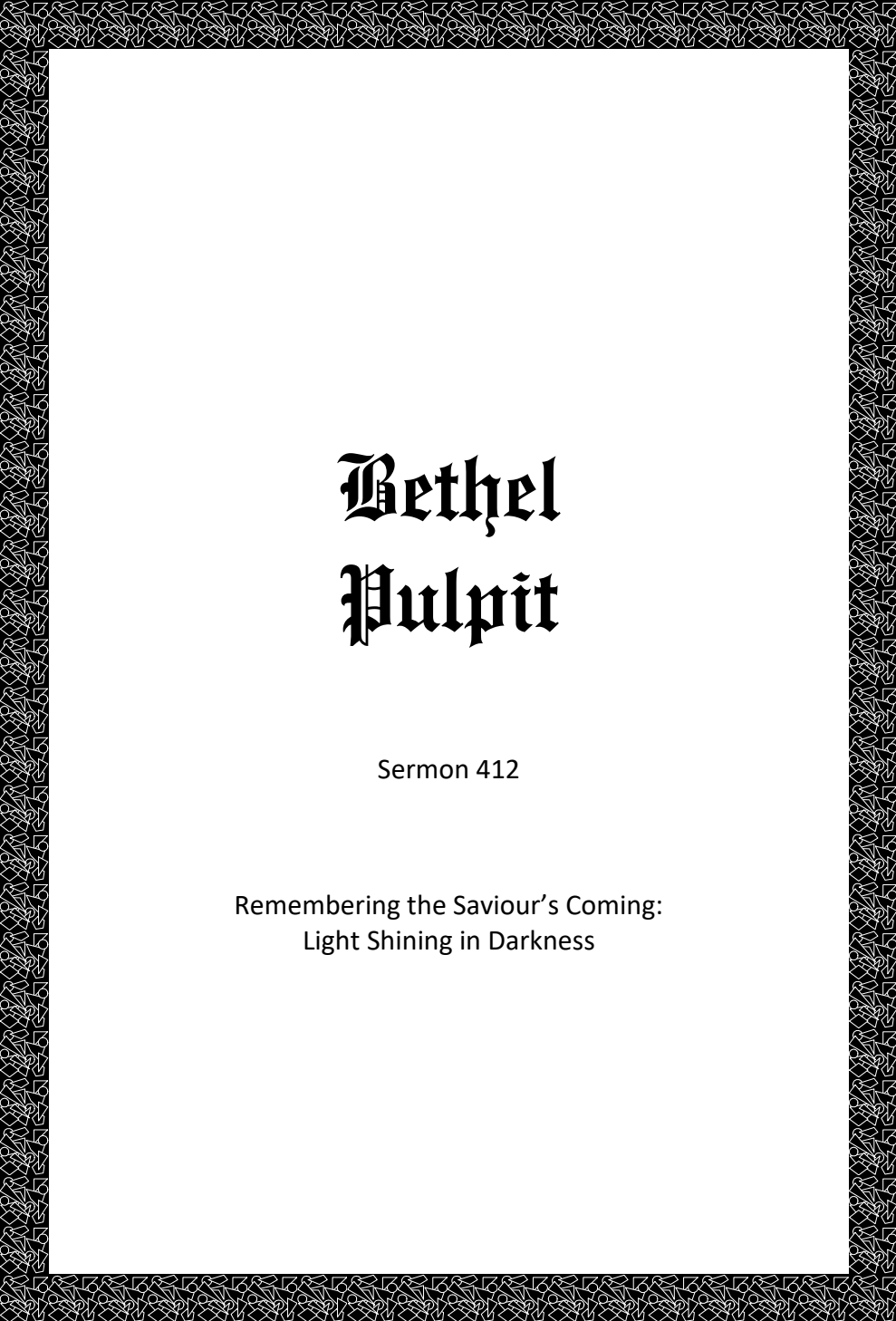




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 412

Remembering the Saviour's Coming:
Light Shining in Darkness

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 3rd November, 2019**

Text: *"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" (Isaiah 9. 2).*

This is a theme that we find throughout the whole of the Word of God, from its very beginning to its very end: darkness and light; light and darkness. Now God's ancient people at the time that Isaiah wrote knew much darkness. There were many sufferings that they had, but also they were plagued with the darkness of sin and unbelief and its effects amongst them. Really, even the old dispensation at its best was a dark dispensation. I am thinking of the priesthood and the sacrifices. True it was, there was a glimmer of light there – they pointed to gospel days; they pointed to Christ – but it was a dark dispensation.

