

Households

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Houses and households occupy a very large place in the Scriptures — they are mentioned well over 2,000 times. Thus they are evidently of great importance in the mind of God. The dwellings of men where, apart from divine intervention, darkness and moral distance from God exists, are portrayed. Blessed indeed to observe the results of God's movements in grace and mercy! Divine light dispels the darkness (Exodus 10: 23); features of Christ seen typically in the "new meat offering" — Himself the *perfect* Meat Offering (Leviticus 2); affections appreciating and making room for the Ark — that beautiful type of Christ (2 Samuel 6); the atmosphere of prayer in Elkanah's house as Hannah sought the presence of Jehovah both prior to Samuel's birth and also as she cared for he who should be the prophet whose word was established from Dan to Beersheba (1 Samuel). Did her sustained communion with God enlighten her heart as to the coming in of God's "Beloved"? She bore *six* — but embraced the *seventh* in her exercises (1 Sam. 2). How challenging the question of Elisha in 2 Kings 4! "What hast thou in the house?" How great the potentiality of that "pot of oil" — the shadow of death removed in the supply of the "Spirit of life" (Romans 8: 2). Surely in a moral sense she became the "wealthy woman" of the chapter, possessed of the ability to recognise features of holiness and having the desire that such holy matters should have a permanent place in her abode. In a day of idolatry and departure from God, when some even deemed it "evil to serve the Lord," the words of Joshua ring out, rejoicing the heart of God — "As for me and my *house*, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24).

Other such instances are to be found in the Word — but may we, beloved brethren, covet to be marked in our houses by these mentioned — an atmosphere of prayer in which features of the precious Christ may be developed; where He Himself may be enshrined affectionately in the hearts of "the family" (cf. Obed-Edom); the Word of God for His people carried in unrestrained and intelligent prayer, and the definite avowal as helped of God that all will be devoted to His service.

Many of the references to the "house" have the house (or, habitation) of God Himself in view. Exodus 15 introduces the thought that God finds His dwelling in the midst of a *redeemed* people, and the feature of holiness which of necessity characterises such a dwelling-place is stressed throughout the Pentateuch. Sadly, the history of God's earthly people shews their inability to sustain in their minds and hearts the sense of holiness due to God's dwelling-house. The prophetic utterances of Haggai and others produced some temporary recovery — but the words of Christ in John 2 indicate their utter disregard for its sanctity. In our dispensation the house of God is seen to be a *spiritual* structure, built in the affections of those reconciled "unto God in one body by the cross" (Eph. 2) "an habitation of God through the Spirit." It is the "assembly of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," in which, even in these last times, the "mystery of piety" is enshrined in the hearts of those who bow in true sincerity to Christ as Son over God's house (1 Timothy 3). The house of God is therefore seen to be a sphere of responsibility down here, whereas the Father's house, so beautifully spoken of by the Lord Himself, is a sphere of heavenly joy and favour. But this most precious study is beyond the scope of the present paper in which we are primarily engaged with the households of believers.

In the New Testament Luke, in his two letters, refers to houses on very many occasions. As a doctor he would doubtless be familiar with the dwellings of the people, but he delights to record incident after incident in which the gracious movements of Jesus Himself are portrayed as *He* entered into the houses of men and women. Precious indeed the results of such movements! Healing;

adjustment; the introduction of an atmosphere of sympathy, affection and power beyond compare! The feverish atmosphere of Simon's house (Luke 4) disappears at His touch and all present were refreshed; all were the subjects of ministry by one who had felt the adjusting, healing hand of Christ. Much has been said of the incident in the Pharisee's house (Luke 7). We would stress only the grace, the infinite love, that triumphed over discourtesy, self-righteousness and condemnation of others — features not confined to the house of Simon but manifestly present on every hand today. Contemplate, beloved brethren, the movements of the Son of Man, lowly, unappreciated, maligned and yet absolutely pre-eminent in grace and love, introducing a peace which is unchanging, turning sadness and despair into lasting joy and producing a response of affection to himself. Blessed indeed the heart or dwelling having such an experience!

