

Have You Come to Bethlehem?

by George Paterson

Reading: Gen. 35:9-20; 48:3-7; Luke 2:15; Heb. 1:1-4 (all R.V.).

Many other passages come to mind as simply commentary. We will compare both the texts in Genesis, where there was "*still some way to Bethlehem*" with that in Luke "*even unto Bethlehem*". The comparison is between "still some way" and "even unto". The Lord is presenting two phrases showing how possible it is to come very near to Bethlehem and yet not come to Bethlehem. Rachel's tomb was very near Bethlehem, but to come very near to an object is not to come to the object. The shepherds might have come to Bethlehem and even to the inn and yet not have seen the Lord. To come very near is equal to being 10,000 leagues away as far as the revelation is concerned, but to come "even to" is to come to know Him.

Note that Bethel was on three occasions the place where God spoke to Jacob. The Old Testament saints had many revelations of God speaking; they had many promises, but only a limited word and understanding, to measure the revelation. Abraham "*believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness*" and in faith Jacob committed himself fully to what was revealed, but when you come to Christ, "*God spoke in His Son*" (Heb. 1:1). He had spoken before in divers portions and manners, in ways coming very near to fulness but yet not coming to fulness.

The Lord Jesus is fully equipped and knows the mind of God. Nothing is said from God to man other than what is said in the Person of Jesus Christ. That does not mean that there is nothing more to be understood and received. God has said, "If you know Him, you know the full thought of God." On what is our conception of God and His thought and purpose based? When and where did you get yours from? On what is it based? If it is on anything less than what is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God Incarnate, no matter how far you may have come, there is still some way to come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you say 'you have believed all you have been taught' are you sure you have come to Bethlehem? Or have you still some way to come? Do you say 'I am positive, I have held this position for years, 40 years or ...'. Yet what is the source, maybe it is human.

God's full thought of Himself and of His Son, and for you and me, is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find it there in Him, if you take Him as a Babe or a Child, as a Man walking up and down, or on the cross; or as risen and ascended to heaven, or as in the throne, take Him where you like and you will find God's thought for you and me. If you compass the whole you will get the whole thought of God, but we cannot compass the whole. We get a fresh glimpse of Christ and it is more than we had ever believed. We can never say we know it all, we can never reach finality and say, "That's that".

On what have you drawn your convictions about self, God, eternity, and God's will and purpose for you? That conviction that you are now in His right way? Can you bring your convictions and put it alongside His light and ask Him if it is right? If the light of Christ confirms it you have God's light, hold on to it for there is no light so complete, perfect, and final as the light Jesus Christ sheds. Take it and check up to it. In a measure to miss that is to miss life, to be in a position that you have not come to Bethlehem.

The Lord spoke solemn words in Matt 7:21-23. They say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name, didn't we come a very long way and sought to do Thy will". Then the Lord will say, 'You came a long way but there is still some way to Bethlehem.' 'But we did a lot, we poured ourselves out.' "*Depart, I never knew you.*" If that is so,

surely there is some way to come to Bethlehem. God is not going along the line of good works. We shall never reach Him on the basis of having done anything. We may seem to have come a long way and yet have not come to Bethlehem.

To another who said to Him "All these have I done", He replied "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God ... go sell ...*". And that man departed sorrowfully.

We can go what we esteem a very long way towards our Bethlehem, we can go a long way and be sincerely convinced that we are going in the highway of God, but there is the danger of not coming all the way to God's end. Good works, a life of sacrifice, the pouring out of oneself for others will not bring us to God.

Is there one here who faithfully and devoutly, believing all is right, has to say, "We thought we did God service." So did another, and into his heart there shined a revelation and he saw that what he thought was doing God service was persecuting the Church. The cost of what YOU are doing, of what YOU are sacrificing may blind your eyes to the need.

Take Jesus Christ at any point and you will find God's full thought about Himself and yourself. When you are seeing the Babe, or the Man on the cross you see God's thought about sinful humanity. You say, "I have confessed myself a sinner", but it may be that you need to see what God means by sin by looking at the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*". Look at Him on the cross, suffering a physical agony you cannot experience, but if that is all you see, you are in danger of matching His death with some other. To die because of sin is not to suffer physical agony. That Man on the cross was One Who had His natural habitation in heaven where the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had perfect harmony and where no sin touched, the Godhead was there in supreme holiness, then the Son of God came and dwelt in the midst of the vile, awful sinfulness of the world.

We find it awful, but we never came from a place of holiness. He came from such a place and lived in this world 33 years and the time drew on for His work of infinite love. When He was here He came to feel what we are feeling about the world, and He came to deal with it so that you and I might be delivered from it. So His holy soul suffered agony those 33 years and then God took, gathered all sin, all the horror of our sin, the iniquity of us all, and that was laid on Him. That is death. "*God made Him sin who knew no sin.*" WHY? "*That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*" God sees His Son hanging on the cross and He imputes to Him all the sin and iniquity of all the ages and then turns from Him. Do you hear Him cry — "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*" That is a soul dying for sin. Perhaps that speech brings home more definitely to us what sin means, what it means to be a sinner under judgment, what it is to be shut out of the presence of God.

