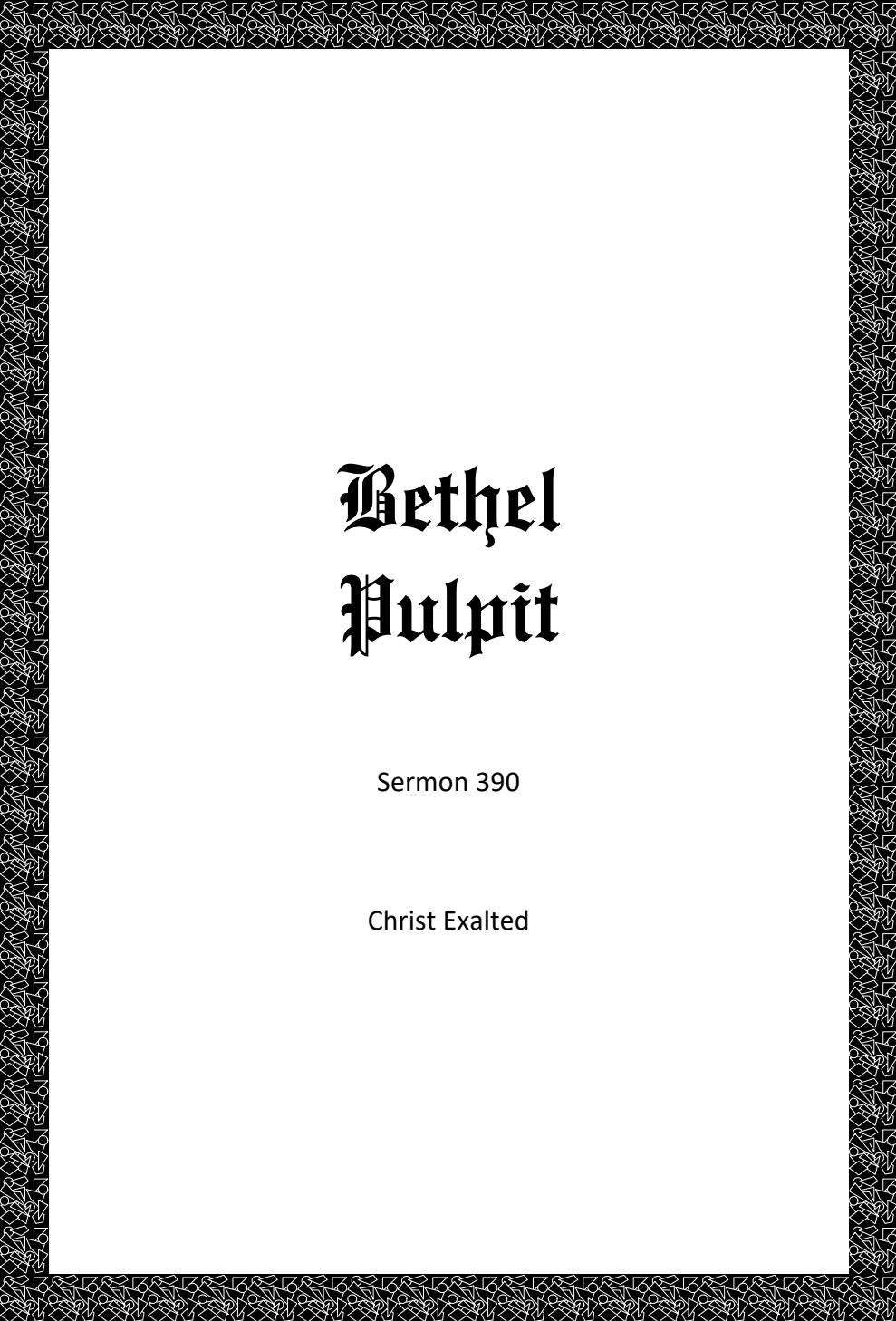




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 390

Christ Exalted

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 24th December, 2017**

Text: *"Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5. 31).*

"Him" – the Lord Jesus who lay helpless in the manger, but now no longer in that stable surrounded by oxen, but at God's right hand crowned with eternal blessings. "Him." But it is "this same Jesus." What we have been thinking about recently is the Son of God in His humiliation. O how low He stooped! Some of the godly Puritans were amazed at that. They could never get over it, the enormous stoop of the Lord Jesus from heaven to earth. It had an effect in their lives: they were very humble before God. If the great God of heaven stooped so low, then what about you and me? So as we think of Bethlehem and the stable and the manger, we cannot help but remember this word: "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." "He humbled Himself"; He "made Himself of no reputation"; He was "found in fashion as a man." "Being found in fashion as a man, He ... became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Now this was our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the days of His humiliation. But you see it in what followed. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head" – those days of poverty, despised and rejected of men, and then you come to Gethsemane and the judgment hall and Calvary. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Now have you ever bowed your knee before Him? Because to Him "every knee *shall* bow," must bow, either in mercy or in judgment.

So as we think of the whole plan of redemption, we see the beautiful beginnings and openings of it when our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came to this earth and went all the way to the cross. But here you see that glorious afterward. "Him" – this same Jesus – "Him hath God exalted." So this evening we are looking forward from Bethlehem, and we are

looking beyond the cross and the grave, and beyond the Mount of Olives, and we are looking up to heaven, there to see the exalted Saviour.

“Him hath God exalted.” Now there are three ways in which His eternal Father has exalted Him. The first is when He ascended into heaven and He crowned Him with glory and honour, and He set Him for ever at His right hand. So He is exalted there, ever living, ever reigning, ever interceding, the Son of God in all His glory. “Him hath God exalted.” Because He is His beloved Son, He must exalt Him, and also as a reward for all those dreadful sufferings that He endured. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever in contemplating the cross mourned with the Lord Jesus in His agony and bitter sorrow? O but have you known what it is to rejoice with Him when you see a word like this: “Him hath God exalted”? No more the cross, no more the crown of thorns.

