at Bethlehem. This is why He came, that sinners might be saved by grace. It is all following, all flowing from the dear Saviour of sinners. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” There is a grave, I think not too far from here, and on it it has these words:

“‘Tis not by works of righteousness
That our own hands have done,
But we are saved by sovereign grace
Abounding in the Son.”

“Not by works of righteousness which we have done.” That is the negative. But the positive: “But according to His mercy He saved us.”

Now the next question: how is all this going to be made known? And here we have the Holy Spirit's work. There is a beautiful unity in salvation. That is, the Father chooses, and loves with an everlasting love, and gives to His dear Son; the Son of God dies for them and redeems them; and the Holy Spirit works in their hearts, making salvation known. So you have the whole Trinity here, and do not forget that the whole Trinity was bound up with all these events in Matthew chapters 1 and 2 and Luke chapters 1 and 2.

“According to His mercy.” How is it going to be made known? “By the washing of regeneration” – that is, the new birth – “and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” These things are going to be made known in a sinner's heart. The Lord Jesus has been born; He has lived; He has died; He has risen again; He is in heaven; and it is the gracious, covenant office of the Holy Spirit to make these things known to sinners personally. If your religion is right, these things will be made known to *you* personally, the work of regeneration, the new birth. Your life will be changed; your eyes will be opened; you will see things you never saw before; you will feel things you never felt before; and there will be a complete change. This is the effect. That was the beginning, when the Lord Jesus came and when He lay there in the manger, and the word was spoken, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” This is the outworking of it, and this is what it means to you and me. “By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” There will be a change. You are going to be different. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

“By the washing of regeneration.” Now beloved friends, it seems a strange expression at first. We think of the new birth, the Holy Spirit's work. “You hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” But “the washing of regeneration.” Now I do not think this has anything whatsoever to do with water baptism in any form. What I take it to mean is this: if the Holy Spirit makes these things known in your heart and mine, reveals the Saviour, makes Him precious, leads you to know this wonderful mercy, brings you to confess Christ as your Saviour, makes His kindness and love precious, it will always have a sanctifying effect. It is the blood of Christ that cleanses from all sin, but the Holy Spirit's work in a sinner, making Him known, making Him precious, will always have that

sanctifying effect. Just as water cleanses, water washes, so the work of the Holy Spirit. It will make you very tender in the fear of God. This is the way that we enter into these blessings for which Christ came and for which Christ was born.

“By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” But do not forget that vital little word in the middle: “He saved us.” The Lord Jesus saved His people when He came, when He died and rose again, but the Holy Spirit makes salvation known. It is that point, beloved friends; I like to hold you on it. When people come to see us and give their little testimony, there are really only two things we want to hear: how they were brought to feel their need of a Saviour, and then how in some greater or less measure the Saviour has met that need. Quaint Daniel Herbert puts it:

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

Do I? He is an almighty Saviour and He is a willing Saviour. “He saved us.” This is how it is made known: “By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

And then the next verse tells us where all these glorious truths and blessings centre, and that is in the Saviour. It is in that wonderful kindness and love. We sang of it this morning:

“Sing that amazing, boundless, matchless love,
Which brought the Lord of glory from above.”

We have it all through these verses. “Which He shed on us abundantly” – that is the eternal Father; that is by the Holy Spirit. “Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” In all things He must have the preeminence. It is all in Christ. If He had never come, where would we have been? It would have been nothing but despair. Whatever point is taken up here, it all centres in Christ. It all centres in the Saviour, the one thing needful. And the eternal Father in these blessings which flow from the coming of Christ does not do it in a kind of half-hearted way, a niggardly way. There is the Father’s love, the Father’s willingness. These things are abounding.

What is it Bunyan calls one of his books? *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Now that could be an interesting book for some of you young ones, because in it Bunyan tells of his own life. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. But if you old ones want something very beautiful, very simple – Abraham Booth’s *Reign of Grace*. Grace does not just exist; it reigns. “That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” It all ends there; it all centres there.

O but, “Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” Well, we just stop here. Personally today, as we think of these things, before you go home, what would you really like? Are there any of you who feel like this: Well, I should love for this lovingkindness to be shed upon me, especially to be shed upon me abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour? O what a word this is!

And then you see, you come towards the consummation, the ending of it. “That being justified by His grace.” Justification is one of the great truths of the Bible. Man is a sinner. God demands that he should be just, he should be righteous. He cannot make himself just; he cannot make himself righteous. Well, how can it take place? “Being justified by His grace.” There is forgiveness in it, but there is more than forgiveness. The Saviour atones for the sins of His people. He takes them for ever out of the way, and He gives them His own holy, spotless, sacred righteousness to be their own. And it is all of grace. I know in some places it says, “By faith.” Well, it is grace that does it, and it is faith that receives it. There is no honour to faith; there is no ability in faith. It is just like empty hands that receive this righteousness that makes a sinner just.

