



Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 16

The Birth of Jesus

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Thursday, 21st December, 1972**

Text: “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8. 3, 4.)

Like Philip, I want to “begin at this same Scripture and preach unto you Jesus.” There is something unspeakably solemn about His incarnation, and something unspeakably blessed; to go by faith to Bethlehem to see a tiny Babe lying there in a manger, to believe that He is the Son of God, and to realise that that small, innocent, holy humanity that there lay in the manger was taken for a purpose, that in it the Redeemer might bleed and die.

There could be no salvation without the shedding of blood. This truth, this awfully solemn truth was declared right through the Old Testament – without the shedding of blood, no remission. Now the Godhead cannot bleed. Then how could man be redeemed?

“Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away *one* stain.”

But how then can sin be put away? What blood must be shed? The Godhead cannot bleed; the blood of bulls and goats would not avail to put away sin. And so infinite wisdom devised the mysterious plan, that the eternal Son of God should take a human soul, a human body, into union with His Godhead, that in it He might bleed upon the cross, and that in it He might die. And so although the Godhead could not bleed, the Godhead could not die, the sacred humanity of our precious Jesus standing in indissoluble union to His Godhead, that blood that was shed had all the efficacy of the Godhead in it. So the Word of God speaks of it as “the blood of God” (Acts 20. 28) and we rightly sing:

“Peace procured by blood divine,
Cancelled all thy sins and mine.”

O have you ever by faith gone to Bethlehem and viewed that dear tiny Child, and by faith viewed the shadow of Calvary over the manger in that stable? And to see what was before that dear Child, that that sacred body was taken, those hands, those feet, that one day they might be nailed to the cross. And I am not being sentimental, friends. We do not want a sentimental religion. But, child of God, it was for your sins, it was for your sake, that the Son of God assumed our nature, that He lay helpless in Bethlehem's manger, with the shadow of Calvary over Him, that soon He might shed His blood and die, lay down His precious life.

How solemnly the Lord Jesus spoke! He said: "I come forth from My Father, and again I go to My Father." But O the accomplishments between the one and the other! And so we have that most beautiful word concerning Bethlehem: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." There are two words there that are usually overlooked. It is God the Father speaking, and He says of Bethlehem, "Out of thee shall He come forth unto Me." The Father says He came forth at Bethlehem *unto Me*. Now, child of God, He came forth unto you, to save you by His grace; but the Father says, "He came forth *unto Me*."

What does it mean? Two things. First of all, in all that He did He had His Father's glory before Him. His first recorded words were: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" He came forth at Bethlehem unto His Father; unto you, yes, but unto His Father, that He might glorify Him. Also this. You see, with God the Father eternity is one eternal NOW. The ages past and the ages to come in the mind of God are one eternal NOW. So as the Father looked at Bethlehem to see the coming of His own beloved Son into the world, at the same moment He also viewed the Mount of Olives where His beloved Son should ascend to return to glory again. And He joins Bethlehem with the Mount of Olives. He came to Bethlehem *from* His Father, but "He shall come forth unto Me," says the Father – at last from the Mount of Olives.

But O the accomplishments between His birth and His ascension! The blessed accomplishments: the covenant of grace sealed with blood, every covenant engagement fulfilled, His people saved with an everlasting salvation, an end made of sin, an everlasting righteousness brought in, the

ransom price paid, redemption completed, a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. O these are the accomplishments! For “out of thee shall He come forth unto Me” – *unto Me* – “that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

Now this is the blessed subject here. So I want to begin at this same Scripture and preach unto you Jesus. There are three things here.

I. First of all, that this dear Babe of Bethlehem was the almighty Creator of heaven and earth.

II. Second, that in matchless love and mercy He condescended to be mindful of sinners and to visit them in His leaving heaven for earth.

III. And third, the complete unworthiness of the sinner that the blessed Redeemer came to save. “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?”

I. Now, beloved friends, do you believe this, that the dear Babe of Bethlehem was the Creator of all things? How the Word of God lays such an emphasis on this, that all things were created by Christ. He is “the image of the invisible God. For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.” The hymnwriter puts it very simply, very clearly: “’Twas our Creator for us bled.” Now do you believe it? The great mystery of it! that the Babe of Bethlehem was almighty:

“No less almighty at His birth,
Than on His throne supreme,
His shoulders held up heaven and earth
When Mary held up Him.”

The heavens were the work of His fingers. The moon and the stars He ordained. But the mystery of it! Yet faith believes it, and faith views the necessity of it. If this dear Babe of Bethlehem be less than true almighty God, then there can be no salvation. He must be man to suffer, He must be God to save.

“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained.” Now, have you ever considered the heavens? Have you ever considered that they were created by Him who once lay helpless in His mother’s arms? Now have you considered this? Solemn, sacred, blessed consideration! And have you looked on the moon and the stars and seen that He ordained them? That verse I lingered on just now, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah,” what a remarkable ending to it concerning the Babe of Bethlehem! “His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” We have it most beautifully opened up in the Proverbs where Christ is there set forth in His eternal existence as the Son of God from everlasting. It is one of the things most assuredly believed among us, that Christ from everlasting is the Son of God in His divine nature, and His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” Before the heavens were created and the moon and the stars, from everlasting He was God, ever dwelling in the bosom of His beloved Father before creation work began.