“Him hath God exalted.” And then secondly, His eternal Father has exalted His beloved Son in the preaching of the everlasting gospel. Now where there is true gospel preaching, it is that exalting of the Saviour. There is nothing in the flesh to exalt, nothing in the sinner to exalt, nothing in us to exalt. We are to be humbled, but “Him hath God exalted.” There is that lifting up of the Saviour in the preaching of the gospel. The old godly ministers in our chapels, like Gadsby and Warburton and Kershaw, often used that expression of Christ being *lifted up on the gospel pole*. Of course, they were referring to John chapter 3, verses 14 and 15: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness” – that well-known occasion, Israel stung by those venomous serpents, death within them, death all about them, no hope, no remedy, “till the serpent Moses took,” and he lifted it on high. It was a serpent of brass. It had the appearance, but it did not have the reality; there was no venom in it. It sets forth Christ made sin that His people “might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” But that was not the end. There was the exaltation. It was to look; it was for dying sinners to look to the serpent lifted up.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up.” It is one of the Lord’s *musts*. He “*must* be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” It is dying sinners looking to a once-crucified, now exalted Saviour. That serpent in the wilderness was a strange way, but it was God’s way, and it was the only way, and it availed. And so it is now.

Over the years there have been a few dying sinners in this chapel who have been sweetly enabled to look to the exalted Saviour, and they have found life there. They have found their hope, their foundation there. They have found their burden rolled away there. I wonder how many here this evening are numbered amongst them, those dying sinners who have looked and lived.

“Him hath God exalted” – in that glorious work, His resurrection and ascension, and then in the preaching of the gospel, and thirdly, in the hearts of every sinner saved by grace. If your religion is real, you will love to hear Christ exalted in the gospel. Now it is a good thing if you have that mark, and I believe there will be this: there will be a sweet attraction; there will be a drawing to the Saviour exalted. O but He will be exalted in your affections. He will be exalted in your heart.

