

“The Sanctuary of God”

“When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from the people of strange language, Judah was His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion.” Ps. 114:1, 2. “For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.” Deut. 32:9.

God’s Presence Sanctifies.

Every place where God’s presence is manifested, is sacred. When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush in the desert, He said to him, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” Ex. 3:5. Likewise when He appeared to Joshua before Jericho, He said, “Loose the shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.” Josh. 5:15. When God came down on Mount Sinai, to speak the law, the mountain was made holy by His presence, so that no unconsecrated person could touch it and live. Sinai was at that time the sanctuary of the Lord (Ps. 68:17, R.V.); for the word “sanctuary” signifies “holy place,” and every abiding place of God is necessarily holy.

God’s Dwelling-Place.

The sanctuary of God is therefore His dwelling-place, so that the text first quoted tells us that when God called Israel out of Egypt, it was that He might dwell among them, and sanctify them by His presence. In harmony with this is 2 Cor. 6:16, 17:—

“What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; for God hath said, I will dwell in them; and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing.”

Not a Man Made House.

When Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, preached the Gospel before the Jewish Sanhedrim, it was these words that stirred the grave assembly to fury, and caused them to gnash on him with their teeth:—

“Who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest?” Acts 7:46-49.

This is what Paul said to the Athenians (Acts 17:24); and Solomon himself, at the dedication of the house which he had built for the Lord, said: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have builded!” 1 Kings 8:27. “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” Isa. 57:15.

A Living House.

The living God dwells in a living house; and only a spiritual house befits Him who is Spirit. Accordingly we read that, coming unto the Lord, “a living Stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:4, 5, R.V.

Jesus Christ is the tried and sure Foundation upon which all who would abide for ever must be built. “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” Eph. 2:18-22.

The household of God is the church of the living God (1 Tim. 3:15), but only because each individual member is the dwelling-place of God. To each person the word comes: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” 1 Cor. 6:19. “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” 1 Cor. 3:16, 17.

When Jesus was asked how it was that He would manifest Himself to His disciples and not to the world, He replied: “If a man love Me, he may keep My words; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.” John 14:23. The Word abiding in the heart sanctifies, so that the heart of each believer is the sanctuary of the living God. This fact is so clear that no more words are needed to make it appear, and we have therefore only to consider its wonderful force, and its practical application to us.

Every Man a Temple.

Remember first that every person is designed to be the temple of God, yes, is God’s temple; but all have gone aside, and have set up idols in the sanctuary, thus defiling it, and denying God’s right to His own dwelling-place. What we wish to consider is what takes place when God dwells in His fulness in His own house, and is allowed complete control.

“In His temple everything saith, Glory.” Ps. 29:9. Therefore when Christ dwells in the heart by faith, and the Spirit strengthens the inner man “according to the riches of His glory,” so that the being is “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:16-19), He who leads His people like a flock shines forth (Ps. 80:1); and because of the light that shows itself in good works, men glorify God. Matt. 5:14-16. “Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.” Isa. 12:6. “Nations that knew not thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He hath glorified thee.” Isa. 55:5.

View of God's Throne in Heaven.

The first chapter of Ezekiel gives us the most vivid picture of the nature of the sanctuary of God in heaven. Read the entire chapter, and pay special attention to the following items:—

The heavens were opened, and the prophet “saw visions of God.” Verse 1.

“And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.” Verses 4, 5.

“And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the color of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above.” “And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty.” “And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings.” Verses 22, 24, 25.

“And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.” Verse 26.

“And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.” Verse 14.

Moved by the Thought of God.

Here we see that God's throne in the heavens is composed of living creatures, and that it is not fixed to one spot, but that it moves. “And they went every one straight forward: whither the Spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went.” Verse 12.

“Whithersoever the Spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the Spirit of life was in the wheels. When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the Spirit of life was in the wheels.” Verses 20, 21, margin.

The throne was too glorious to be seen and described in detail; and we can form no clear conception of its likeness; but one thing we may learn, namely, that it is full of the Spirit of God, and is so closely in touch with Him that His thought for it is instantly executed. God's Spirit is to go to some place, and thither the throne of God instantly moves. Every thought of God is promptly responded to, and carried out, because His spirit fills His throne and temple.