O beloved friends, there was something most blessed in the way in which Christ was concerned before creation. His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”; those goings forth in the covenant of grace, ordered in all things and sure. What goings forth? As He loved His poor, unworthy people with an everlasting love, as He undertook to redeem them, to pay the ransom price, as He devised the way with His beloved Father and the Holy Ghost in which sinners might be saved and not one divine attribute stained. Before creation’s work began there were some blessed goings forth. “Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”

And then came creation, and creation was an easy thing for the Son of God. “He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.” It was the word of omnipotence when the Son of God created the heavens and the earth. I take it that is what this expression means here, that the heavens are “the work of His fingers.” You look at the wonderful expanse of the heavens, the amazing glories of creation, it seems impossible. What power, what omnipotence was needed that this should be created! But, you see, it was an easy thing for the Lord Jesus; it was “the work of His fingers.” Now most things we cannot do with one of our fingers. Some things need all the strength of the arm, and other things need a firm grip from the hand. Really, it is only the most trifling thing that we may do

with one of our fingers, isn't it? Well, creation was an easy thing for the Lord Jesus; it was the work of His fingers. It was so easy. He spake and it was done.

Now that was creation, "the work of His fingers." Beloved friends, your redemption was not an easy thing. O the sorrows the blessed Son of God must endure before your poor, guilty soul might be redeemed! Redemption was not the work of His fingers.

"He bore all incarnate God could bear
With strength enough, and none to spare."

O the difference between creation and redemption!

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained." We live in a day in which there seems to be a most determined effort by Satan to dishonour the Son of God. You have it in these awful stage plays you hear about, and you also have it in the religious world. There seems to be a determined effort to dishonour the Son of God, to deny His Godhead, to deny His omnipotence. But I believe this: if the Lord teaches you, there will not be a shadow of doubt in your heart concerning the eternal Godhead of Christ as the everlasting Son of the Father, and concerning His omnipotence. You will not see Bethlehem's Babe as a mere man. You will believe that He is true almighty God. For "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh." "*Without controversy.*" Well, you say, there never has been a subject in religion about which there has been more controversy. Friends, it is without controversy in the Word of God and, if you are taught by grace, it is without controversy in your heart. For "without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness."

"When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained." The wise man says, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Remember that God created everything, that there is a Creator; and there are so many things to remember concerning your Creator. But the point here, friends, is this. You are to remember that this dear Babe of Bethlehem in the manger was your Creator. O He was the Creator of heaven and earth who came as a Babe to Bethlehem! You see, when the Lord Jesus in creation spake and it was done, when He created this world, He had in view His own eternal

love to His beloved people given to Him by His Father. And do not forget that when the Lord Jesus created the world, He created that little spot where later the town of Bethlehem was to be built. He created that, and He created Jerusalem, the spot where later a garden was to grow, a garden named Gethsemane. And He created that little hill which was to be known as Calvary. And when He created all these things, His loving heart and affections flowed to His people, and He viewed that spot on Calvary and that cross which was to be erected there, on which He was to be crucified. “He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,” even from everlasting.

“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained.” Now I would that we might at this season be able to press through all the inferior things (and we are plagued with inferior things). But may we be able to press through them all and reach the manger, and may we there worship our incarnate God. May we see the Creator there. And may we view this: it is an empty manger. It is an empty manger we preach as we preach an empty cross and as we preach an empty tomb. For this same blessed Jesus, who once lay in the manger, who once hung on the cross, who once was laid in the tomb, is now exalted as the Lamb once slain in the midst of the throne, “whom having not seen we love.” That is a good verse in the children’s hymn:

“And our eyes at last shall see Him
Through His own redeeming love,
For that Child so weak and helpless
Is the Lord in heaven above.”

O may you worship your incarnate God, your Creator, the Lord Jesus.

II. Then, you see, it is very beautifully expressed here that, although He is so great, so high, so holy, almighty, omnipotent, yet He is mindful of man, and He visits man. O what an unbelievable thing that the Son of God should be mindful of you and me! We sometimes sing that beautiful little hymn:

“Midst all His vast concerns,
He cannot you forget.”

Now look at the “vast concerns,” of the Son of God. Here are some of them, the creation of the heavens, the creation of the earth. But, child of God, He did not forget you when He was creating the heavens and creating

the earth, and now though every rolling star, every moving planet is His concern, and by Him, and by Him alone it exists, yet,

“Midst all His vast concerns,
He cannot you forget.”

How many times have you forgotten Him today? How many times? But He says, “I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands; thy walls are continually before Me.”

“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” The Son of God, so great, high, holy, almighty, the eternal Creator, and yet He is mindful. Do you ever enter a little into the Psalm: “The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless us”? You know what it means to be “mindful.” It really means two things: one, that the Lord ever remembers, and the other, that He ever cares. That is a blessed point to those of you in the furnace of affliction, that the one who is mindful of you is almighty. “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.”