Now you children, you young ones, I wonder if you remember what I spoke from – it could not be last year, because we did not have a Christmas day morning service then; it must have been the year before. Can you remember what I spoke about? I asked if any of you had had it for a present – a magnet. There is just one thing with that magnet: it draws; it powerfully draws; it pulls. That is what the Spirit of God does in the hearts of sinners when He exalts the Saviour there. He sweetly draws them to the Saviour to fall at His feet. This is the way you will come:

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

“Him hath God exalted.” You remember how Peter opened it up just before in the preceding verse. He said, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted.” Now it is a wonderful thing. Mary Magdalene was asking (she thought He was the gardener): “Tell me where thou hast laid Him.” There was only one *Him*. “Tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.” How could she lift up what she thought was a lifeless body and carry it back to the grave? O that one word, *Mary*. Has the Lord ever spoken that one word? I once was preaching on this subject down in Wiltshire. I received a most beautiful note. There was no address on it, and it was just signed “*Mary*.” She said the Lord Jesus spoke that word to her: *Mary*. I think she knew the answer: *Rabboni*, my dearest Master. But it is *Him*.

“Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth?” You are sad because you cannot find Him. What about this: “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!”?

“Him hath God exalted with His right hand.” We have what I think is a beautiful description of the Lord Jesus exalted at His Father’s right hand, the place of honour, the place of glory: “A Prince and a Saviour.” If we have that, we have heaven. “A Prince and a Saviour.” O that glorious work of salvation! “Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.” The chief of sinners – “He is able” – He is willing – “to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him,” the dear Lord Jesus, our dear Immanuel, the Saviour of sinners. There He is exalted at the Father’s right hand.

“A Prince” – His almighty power, His royalty. He is that wonderful Prince of Peace. He is the Prince of Life. He is the Prince of Glory. He is the Prince of the kings of the earth. We sing of the “wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died.”

There in heaven tonight He is exalted as “a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” The Lord Jesus preached repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance. All the apostles preached repentance. It is very clear that without repentance none can be saved. We need to repent. We have not the ability to repent. Unless enabled by the Lord, unless we have this vital gift here, we do not repent. And yet we must repent.

I think the old Scottish divines used to speak of it like a vice. You know what a vice is. When it is fastened, it becomes tighter and tighter. They used to hold you in this vice: that you must repent, and yet you cannot repent, so how are you going to repent? And they brought the vice tighter and tighter. There are these many exhortations to repent, the need to repent because we are sinners in the sight of God. Repentance really means a changing completely round. Yes, it does mean confessing your sin; yes, it does mean to be sorry for your sin; but it means not going on in your sin. It is that turning round. Like that old Sussex preacher who said, “What is repentance?” and he swivelled right round with his back to the congregation. It is that complete turning round, that complete change.

“Him hath God exalted ... to give repentance.” Well, surely you know whether you have repented or not. I know you will be tried.

Sometimes your heart is hard; sometimes you will long for a soft heart; sometimes you will wish you were different; but you do know if there has been a change. Like John Newton said, "I am not what I long to be; I am not what I should be; I am not what one day I hope to be; but I do know this: I am not what I once was." Many a tried, tempted believer, especially in their early days, has been able to hold this fast: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." Now if you have that, it means there is life, and if you have that, it means there is repentance. "To give repentance." Some of you say like the hymnwriter, "I would, but can't repent." Well, the Lord Jesus is exalted to give it, and this means that He is willing to give it, and He delights to give it, where there is a prayer, where there is a longing for it.

"To give repentance." Some of you may be a little troubled that this word speaks of repentance, but does not mention faith. It speaks about repenting, but it does not speak about believing. Beloved friends, you cannot have the one without the other. They are always spoken of as twin graces: repentance and faith; faith and repentance. As you have it here, there is repentance, no mention of believing. In many scriptures you have believing, no mention of repentance. I am sure even the young ones can see it here. If repentance means a complete turning round, then if you are turning away from sin, and Satan, and the world, and your idols, and the things that once satisfied you, and from prayerlessness, and from confidence in yourself, if you are turning completely round from that, then you are looking in a different direction, then you are looking unto Jesus. These two things go together: faith and repentance. But these two things are vital.