You say, "I don't know" but you will, for the books will be open and that which is written will be declared. Behold this Man dying because of sin, not His own sin, but dying because He was separated from God. That is God's end for the sinner who rejects His salvation. "But my works, have I not lived years in active Christian service, have I not given my goods, and almost my body?" The Word says we are saved by faith, not works. None can enter the presence of God on the ground of what THEY have done. Works cannot save. "My God, why?" That is dying, that shows it. You may have gone a long way yet not fully realised the horror of sin.

Look at Jesus Christ, hear His speech about salvation, take Him where you like. As a Man about Galilee see His loving grace, the charm of His movements, and tenderness, yet there is strong rebuke where it is needed. Match that which you see with what you are, and if you are honest you will say, "I come far short of this". That is God's standard for man, God cannot lower His standard, and that standard is for you and for me, and God is

ready to reckon that standard as you and as me, that righteousness you see in Him to be ours, to be reckoned to us, and just in the measure we are willing, to impart it to us, to make it our character. Here is a man of moral perfection and purity, that man may be you. We may become like Him, we have tried to be righteous but there is still some way to Bethlehem, but you may leap this moment from what you are into what He is, into His glory, your bands broken, the cruel tyranny when you were as a worm under the heel of a boot, the power of habit, the things against your will, by which you are held in chains. One leap of faith into what Jesus Christ is, and you are free. You see in the Man Jesus Christ both God's standard and God's gift to you and me, take by faith this gift of God. Have you come to Bethlehem in the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Is His righteousness reckoned to you? Are your sins put away? He says, "*Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more*". There is no doing anything but casting yourselves on the mercy of God, then your sins are cast behind His back, YOUR sins, YOUR iniquities and no more to be remembered.

Have we got to the full Bethlehem measure when we talk of sins forgiven. Take the Babe, and follow the Man raised from the grave. God has taken Him, and given Him a Name superior to all names, and God's words to us are that He has made us saints, and when He comes again to the earth He comes to be glorified in His saints. There's a glory end to this, and it is laid up for us.

Who knows the full revelation of salvation, it is being brought to us, it is on the way; present blessing to us is not by way of good works, but by casting ourselves on His mercy. We can testify to it's present worthwhileness, salvation is coming and in a little moment it is going to be unveiled, the veil will be rent and we shall see the Lord, we shall be caught up. That is the end of salvation; there is much more after of which we do not know. My hope is set on that end, "*He is able to keep that which is committed unto Him against that day*".

How far have you gone on the way to Bethlehem? Have you got to Bethlehem? If you are only a tiny way on, go on to the end, for "*they that endure to the end shall be saved*".

Are you quite satisfied with what you have got ? It is foolishness if you do not have all you can have. Those who are content with less than all may be brought into fiery trials to persuade them to reach out for all. Is God who did it all for you going to allow you to sacrifice through folly all He bought for you? To rest content with half may provoke the love of God to chastise you, to make you reach out. The Word speaks of some who shall be "*ashamed before Him at His coming*", those are such as are content with less than all they knew was for them in Christ. All God asks for is as Paul put it — "*I press towards the mark ...*".

Did you notice Jacob, that he dearly loved Rachel, and had served seven years for her. He attained unto God's fulness, for God through her dying gave him the "*son of his right hand*". It is a race that should go on today. Somewhere among Jewish people Benjamin survives. Even if you let go some precious thing, press on to God's fulness. A little while and earth's best will be laid in dust, but that which we receive from Him is an inheritance undefiled and incorruptible.

We will look at the measure of sacrifice. Some may have reached the place where they have said, "God has asked a bitter hard thing and I can't do it. I have sacrificed a lot, now He asks too much." They have still some way to go to Bethlehem. The way is Bethlehem, Calvary, on and up. God's measure of sacrifice is that "*God so loved the world that He gave His all.*" We have got to so love the world that we will sacrifice self to the uttermost. It was not only a child taken. God made a greater sacrifice than that. What did it cost the Father? His companion in glory, He sent Him into the stench of sin, see Him on the cross, then we see the measure of what it cost. Do you see what it cost

God? In the measure of Bethlehem we see God's measure of sacrifice. We are not called to such a sacrifice, but God shows this and if we rebel, says, "Look at what I gave." "If that is your measure of sacrifice, Lord, you have asked a hard thing but you shall have it." "*My grace is sufficient for you.*" Do you say I cannot do the will of God at that price? Then you have still some way to go to Bethlehem, to go to God's full meaning of giving, of sacrifice, of laying down life, as the flesh rises against it, he says, "God is faithful, He will provide a way of escape." "*My grace is sufficient for you.*" "Take My yoke, I will come alongside." Any yoke is easy shared with Him. What then? A light weight carried for a long time becomes burdensome. You "*shall find rest*". Every word of the Lord is good and perfect, and in order to enable us to fulfil it He will give Himself. "*I am with you*" and if you believe He is in you then you are reinforced by His strength and shall overcome.

None of us have reached Bethlehem but we press on to know him and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings (as approaching their meaning) and conformity to His death. He was one Who let go His own things, as He did heavens glory, that as He let go we may have heaven's glory in place of the little things we let go. We dare not stop short of Bethlehem's measure. Can you say, "*I do press on to know the fulness of the Lord*"? If so He is with you and will minister His life, joy, and power so that even on the cross the joy of the Lord shall be your strength. Have you heard the call to run from Rachel's tomb to Bethlehem? Cast yourself in full measure on the full mercy of this Man and enter into the full enjoyment of the inheritance.