

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 425

The Risen Saviour Going Before

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 5th January, 2020**

Text: *"Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you" (Matthew 28. 7).*

This chapter very simply, very beautifully sets forth the glorious resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "The Lord is risen indeed." "Vain the stone, the watch, the seal." Now at the Lord's supper, our Lord Jesus Himself told His immediate disciples, "After that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee." Now the resurrection took place in Jerusalem, but according to His infinite wisdom, the Lord Jesus determined that He would meet His immediate followers in Galilee – Galilee which had known so much of His miracles; Galilee where He lived as a Boy, the Sea of Galilee where so many wonderful things took place. Here, the angel revealed to those godly women at the empty grave the truth of the resurrection and that they should go and tell His immediate disciples. Godly Ralph Erskine said these godly women had the privilege of being apostles to the apostles themselves! Having told them concerning the resurrection, how the Lord had appeared to them, they said this: "Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee."

It seems clear that there was some appointed place for their meeting. Just after this, we read of how it was fulfilled. "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them." Many believe this was the very same occasion, that remarkable occasion we read of in 1 Corinthians 15, where five hundred of the brethren saw Him at once. Now there is no mention of that anywhere else, no real mention of that meeting, but it seems very likely it was this same occasion appointed here. Don't we wish we knew more about that remarkable gathering of the five hundred brethren in Galilee! I do not know about you; often I wonder who was there. Would poor, blind Bartimaeus have been there? Was Zacchæus there? What about Mary, the mother of Jesus herself? The woman who pressed through the crowd? That leper who was healed? That one who had to say, "Lord, help me"? You could go on with all your thoughts. They are not unprofitable, but these things are wisely hidden from us.

But the Lord Jesus went before His disciples. He went before them. The place was appointed, and He met them. It seems, beloved friends, there were two things. Apart from the clear revelation to them that the Lord is risen indeed, it was this same Jesus that they had known before. But on the one

hand, the Lord was giving them some instruction. Some of it, of course, was on their going forth to preach the gospel. They were given various instructions how they had to go on, what they were to do, how they were to behave now the Lord Jesus would no longer be with them on earth.

But then also He had some beautiful words of comfort to speak to them. What a word was this with which He concluded: “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” – the Lord’s gracious, faithful promise of His abiding presence with His immediate disciples and with all His beloved people to the end of the world. For really all these happenings here – the Lord would go before those immediate eleven – surely He goes before *all* His beloved people, and these words spoken, not just to the immediate few or to the five hundred, but to all His people to the end of time. “All power is given unto Me.” What a word that is! “Go ye therefore.” What a word that is! “Lo, I am with you alway.” What a word that is! “Even unto the end of the world.”

So then, beloved friends, the theme on my spirit for this evening, and for this first Lord’s day of the new year: *the risen Saviour going before His people*. That is what we want this year at Bethel, the Lord Jesus to be with us, and to go before us – in the services of the sanctuary, in our own homes, in all the things that concern us – that He might lead us, that He might bless us, that He might be with us, that He might help us, and especially for those among you with mountains before you: “The Lord hear thee” – the risen Saviour – “the Lord hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion.”

“Behold, He goeth before you” – a message, not just for that day, but for the present day, to the Lord’s people, not just to those immediate disciples, but to the whole blood-bought church of God in all ages.

I must confess I find this to be a really beautiful word. May we be enabled to pray for it, at our Bethel prayer meetings, in our own homes, with our families, personally, that the risen Saviour might be with us this new year, that the risen Saviour might in love and mercy go before us. It is something like Israel in the wilderness. They were not left to walk it out alone. They had Almighty God with them, going before, to lead them the way they must walk, and to comfort them, and to defend them with His presence. Of course, that was known to them in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire – the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night. We have not got any cloudy, fiery pillar; we have something better. We have a once-crucified, risen, exalted Saviour Himself.

“Behold, He goeth before you ... lo, I have told you.” That is the confirmation of it, the certainty of it, an answer to all the doubts and fears. “Lo, I have told you” – the faithful God. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it?” “Behold, He goeth before you.” So there seems to be a thought here of the risen Saviour *as the Shepherd of His people*. He is spoken of as the good Shepherd, and the chief Shepherd, and the great Shepherd. We have that beautiful word, “When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them.” I am sure you do not need me to explain to you the difference between an English shepherd and a Jewish shepherd. The Jewish shepherd does not go behind and drive. He goes before. He leads the sheep. The sheep follow Him. “When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him.”