On Earth as in Heaven.

Even so it will be when God is allowed his rightful place in the bodies of men. His spirit will be their spirit, and His mind and thought will be their mind and thought. In 2 Cor. 6:16-18, where we are told that we are the temple of God, we learn that when we are sanctified by His presence we are His sons and daughters. We are the temple of God, because the Holy Ghost dwells in us. 1 Cor. 3:16. We are builded together in Christ for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Eph. 2:22. But “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Rom. 8:14. That is,

those who yield themselves to God, to be His spiritual house, His temple, are filled with the Spirit, and are guided by the Spirit whithersoever the Spirit wills to go. The mind of the Spirit is their mind.

God Thinking in Man.

That God designs to think and act for His people, is shown by His call to the wicked to forsake their way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and to return to the Lord, whose thoughts are as much higher than man's thoughts as heaven is higher than the earth. Isa. 55:7-9. When a man forsakes his ways and thoughts, and returns to the Lord, his ways and thoughts henceforth must be God's.

When God thinks for a man it is not like one man's thinking for and imposing his will on another. There is perfect freedom. The man chooses God's thoughts, because they are better than his own, and then God thinks in him, the man's brain being the organ of the Holy Spirit. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear" (Rom. 8:15), but God has given us the Spirit "of power and of love and of a sound mind." 2 Tim. 1:7. Only by the Spirit of God can anybody rightly know anything. 1 Cor. 2:12. When men submit to be the temples of God, then is God's will done on earth even as it is done in heaven.

A People Called Out.

It was to this end that God called His people out of Egypt. They were "called out," and so they constituted the church of the living God, for the Greek word which is rendered "church," means literally "called out." God calls people out from the world, that they may be a "spiritual house, a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5); and His presence in them makes them "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (verse 9); and they "show forth" the praises of Him who have called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, because He who dwells in them shines forth.

That this was the object of God's calling Israel out of Egypt is seen from His words in Ex. 19:3-6:—

"And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

A Tabernacle Made with Hands.

Yet while they were still encamped before Sinai, the Lord told Moses to direct the children of Israel to bring an offering of gold and silver and brass, acacia wood, and various kinds of skins, and fine linen, etc., and said: "and let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." Ex. 25:8.

“Tabernacle of Witness.”

What a strange thing, that the Most High God, who dwelleth not in temples made with hands, should ask weak mortals to build Him a house, that He might dwell among them! Why was it?—The answer is plain; they were too high-minded, too self-sufficient, to give place to God, that He might dwell in their bodies, controlling every thought and act; for God dwells with the lowly; therefore since God would not cast them off, He manifested His presence among them in a marked manner, hoping at length to draw them wholly to Himself. If they had believed, they would not have needed the sanctuary, any more than Abraham did. The principal thing in it, and to contain which it was specially built, was the law,—the tables of testimony. But this law the children of Israel ought to have had within them, “written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.” In that case they would have had the witness in themselves; their own bodies would have been tabernacles of witness, and they would have been witnesses for God. As it was, however, “the tabernacle of witness” was that built by Moses. Acts 7:44. The fact that this testimony was in that tabernacle instead of in them, made it a constant witness against them, a testimony to their unfaithfulness.

“Our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.” Heb. 7:14. Yet as already noted, “when Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah was His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion.” The primary design was that all Israel should be His sanctuary, even as now. The confining of the sanctuary service to the tribe of Levi was a standing reminder of the unfaithfulness of the people, which hindered them from receiving the fulness of God; and the raising up of Christ out of the tribe of Judah, was no new thing, but a manifestation of that which had been from the beginning.

Lessons to be Learned.

From the tabernacle built by hands some valuable lessons are to be learned, for God never directs anything to be done in vain. The jealous care which God has for His dwelling-place was one of the chief lessons, but there were many things that could not be taught by that building, for the simple reason that a dead thing can never show the activity of a living thing.