When you think of our own country, for hundreds of years our country was dwelling in darkness. Even historians call them the Dark Ages. There was no knowledge of the Scriptures, of man's lost condition, of the way of salvation. So there was a lot of superstition, and there was a lot of idolatry, and there was a lot of immorality and a lot of wickedness, until the morning star of the Reformation, Wycliffe, appeared, and then later the fulness of the blessing of the Reformation.

But with each of us, every one of us, by nature we are the people who walk in darkness. Adam walked in the light before he fell. But he ruined all of his future race, and all of them as they are born go forth in darkness, living in darkness, walking in darkness, and even though now we have the Scriptures amongst us, by nature we are walking in darkness. We cannot see our great need. We cannot see the importance of eternal things. We cannot see the greatness of God. We cannot see eternity and all that it means. We cannot see the judgment day. We cannot see the way of salvation. We cannot see that beauty in Christ that we should desire Him. So it is not only darkness; it is death. And if uninterrupted by grace, it ends in eternal death.

"The people that walked in darkness." But it is not some kind of innocent darkness. It is the darkness of unbelief. It is the darkness of sin, the darkness of guilt. It is darkness for which we are accountable. "If

therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” One of the passages we read this evening (Isaiah 60) spoke of *gross darkness*. Now naturally all of you know what darkness is. You know how since the clocks were put back last week, we have this darkness coming earlier. We have the dark nights. But I do not think many of you know what gross darkness is.

Now we older ones remember the last war. There was a blackout. It literally was a blackout. It was gross darkness – the point being that enemy aircraft could not see where they were going, could not even see where there was a town or city that they wanted to bomb. That gross darkness! I remember my dear old father coming back with his head bleeding. He thought he had got to the end where he could turn left, but you could not see anything, and he just crashed into a wall. We heard stories in our own town where people could not find their way home. Some people had gone out into their own garden, if they had one, and they could not find their way back into the house. Well, that is gross darkness, and that is the kind of darkness the Word of God speaks of – not a glimmering of light.

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” And that great light appeared in the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I do not know whether you young ones have ever thought about it, but when we read of the birth of Jesus, there is so much about the light – the light that shone over Bethlehem, the radiance of the angels, the glory that shone around. When you think of the wise men also, they saw a light which led them to Bethlehem. Now that was not the great light. The great light was the Babe that lay in the manger at Bethlehem, and He brought light to this dark world. That was really the first time. It had been prophesied; there had been glimpses of it; but now, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” And the solemn thing was that most of them preferred the darkness to light, because their deeds were evil.

“He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him” – O there was a people! Those poor shepherds rejoiced in that light. So did the wise men. So did Simeon. So did Anna. “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light,”

and they rejoiced in it. So it was not the glory surrounding the angels. This was the great light. “Fear not..... For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour” – that is the great light – “a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” It is a mercy if you and I ever have seen that great light, sometimes spoken of as the Sun of Righteousness, Christ compared to the sun in the firmament, that great light, and the people who walked in darkness saw it.

What a wonderful thing it is that almost immediately after this verse Isaiah by faith most sweetly and blessedly opened up who that great light is. “For unto us a Child is born.” Now this is the great light. “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful.” That is the great light. He is wonderful in His salvation, wonderful in all that He has done, and wonderful in all that He is doing, wonderful to answer your prayers, wonderful to deliver, wonderful to uphold you in the time of your need.

“His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor” – in that sense, that you can go to Him as a poor sinner. You are unwise; you do not know what to do. You may go to a human counsellor. They may give you the wrong advice. But this is a wonderful Counsellor. He makes no mistakes in the counsel that He gives.

“The mighty God.” There is not a clearer declaration of the Godhead of Christ in all Scripture than that. There are one or two of you here this evening who can say this:

“That Christ is God I can avouch,
And for His people cares,
Since I have prayed to Him as such,
And He has heard my prayers.”

“The everlasting Father.” Let us be clear; let us not get into error on the relationship of the Persons in the Godhead. This is not confusing the Son with the Father. It is speaking of the eternal Son, our Lord Jesus, in His loving, kind, fatherly dealings with His people. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”

“The Prince of Peace.” He “made peace through the blood of His cross.” He gives peace. He is our peace. Now this is the great light. “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” We love those words, don’t we!