The circumstances affecting the house of Jairus (Luke 8) are multiplied around us today. Death, the result of man's failure in responsibility, has fallen upon all — even the fairest! The world can but lament and weep, and the sorrow remains unassuaged, until One enters that house before whose presence the article of death must flee, the Living Lord, the Son of God! Death is but sleep where He is welcomed and known; sorrow and wailing must cease; supremacy of power (v. 54) and the tenderness of sympathy and love (v. 55) prevail, newness of life and its sustenance ensue. Space permits but a brief reference to Luke 10 where Martha received the Lord "into her house" with results which have a clearly important moral significance in the present time — adjustment in service, an atmosphere of seclusion to Himself; an increased perception of the glory of God in the Person of One who is "the resurrection and the life," all eventuating in a scene fragrant with the appreciation of His suffering love! What boundless joy, what infinite blessing as we make room for this precious Christ in our dwellings! In His Person we see, and in His presence we breathe, the pure air of resurrection; our spirits are ravished with His grace and glory and our hearts respond adoringly to His love. The joys of heaven above the earth!

The scene in the ruler's house (Luke 14) emphasises the poverty of thought and lack of appreciation for Christ which exists in the sphere of ritualistic formality — but furnishes an occasion for the display of power and compassion in the heart of the Saviour, and too, the wisdom which would bring adjustment into man's morally disordered dwellings. The abounding kindness of God in the remaining portion of Luke 14 and the revelation of divine love in Luke 15 would be the subject of a paper other than the present. The house of Zacchaeus in Luke 19 was greatly favoured. He desired to see Jesus "Who He was." Blessed indeed to know and appreciate what Jesus *has done*; happy the heart which desires to know *Him for Himself*. Salvation is enshrined in His Person — what wealth entered that house in Christ!

"At evening time it shall be light" was surely the experience of the house of Cleopas (Luke 24). Disconsolation and perplexity were turned into radiant joy as they recognised their Guest as the "Risen Lord;" the certainty of the resurrection eliminated all doubts and fears; footsteps were quickened in the pursuit of His interests and voices raised in His praise.

There are many other references to "houses" in the Gospels — but if the truth of the incidents mentioned has its unhindered place in our hearts today, if Christ Himself has undisputed liberty there, what happiness and joy will result, conditions too of praise and worship to him who could say in the days of His flesh — "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

Conditions obtaining in some of the houses mentioned by Luke in his second letter furnish us with instruction and perhaps encouragement. We consider them but briefly. In Acts 8: 3 "*assembly*"

features are seen, calling down the hatred of Saul the Pharisee, but doubtless yielding joy to the heart of Christ who "loved the assembly." In Acts 10 Cornelius (who had but an elementary knowledge of the truth) is marked by *godly fear* "with all his house." Graciously the blessed God took account of hearts devoted to Himself, freely giving an increased sense of His love and truth. Blessed reward indeed! *Rejoicing* filled the household of the jailer in Acts 16; and *faithfulness to the Lord* marked the dwelling of Lydia. Reception of the testimony brought persecution to the house of Jason (Acts 17); but Romans 16 (if referring to the same believers) shews the reward. The setting and atmosphere of the houses of Justus and Crispus (Acts 18) are of deep interest — the faith of the latter resulting in a testimony producing much for God Himself. Most precious the contents of Philip's house (Acts 21) — the evangel was treasured there, prophecy too, and the will of the Lord. Beloved brethren, in these days of apostasy and forgetfulness of God and His interests how blessed to make room in *our* homes for that which rejoices His heart, seeks His mind and bows to His will!

Let us not overlook the house of Mnason — the *old disciple* (Acts 21) with whom Paul and his company were to lodge. A connotation of his name indicates "diligence." As years increase and many activities are no longer possible may the Lord help us to diligently make room still for the word and teaching of the apostle! In Acts 28 Luke closes with that delightful reference to Paul in "his own hired house," the atmosphere of which is fragrant with "those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" and His kingdom rights.

Space forbids pursuing this happy subject in the Epistles — the houses of Stephanus, of Aquila and Priscilla, of Chloe, truly a "green herb" in the arid conditions of Corinth, and of many others all furnishing help, encouragement and maybe challenge to us in our day.

"The ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-Edom . .

And the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and *all his household.*"