God’s real dwelling-place moves of itself, impelled by His thought, while this house had to be carried by men. A stream of living water comes from God’s throne (Rev. 22:1), as was shown at Sinai; but nothing of the kind was seen in the tabernacle of Moses. The rightful place of God’s law, as the foundation of His throne,—and this is a thing which should not be overlooked, for it must be in every heart where God dwells. Jesus said, “Thy law is within My heart.” Ps. 40:8.

That tabernacle was cleansed with blood (Lev. 16), an indication of the fact that it is the blood of Christ that cleanses the living sanctuary—our bodies. But whereas in that sanctuary the cleansing was done only periodically, in the real sanctuary it is a continual process. Just as the water of life constantly flows from God’s throne, so the blood of Christ constantly flows through the hearts of believers, cleansing them moment by moment; and as the blood is life, identical with the water of life, (1 John 5:8), it must flow out as well as in; so out of him that believeth, whose heart is God’s throne, “shall flow rivers of living water,” and he shall be a source of life to

others. This high calling Israel of old missed through unbelief. Let us take heed lest we fall after the same example of unbelief.

Cleansing of the Sanctuary.

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out.” Rev. 3:12. It is worthy of note that this promise is in immediate connection with the statement by the Lord Jesus, “Behold, I come quickly.” The sanctuary of the Lord is now defiled and broken down (Dan. 8:13; Acts 15:16); but before the coming of the Lord is to be built up and cleansed; for Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, “that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Eph. 5:25-27.

That God has a sanctuary in the heavens, and that Christ is priest there, cannot be doubted by anyone who reads the Scriptures. See Heb. 8:1, 2, etc. But this sanctuary is as much greater than the figure that was built by Moses as heaven is greater than earth, or as the work of God is greater than any work of man. Of the work of the sanctuary in heaven it is not necessary to speak particularly here, since what we may know of it is indicated in the service of the priests in the earthly tabernacle, who served “unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.” But that sanctuary is a living place, as we learned in the view of God’s throne; and that men saved from sin on this earth are to become a part of it is stated in Rev. 3:12, just quoted. Therefore it follows that the cleansing of the sanctuary,—a work which is set forth in the Scriptures as immediately preceding the coming of the Lord,—is coincident with complete cleansing of the people of God on this earth, and preparing them for translation when the Lord comes.

The Perfect Testimony.

God has never left Himself without witness in what is termed the works of nature; but that witness is insufficient; man, the highest of God’s creatures, must witness to Him as well as the lower things that God has made. In every age there have been individuals who, like Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, have been faithful witnesses; but they were only parts of the whole. It is not merely single individuals, but a body of people “called out,”—the congregation, the church,—that constitutes God’s house. Before the end comes, and at the time of the coming of Christ, there must be a people on earth, not necessarily large in proportion to the number of inhabitants of earth, but large enough to be known in all the earth, in whom “all the fulness of God” will be manifest even as it was in Jesus of Nazareth. God will demonstrate to the world that what He did with Jesus of Nazareth He can do with anyone who will yield to Him.

The Life of Jesus Manifest in Mortal Flesh.

Jesus Christ was the perfect temple of God; but if He were to be the only one in whom such fulness is revealed, then the too common idea that Jesus was a unique specimen, not made in all things like unto His brethren, and that is impossible for anybody else to be in all things like Him, would be warranted; and Satan would not fail to charge God with incapacity and failure, saying that He is not able to take a man born in sin, and bring him to perfection. Day after day he is

making this charge through men who, either despondently, or in self-justification, say that “Christ was different from us, for He was begotten by the Holy Ghost, and being born sinless had the advantage over us.” The Lord wants all to understand that the new birth puts men in the same position that Christ occupied on this earth, and He will demonstrate this before all the world. The life of Jesus is to be perfectly reproduced in His followers, not for a day merely, but for all time and for eternity. There is danger in delaying to yield to this working of the Lord by His Spirit, for He says:—

“Behold, I will send My Messenger, and He shall prepare the way before Me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? . . . and He shall sit as a Refiner and Purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.” Mal. 3:1-3.

The glory of the house of God when He shall dwell in it in His fulness cannot be described or imagined. “Eye have not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of men, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit.” Therefore, “Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” “And the very God of peace sanctify you holy; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.”

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