“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.” Really, in dealing with this beautiful, important subject, there are two aspects of it, surely, two simple aspects. One is the great light, the Person of our Lord Jesus in all the glory of His Person as He shines forth, all the glory of the work that He accomplished, the eternal Son of God from everlasting. That is one aspect, to behold His glory just as you can look on the sun and you can look on its beauty, its glory. Sometimes you see it rising; sometimes you see it setting. It is a great light. But the other thing with the sun: it shines. It shines forth, and where there was darkness before, the sun shines, and darkness cannot stand before light. When the sun appears, the darkness flees.

So there are those two points. If led by the Spirit of God, we shall see something of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. Also, we shall know something of the shining forth of that great light in this dark world, especially in our dark hearts, because that is the beginning of real religion. We do not really know anything, we do not really see anything, until Christ the great light by His Spirit shines in our hearts. The old Church of England prayer: “Lighten our darkness, we beseech, Thee, O Lord.” The Old Testament church prayed for it. There is that well-known prayer: “Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.” The Lord dwelt between the cherubims. That was where the mercy seat was, the blood was sprinkled, where a holy God met with guilty sinners and received them, accepted them. In measure even in that dark dispensation that was the place where Almighty God shone forth, from between the cherubims, and all on the ground of that blood that was sprinkled, looking forward to Christ.

O but this great light, the coming of the Saviour into this world, shedding abroad those beams of grace and glory! Just before the Saviour was born, old Zacharias spoke so beautifully about it. He spoke as if it had

already happened: “The dayspring from on high hath visited us.” It is a lovely title: “The dayspring from on high.” The margin gives it, “the sunrising” – bringing light where there was darkness before. “The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,” and this is it: “to guide our feet into the way of peace.” There is a way of peace. It is in Christ, and it is the only way of peace. It is the way of forgiveness. It is the way of salvation. It is the way of peace through His blood. It is the way of peace which leads to heaven. But we are dark by nature. We cannot see it, but when the light shines, it is to guide our feet into the way of peace.

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Wouldn’t it be a wonderful thing if before we went home tonight, we should sweetly be assured that we are amongst this people, and the reason being that the Lord has shined in our hearts!

Now perhaps some of you feel in the dark. Can you pray that prayer:

“Lord Jesus, shine, and then I can
Feel sweetness in salvation’s plan;
And as a sinner, plead for grace,
Through Christ, the sinner’s Hiding-place”?

O may there be a people at Bethel who by nature walked in darkness, but through free and sovereign grace have seen the great light, and not just seen it, but found that the light on them has shined.

So our Lord Jesus made that majestic statement: “I am the Light of the world.” Let us be clear: that is really an assertion of His Godhead. No mere man could say, “I am the Light of the world.” If he did, he is either a blasphemer on the one hand or a madman on the other. But Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world.” There He was, “despised and rejected of men,” as the prophet said. When they saw Him, there was no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. Why? Because they were still walking in darkness. O but He said, “I am the Light of the world,” the only true light. “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.”

“I am the Light of the world.” It is one of those wonderful *I am* statements of the Lord Jesus. He is really referring to the title Almighty God revealed Himself by to Moses. Moses said, Who art Thou? What

shall I tell Pharaoh? What shall I tell the people? The Lord said, “I AM.” It means the One who is always there, the One who is eternal, the One who is unchangeable, the One who before creation could say, “I am,” the One who can still say, “I am” when time shall be no longer.

The Lord Jesus takes it to Himself and lovingly joins it: “I am the good Shepherd,” and “I am the true Vine,” and “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” And here, “I am the Light of the world” – not just that He gives it; He is the Light.

“I am the Light of the world.” And what comes now? “He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” Now that following is by faith, and often in the New Testament it is the same as believing. A believer is one who follows after the Lord Jesus. I hope there are a few here this evening following after, because you want Him, you must have Him, you cannot do without Him, and then as the Lord deals with you, being able to follow Him in that narrow way which leads to life.

“I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness.” Now that may trouble some of you. You say, I hope I am a follower of the Lord, but often I do walk in darkness. Yet this says that he that followeth after the Lord Jesus will not walk in darkness. Let us be clear, beloved friends. Let us understand it aright. He that followeth after Me shall never again walk in that darkness of eternal death which was ours by nature. There will be times in our pathway, times in providence, times when Satan tempts us, and we do walk in darkness, but we do not walk in that complete, gross darkness where the Lord found us before He shone in our hearts.

“I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” So this is what this light is. It is the light of eternal life. It is the light of eternal life in your heart. It is the light of eternal life which His people shall know in heaven.