So we have not to get in front of the Lord this year, but when He moves, and when He leads, we are called to follow; we must not lag behind. If you have read that remarkable book, *The Land and the Book*, by Dr. Thomson – it was a great favourite in the past and I should think it is perhaps the soundest book there is on Bible customs. But he was a minister for thirty years in Israel. He saw a shepherd leading his sheep, and they came to a river, and those who kept close to him and followed him were completely safe. But he noticed here were one or two frisky lambs. They had lagged behind. When they got to the river, they tried to get across themselves. They nearly drowned in the river. The shepherd had to go aside and rescue them. It is that word: “‘Keep close to me,’ the Shepherd cries.”

“He goeth before them.” “He putteth forth His own sheep,” because He does put them forth one way – when He begins a work of grace in the new birth in a sinner’s heart, He puts forth this lamb in a way of prayer, in a way of gracious exercise, in a way of gracious concern. Perhaps some of you are there. “When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them.” O His gracious presence! He is going to guide you. He is not going to leave you to yourself. He is going to show you the right way. “This is the way, walk ye in it.”

“Behold, He goeth before you.” Now there is another way in which the Lord puts forth His sheep, and that is sometimes He puts them forth to walk in a way they have never walked in before, a way in providence. It may be an interesting way. It may be a way they want. It may be a way with difficulties. It may be a very hard, rugged, troublesome way. But if the Lord is putting you forth in a way you have not walked before, and perhaps it

troubles you, may you hold this fast: “When He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them.”

It brings back to my remembrance those last few weeks before I first came to Bethel with a view to the pastorate, fifty-five years ago, and the nearer it got, I did not want to come. In the end, I felt I could not come, and I wondered if I had made a mistake. And then this word came: “When He putteth forth His own sheep.” I clung to it. I felt clear on one thing: it was not my own doings. The Lord was putting me forth. And then, “He goeth before them.” And do you know what followed afterwards? Actually, I preached from this fifty-five years ago, the first Sunday of those three months: “I will go before thee.” That is it! “Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee.” “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.” Well, looking back over those fifty-five years, we have had some crooked places, haven’t we! But as we look back, one by one, up to the present, the Lord has made every single one straight. We believe He will to the end here at Bethel, and in our own families, and in our circumstances, in our souls.

O that crooked thing of sin and unbelief, and the Lord has that blessed ability to put these things straight through the riches of His grace and the preciousness of His precious blood. It is still true, and may it still be true at Bethel, and may it be true in our hearts and lives this year: “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.” Now that is promising some hard things, some impossible things, but you realise it is the Lord who keeps saying what *He* is going to do, not what we have to do. “I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron” – impossible things – “and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places.”

“Behold, He goeth before you *into Galilee*.” Well, of course this was graciously fulfilled, literally, in these days following the Lord’s resurrection before He ascended into heaven. But what about us? I do think, without stretching it, we can speak of Galilee in two different ways. First of all, *the Galilee of the unknown way*. This was an unknown way to those immediate disciples and to the other five hundred. The Lord sweetly assured them He was still going to be with them, He was going to lead them, He was going to go with them, and guide them, and bless them, and supply all their needs in the unknown way. Often the Lord’s people are fearful about the unknown way. The hymnwriter says,

“Creatures of fear, we drag along,
And fear where no fear is.”

Some people have it more than others. There is a fear of the unknown way. But whatever there is or whatever there is not to be, there is this divine certainty, that the Lord Jesus will be there. He has already gone before. All those places you come into, you will find that the Lord Jesus has gone before and the Lord Jesus is there already.

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him.” Now may that blessing be ours in the unknown way at Bethel this year: “There shall ye see Him,” by faith. O may our faith be increased, to have a glimpse of the King in His beauty, to see the Lord Jesus by faith – not some visionary thing, not some dream, but the reality of it, to see the Lord Jesus in His unchanging love and mercy. Some of these were the disciples who had forsaken Him. Peter had denied Him with oaths and curses. “They all forsook Him, and fled.” But later in this gospel a similar word is quoted, but it says, “Go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me.” The matchless condescension, the unchanging love of our Lord Jesus! There is a relationship there which could not be broken, and He still called them *His brethren*. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee.” The unknown way – it is in the hands of the risen Saviour. He is there to hear and answer prayer. He will not forsake His people. He will send them help from the sanctuary. He will strengthen them out of Zion. His loving sympathy is still the same. He knows, He understands, He cares. His divine, almighty power – nothing too hard for Him. His wisdom – He knows the best to be done; He knows how to do it; He has promised He will do it.