This was the great truth of the Glorious Reformation. I wonder if you children, you boys and girls, you young people have realised that 2017 is the five hundredth anniversary of the Glorious Reformation (if a date could be chosen) when Martin Luther, a monk in Germany, nailed his ninety-five theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg. I think if you look out in the papers and the magazines, the secular as well as the religious, this coming year there are going to be many celebrations of this. Almost all Europe was in darkness, in bondage, in distress. They did not know the way of salvation. They thought you have to do something, and they could not do it, and Luther as a young monk found he could not do

anything to gain this justness, this righteousness, but he must find it. He was going to have the most menial task in the monastery. He was willing to scrub the floors. He was willing to starve himself almost to a skeleton.

One day, with a divine light that word shone in his heart: “The just shall live by faith” – not through anything he could do. He was a changed man, and soon there was an effect throughout Germany, and soon throughout Europe, throughout England, throughout the known world, and under the blessing of God there was light instead of darkness. O the blessings we owe to that Glorious Reformation! But it was this revelation: it is all in Christ; it is all through grace. They used to have those mottos: By grace alone, by faith alone, by Christ alone.

I have always liked that little story. When Luther was in the depths of despair, there was a visitor to the monastery. He was a kind of supervisor, a man called Staupitz. He did not know much, but the light of the gospel was dawning in his heart. He saw Martin Luther in his dreadful distress, and just said one thing to him, and I have always thought it was beautiful, and it suits us today. He said, “Brother Martin, look to the wounds of Christ!” That is it. It would be a wonderful thing if any in Bethel Chapel were sweetly enabled to look to the wounds of Christ. Some of us can go back to those days many years ago when we “found the ground wherein our anchor, hope, must firm remain, the wounds of Jesus for my sin.” “Look to the wounds of Christ,” because no sinner ever perished there. This is the ground of justification. It is all in Christ, and it is all made known by the Spirit of God to this sinner who feels he is not just in himself.

“That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs” – “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” You know what an heir is. He has a wonderful inheritance or a smaller inheritance, but he does not deserve it. If someone has left a will and it has been testified to, you might go and say, “I deserve to have part of that will, because I have done this.” No; it is those who are heirs, whose names have been put in that will. And these sinners for whom Jesus was born, for whom He died and rose again and lives eternally, on whom this lovingkindness abounds, they are made heirs. “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.”

“Being justified by His grace, we” – unworthy of it all – “we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” So you see, the wheel

has gone full circle. It all started in eternity in the plan of salvation, the lovingkindness of God appearing, and then so blessedly displayed in the birth of Christ, in the coming of the Saviour, and the outworking of it, the great work of redemption, all these things that follow on, and then it reaches the end. It lands this sinner in heaven, and eternal life. O what a blessing! But it is all through Jesus Christ our Lord, He who was once born a Bethlehem, He who once came.

“Eternal life, at His request,
To every saint is given;
Safety on earth, and, after death,
The plenitude of heaven.”

It is “in hope of eternal life.” It is not a vain hope; it is not a false hope; it is a “good hope through grace,” and it is built on a solid foundation; it is built on the rock. “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus.”

“Made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” So after all these lovely things we have been thinking about concerning Bethlehem, and the shepherds coming, and the angels, and the wise men, but this great point: what took place afterwards and why did He come and what did He accomplish, and above all, what does it mean to you and me? You have it here, as old John Warburton said, it is fastened secure in eternity at both ends. It is “from everlasting to everlasting.” Following from this love, there is liberty here instead of that awful bondage, and there is light here shining in darkness. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.” And then it is not death; it is life, eternal life. But it is all in Christ.

It was when he had that revelation of the cross that Bunyan’s Pilgrim entered into all these things: the love, the light, the liberty, the life, and his burden rolled away when he came to the cross, that heavy burden which rolled into the open grave. He saw it no more. You know what he said: “He has given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.” That is it: “Life by His death.” And Bunyan said, “As he went on, he sang, and I listened to the song:

‘Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me.’”

“The hope of eternal life.” Well, what a stream of blessings, what a chain of blessings, all clearly bound together! But we do not want just to look at it just as a doctrine or something in the Word of God. These are the things that our souls painfully need. Without them we must perish. We love to sing of Bethlehem, but then the glorious things that followed according to the gospel in the salvation of unworthy sinners. O that you and I might be sweetly led, sweetly drawn, that we might be able to enter, that we might be able to creep inside these things, that we might find a resting place, that we might find a hiding place. But it must be “beneath the shadow of His cross.” It must be in Christ.