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Favoured people, blessed people! But the clear point here: there has been a change, a definite change. Well, could you have a greater difference than between darkness and light? There is a change here, and it is vital. When the new birth comes, there is light instead of darkness. There is the effect,

true conversion. Conversion really means a turning completely round. Repentance – there is a change there. With many of the Lord’s people, this change comes more gradually. That may try you, but it should not, because the comparison here is to the sun rising. It comes gradually. At first you can hardly tell a difference, and then there is still some obscurity, but before long there is the light of day. “He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” O to be found amongst this favoured people, eternally chosen, eternally loved, redeemed by blood, called by grace, taught by the Spirit!

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” The great change has taken place. It is not just that the light is shining, but they have seen it. “They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”

Now that hymn we sang just now, “Christ whose glory fills the skies,” is a beautiful hymn, and of course it is really a paraphrase of that wonderful promise that was given just before the canon of holy Scripture in the Old Testament was finally closed, and no more light of prophecy in the Word of God for four hundred years. I am referring to the closing words in the prophecy of Malachi chapter 4. What a dark day it was! The Old Testament is going to end with, “Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” It is a day of darkness. “But unto you that fear My name” – and the promise is as true now as it was then – “Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings.” Perhaps it seems a strange expression, the *wings* of the sun. It really means the sunbeams. There is a promise here to plead.

Sometimes the Lord’s people walk in *felt* darkness after the Lord has revealed Himself to them.

“This their incessant cry must be,
Jesus, reveal Thyself to me.”

Perhaps some of you feel you are walking in that darkness. It is not the darkness of death, but you feel that darkness. Perhaps you feel it is darkness you have brought on yourself, the darkness of unbelief, and slothfulness, and lethargy, and backsliding, but you hope that word may be fulfilled with you, because you trust you do still fear His name: “Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His

wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” You know what that means. The calves have been shut up all winter. When the sun begins to shine, they are allowed out and with what delight they run round.

I remember mentioning this at Bethel some years ago. You remember Mrs. Jefferys. She had lived in a farm down in Wiltshire. She said, “Don’t I remember it, when we opened the doors of the cowshed at the end of the winter, the way the cows ran out. They could not get out quickly enough!” What does it mean? It means light instead of darkness, life instead of death, liberty instead of bondage, and all coming from Christ, the Sun of righteousness arising.

“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.” “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

“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.” Now there is just one other thing. I read to you chapter 60. “Arise, shine.” The margin puts it, “Arise, be enlightened.” That is what the shining forth of this light from heaven does: it enlightens us.

“Enlightened by the heavenly ray,
Our shades and darkness turn to day;
Thine inward teaching makes us know,
Our danger and our refuge too.”

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” Of course, it has always been believed that that word was specially fulfilled in the wise men coming to Bethlehem. That is why so many people speak of them as kings.

“And the Gentiles.” When that word was spoken, *Gentiles* did not just mean those who were not Jews. It meant those who were out of the secret, those who were passed by, those who were far off. That is what it

means by *Gentiles*. “And the Gentiles shall come.” There will be an attraction in this great light. Something will pull them. The Lord will draw them to Himself. “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.”

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.” Then of course we read of everlasting light. Can you remember what I spoke from at Alan Daniels’ funeral? “Thy sun shall no more go down.” Poor Alan had many days of darkness. “Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.” That is the eternal prospect of all the people of God.

* * *

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
Triumph o’er the shades of night;
Day-spring from on high, be near,
Day-star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn,
Unaccompanied by Thee;
Joyless is the day’s return,
Till Thy mercy’s beams I see;
Till they inward light impart,
Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit, then, this soul of mine;
Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
Fill me, Radiancy divine!
Scatter all my unbelief;
More and more Thyself display,
Shining to the perfect day.

C. Wesley

Light of those whose dreary dwelling
Borders on the shades of death,
Come, and Thy bright beams revealing,
Dissipate the clouds beneath.
The new heaven's and earth's Creator,
In our deepest darkness rise,
Scattering all the night of nature,
Pouring day upon our eyes.

Still we wait for Thy appearing;
Life and joy Thy beams impart,
Chasing all our fears, and cheering
Every poor, benighted heart.
Come, and manifest the favour
Thou hast for the ransomed race;
Come, Thou dear exalted Saviour!
Come, and bring Thy gospel grace.

Save us in Thy great compassion,
O Thou mild, pacific Prince!
Give the knowledge of salvation,
Give the pardon of our sins.
By Thy all-sufficient merit
Every burdened soul release;
By the shining of Thy Spirit,
Guide us into perfect peace.

C. Wesley