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.” I will tell you why this word was made special to me. On one of our visits years ago on a preaching tour to the United States – I cannot remember exactly which one it was – I was dreadfully fearful about going. I would have liked to have cancelled it. I cannot remember all the circumstances, but I was just shrinking from it, and the Lord led me to this word: “Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee.” Instead of Galilee, I could have read it, “the United States of America.” “Behold, He goeth before you ... there shall ye see Him.” I believe we did see His good and gracious hand. “Lo, I have told you.” So what a word this is, *the Galilee of the unknown way*.

But then secondly, *the Galilee of heaven*. Again, I do not think it is stretching the word to apply it like this, because almost immediately after this, after this meeting with His disciples and the five hundred brethren, “He led them out as far as to Bethany.” So they had returned from Galilee to Jerusalem. “He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them.” And whilst He was blessing them, He ascended out of their sight. He ascended to heaven. That is, He had gone before His immediate disciples, before all His beloved people to the end of time. So this is a word for all the Lord’s tried, trembling people as they think of eternity. “Behold, He goeth before you ... there shall ye see Him.”

“There shall your eyes with rapture view
The glorious Friend that died for you.”

“There shall ye see Him,” unworthy as you are.

“The King there in His beauty
Without a veil is seen;
It were a well-spent journey,
Though seven deaths lay between:
The Lamb with His fair army
Doth on Mount Zion stand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel’s land.”

“There shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you.” This is the prospect of living faith. How beautifully our Lord Jesus opened this up in the upper room where the Lord’s supper was instituted. “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house” – that is the Galilee above, and what a beautiful term that is for heaven: *My Father’s house*. “In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.” Now this is it: “I go to prepare a place for you.” The old preachers said it so often: “Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.” O we need that gracious preparation! Do you ever pray that prayer, “Prepare me, gracious God”? We cannot prepare ourselves.

“Prepare *me*” – not somebody else –
“Prepare me, gracious God,
To stand before Thy face.”

And then I do like it, what the preparation is:

“In Christ’s obedience clothe,
And wash me in His blood.”

We do not need any other preparation.

“I to go prepare a place for you.” Now we can see how we as sinners need to be prepared, and we cannot prepare ourselves, and it must be the Holy Spirit’s work. It seems something of a mystery how heaven must be prepared. It seems to me that the preparation for heaven is the actual presence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ after His sin-atonement death and His glorious resurrection. That was the one thing needed: His ascension to sit down in His rightful place in heaven. “I go” – this is the risen Saviour. He has gone before. “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again.” That is the second coming, but it is also the day of a believer’s death. “I will come again, *and receive you unto Myself*.” It seems as if the dear Lord Jesus personally is going to welcome each of His redeemed in heaven.

Krummacher so beautifully says that when you reach heaven, you will not be a stranger. You have long been expected there. You will feel at home. You will be welcome. He said it is like the birth of a baby: when he is born into this world, he does not feel to be a stranger. He belongs. He is one of the family. He is welcome. The cot, the little clothes have all been made ready, prepared for him.

“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” – eternally. And that word for ever: “Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.” Have you got a sweet hope, beloved friends, of a personal interest here? We are not worthy; we do not deserve it; but it is a solemn thing if we have no interest. It is a solemn thing if we are passed by. It is a solemn thing if we are left out.

“Prevent, prevent it by Thy grace;
Be Thou, dear Lord, my Hiding-place.”

O but what a beautiful word this is! There are so many aspects of it. It is, to use the old expression, like a diamond, and which ever aspect the light shines upon it, there is something fresh and beautiful that is seen in it. This is what we want: the dear Holy Spirit to shine upon this word this new year evening, and also to shine in our hearts. What is it? “To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” O may it be made over to us personally.

“Behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo,
I have told you.”

* * *

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!

He lives, to still His people’s fears!
He lives, to wipe away their tears!
He lives, to calm their troubled heart!
He lives, all blessings to impart!

He lives, all glory to His name!
He lives, unchangeably the same!
He lives, their mansions to prepare!
He lives, to bring them safely there!

S. Medley