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance," to give faith. Now there is a beautiful verse in one of our hymns. I hope it may affect someone's heart here.

"Saviour, Prince, enthroned above,
Repentance to impart,
Give me, through Thy dying love,
The humble, contrite heart.
Give, what I have long implored,
A portion of Thy love unknown,

Turn, and look upon me, Lord,
And break my heart of stone.”

“To give repentance.” Now the beautiful case you have of it, of course, is Simon Peter. You say, “He fell badly.” He repented wonderfully. You think of it: this apostle who was preaching this blessed sermon here, who spoke these very words here, he knew what repentance was. He knew his need of it, but he knew he was given it. You can hardly think of it, Peter denying his Lord and Master with oaths and curses. Can this be Peter? “And the Lord ... looked upon Peter.” It was a look of sorrow; it was a look of grief. Has the Lord looked on some of you like that? Has He ever looked on you from the cross? Has He ever looked on you as a dying Saviour? And has that look pierced you through and through? Has that look condemned you? But then there is *a second look*, and there is forgiveness in it, and there is salvation in it, and there is heaven in it, and that will cause real repentance to flow, if you see your sin as that which crucified the Lord of life and glory.

“Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” It means this: that repenting sinners are forgiven sinners. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” “And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” “To give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” If faith and repentance are twin graces, then repentance and forgiveness are twin blessings. But it is clear here that forgiveness is the gift of God. It can never be earned; it can never be merited. It is the gift of God’s free, sovereign, unmerited grace, to give forgiveness of sins. Have you any sins you need to be forgiven?

There was a dreadful criminal to be hanged. In mercy the Lord appeared for him. He was allowed to speak just a few words, because as most of you know, executions in the past were always in public, and a great crowd appeared. He was going to be hanged, and he had been a dreadful, evil sinner, but he found true repentance and true forgiveness. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, he said, “He is a great Forgiver.”

What a mercy that we have wonderful encouragements. Just one: “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” – that is the repentance – “and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will *abundantly pardon*.” It is not something the Lord does in a niggardly way. Satan has tempted some – well, the Lord will have to do it just because He has promised, but He will not really be very willing. “He will abundantly pardon.”

“To give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” But let not anyone think that repentance is a way in which a sinner obtains forgiveness, gains it, wins it, merits it. Repenting sinners, blessed by the Spirit of God, are forgiven, but it is not because they deserve this forgiveness. Forgiveness is entirely on the ground of grace. Forgiveness is in Christ alone. Forgiveness flows from one place and one place alone, and that is the cross of Christ. That is the place where you will have to go to find forgiveness, this dear Saviour once crucified, once bleeding, dying on the cross. Why? That sinners might be forgiven. O how the psalmist spoke of it: “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.”

“To give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” So what a word that is!

“Come, then, repenting sinner, come;
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what thou wilt, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death.

“His blood can cleanse the blackest soul,
And wash our guilt away;
He will present us sound and whole,
In that tremendous day.”

And it will be a tremendous day when you and I come there, and are you ready, and am I ready, and have we a sweet hope that:

“He will present us sound and whole,
In that tremendous day”?

“Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”

* * *

Join, all who love the Saviour's name,
To sing His everlasting fame;
Great God! prepare each heart and voice
In Him for ever to rejoice.

Of Him what wondrous things are told!
In Him what glories I behold!
For Him I gladly all things leave;
To Him, my soul, for ever cleave.

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.

With Him I daily love to walk;
Of Him my soul delights to talk;
On Him I cast my every care;
Like Him one day I shall appear.

Bless Him, my soul, from day to day,
Trust Him to bring thee on thy way;
Give Him thy poor, weak, sinful heart;
With Him, O never, never part.

Take Him for strength and righteousness;
Make Him thy refuge in distress;
Love Him above all earthly joy,
And Him in everything employ.

Praise Him in cheerful, grateful songs;
To Him your highest praise belongs;
'Tis He who does your heaven prepare,
And Him you'll sing for ever there.

S. Medley