“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” In a few places in the Word of God the incarnation of the Lord Jesus is spoken of as a visit. There never was such a visit as this, a visit from heaven to earth. “What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” The angels visited Bethlehem, but they did not stay. I do not know whether you have ever noticed that word concerning the angels as they visited Bethlehem: “It came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven.” You see, the angels did not remain upon earth; those holy beings returned to heaven, their home, their rightful place. “It came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven.” Ah, but that dear Babe lying in the stable, He did not return with the angels into heaven. What did Isaiah say? “Behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.” He visited this earth that He might linger for the space of just over thirty years. Dear godly Zacharias had a clear revelation of the purpose of this visit when in holy ecstasy he cried, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people.” Why, Zacharias spoke as if redemption’s work was complete; and it *was* as sure of completion when the Lord Jesus lay in the manger as when He cried with a loud voice, “It is finished.”

O but that was the purpose of His visit, redemption. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” O the great love of the Son of God that He was mindful of sinners, and that He visited them! Now this is the sweetest of all themes, is it not? Redeeming love in the Person of Christ. How many of you, from an honest heart, can say:

“E’er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme
And shall be till I die.”

This is why He visited sinners, that He might redeem them. He was born that He might die. He came to Bethlehem that He might go to Calvary. What was necessary for redemption? Two things: the Son of God should live a holy, spotless life in obedience to the law which He Himself had given, and that He should lay down that life, that holy life, a sacrifice in death. And this is what He did. We have a beautiful hymn and it bears a beautiful title, “The wonders of redemption,” and what wonders there are in redemption! The great wonder that the Son of God should leave heaven for earth to visit sinners, and the great wonder that having left heaven for earth, He came not to reign, but He came to suffer, bleed and die.

O this visit! So, you see, Zacharias cried again, “The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” He who is eternal light, the light of the world, came into this world of darkness to visit it. “The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” “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.” Well, you might think in the eternal covenant appointments of Jehovah that when the Creator was to visit this earth He would have an honourable welcome. You sometimes read of a royal visit and all the preparations and the plans that are made. Nothing but the best will do. But when Christ came, it was not the best. It was the worst. I have never heard of any other mother having to lay her newborn babe in a manger. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.” Now that is the Son of God visiting and redeeming His people.

“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.”

III. Now look at the application of it: “What is man,” that all these wonders should be done for him? Well, do you feel that you deserve it? Do you feel that you are worthy of it? That the Son of God, the great Creator should do all these things, these amazing things, for such a sinner as you? Do you feel that you are worthy of it?

“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” I wonder if you ever look up on a starry night at the wonders of creation and get a little glimpse of this, that this is the works of His fingers, and you have some sense of His greatness, a little sweet hope that He is your Saviour and your Friend. Then before His greatness you sink into nothingness – especially the greatness of His love. You say, “Why have I found grace in Thine eyes ... seeing I am a stranger?”

“What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” It is a humbling experience to go by faith to Bethlehem. Much of our trouble is through our pride. Much of the trouble in the world is through pride. Much of the trouble in the churches is through pride. We are our own worst enemies, and we do not like to be humbled. But the Son of God humbled Himself. He did it freely and willingly. O but this is the place of humility, to see that great stoop, to have a little glimpse by faith of the eternal glory of the Son of God from everlasting, in the bosom of the Father, and to see that great stoop from heaven to earth and the willingness with which the Son of God came, and that He was lodged in a stable with the beasts. Not only so, but to view this, not as the guilt of the inhabitants of Bethlehem in His own day, but as yours and mine; because in His atoning death it was we who nailed Him to the cross, and in His being lodged with the beasts, it was we who lodged Him there. This will humble you, this will abase you, this will lay you low, when you see all this done for you.

I want to speak advisedly here. I feel there is a lot of blasphemy at this time of the year, and I feel that even the Lord’s people can come perilously close to it. I feel that we should approach the manger at

Bethlehem with as much solemnity of spirit as we come to the Lord's table to partake of His broken body and shed blood. O the solemnity of the manger and the stable, the solemnity of Bethlehem! And O the love that shines through it!

But "what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?" Well, we bring it to our own case, our own heart. "What is man?" What are we? Where are we? Our sin, our guilt, our unworthiness, our vileness, our unbelief, what are we and where are we? "What is man?" And yet it was for such as we that the Lord Jesus did such blessed things. "What is man?" O do you find the answer, the solemn answer in your own heart? "What is man?" And you see, it is not just that we are so sinful and so guilty, but we are so changeable. It may be that last evening you were able sweetly to meditate upon the glories of Christ in His incarnation, and wherever are you today? This tries me, it grieves me, that one day there can be such sweet and blessed thoughts of Christ and the work of redemption, and the next day nothing but sin and carnality.

"What is man?" O but beloved friends, your mercy and mine is that the work of redemption is finished, and if we have blessed thoughts of the incarnation one day, and the next day our hearts are full of sin and all manner of evil, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure," that foundation He came to Bethlehem to lay, that redemption He came to accomplish. There stands our salvation, and what a mercy! – not in self, not in our feelings, though we must have a feeling religion, but in Christ. Blessed truth, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever"! "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?"