

The House of the Lord

Psalms 23-29.

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The opening chapters of Genesis disclose to us the fact that God not only created man with a capacity for holding intelligent intercourse with Himself, but also actually desired and sought his company. Directly sin entered, this happy intercourse was broken up, and Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord when He walked in the garden in the cool of the day. Mankind soon lost any desire for the company of God. God has never deviated from His desire for the company of men, and He purposes ultimately to secure it.

Moreover God never left Himself without witnesses in the shape of those who did desire His company. In the age of the patriarchs, whether before or after the flood there were those who walked with Him; such as Enoch, and such as Abraham, who was called the friend of God. These however were but individuals; it was when He called Israel as a people out of Egypt, and brought in a national redemption from Egypt that His purpose to dwell amongst men comes clearly to light. The oft repeated word to Pharaoh was, "Let My people go that they may serve Me." And, directly they began to sing on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, they said, "He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation." If no one else did, Moses at least seized the Divine thought to dwell in the midst of His redeemed people.

This purpose of God comes fully to light in the New Testament, but it also appears at intervals in the Old Testament, both in history and in prophecy, and notably so when the great redeeming sacrifice of Christ has come into view prophetically.

The great Messianic prophecy of the later part of Isaiah is a case in point. Isaiah 53 predicts the atoning work of Christ: Isaiah 54, the consequent blessing of Israel: Isaiah 55, grace flowing out to the Gentiles: Isaiah 56, the house of Jehovah established and becoming the available centre where all who fear His Name shall be gathered in a place of nearness — His house "an house of prayer for all people."

The only other Old Testament scripture which equals Isaiah 53, in its clear and full prediction of the atoning sufferings of Christ, is Psalm 22; and here again this feature comes into view. With one exception each Psalm from 23 to 29 inclusive has some reference to the house of God. Different features connected with that house are stated, and we may now briefly consider them.

In the opening verses of Psalm 22 Jehovah is addressed as, "Thou that inhabitest [or, dwellest amid] the praises of Israel." In order that Jehovah might eternally dwell amid His people — and they be a praising people, so that He dwells amid their praises — the blessed Saviour suffered and died. The latter part of the Psalm shows prophetically how fully this purpose is going to be realized in the days to come: how that, beginning with the godly remnant of Israel, who became the nucleus of the church, and widening out to a restored Israel and gathered Gentiles, and even generations yet unborn when the Millennial Age begins; praise and worship shall rise, and He shall indeed dwell amid the praises of His saints. The house of the Lord is not actually mentioned, but one of the great purposes that is to be attained as the fruit of God dwelling among men is very manifest. The house in which He shall dwell shall be filled with praises; each family whether heavenly or earthly (see Eph. 3: 15) having its own distinctive note.

The house is however named very distinctly in Psalm 23, when we come to the last verse. The

primary thought of the house is that it is the place where *God dwells* amid the praises of His people; but it is none the less true that it is also the place where *saints will dwell*, and dwell for ever. The Psalm celebrates the activities of Jehovah as Shepherd. We very rightly refer it to the Lord Jesus in His risen activities, for He is Jehovah. But it not only speaks of His activities on our behalf; it speaks also of *His abiding with us*, both in the presence of our enemies and in the valley of the shadow of death, and ultimately of *our abiding with Him* in His own house.

The last two words of the Psalm, "for ever," stand in contrast with the words, "all the days of my life." This shows, we judge, that in the mind of David this dwelling in the house of the Lord was something beyond any drawing near to God in connection with earthly dwelling-places, even millennial ones. His faith looked on to something akin to that which Abraham saw when "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11: 10). The patriarchs desired an heavenly *country*, and looked for the city that God would build: David had his expectation centred on something more intimate still, for to dwell in the *house* of the Lord bespeaks a nearer intimacy.

We share this happy expectation with David, and neither he nor we shall be disappointed. In the New Testament the expectation becomes enlarged and clarified. We have the Lord's parting words, "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." The temple in Jerusalem, with its many chambers and abodes, had been a pattern or type of the real dwelling-place of God. If the reality had not been according to the type, the Lord would have told His disciples as to the difference. The type however had been accurate. The house that Solomon built had been surrounded with chambers, so that when God granted His presence in the most holy place He dwelt there surrounded by those who were put into priestly relation with Himself. Thus it is going to be in the true house of the Lord which shall fill eternity. In that house David shall find his place. In that same house a place has been reserved for us, who are called to follow the Lord during this time of His rejection and absence from this world.

In that house we shall dwell. The passing and the evanescent will have given place to the abiding and the eternal. David evidently realised this. What he did not know was that we shall dwell in that house of Jehovah in company with the Son of God. We shall reach it by His coming again to receive us unto Himself; and His own words are, "that where I am, there ye may be also." So we have before us not merely a place, but a well-known and well-loved Person filling the place. This it is that makes the house of the Lord a *home to us*, so that the thought of dwelling in it for ever becomes a delight.

In Psalm 24 the house of the Lord again comes before us, spoken of as, "His holy place." The *holiness* of the house is clearly the point here, for that becomes His house for ever, and constitutes a challenge to everyone who would draw near. "Who shall stand in His holy place?"

The demand which this challenge makes is very sweeping. Hands, hearts, soul and mouth are all brought under review, and perfection of holiness is required. Of all the myriads who have trodden the earth only One has ever manifested holiness such as this. There has been this One, and as a consequence He enjoys what we may call, the freedom of the house. Its doors are flung wide open before Him, and He has full liberty of, entrance. Not only does He enter, He enters in a blaze of glory, and as the leader of hosts who are associated with Him.

So, after all, there *are* to be others who answer the challenge and finally stand in His holy place. There is to be this "generation of them that seek Him," (verse 6) who also are characterized by holiness. They have *become* that which He ever *was* in intrinsic perfection. Their clean hands and pure heart are the result of a work of God, both for them and in them.

So if Psalm 23 gives the saints the confident expectation, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord

for ever," Psalm 24 indicates that "the generation of them that seek Him" will be so established in holiness as to be altogether suitable to that "holy place." They will enter as hosts identified with the King of glory, who has a perfect and absolute title to the abode of Jehovah's holiness, both on account of what He is and of what He has done. Since it is going to be thus with us in the day of manifested glory which is approaching, let us see to it that we are characterized by holiness now. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," is a saying capable of a double application; a present as well as a future. We may be perfectly clear in our doctrine: we may stoutly maintain the priesthood of all believers: yet if we do not pursue holiness we shall be lamentably poor and weak in drawing near to God, and in the exercise of our priestly functions.

Psalm 25 makes no allusion to the house of God. It concerns itself rather with the varied features of godliness in the saint which qualify him for having to do with God. "Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths," is the prayer; and the condition in the saint which enables him to discern the Lord's way is described in the verses that follow. He must be marked by meekness (verse 9), obedience (verse 10), absence of guile (verse 11), the fear of the Lord (verses 12 and 14), a spirit of continual dependence on the Lord (verse 15). If characterized by these things the house of God will be to him a centre of attraction.

The attractiveness of God's dwelling-place comes before us in Psalm 26, where again the house is referred to. It is spoken of as "the habitation of Thy house," which seems to lay stress upon the fact of its being Jehovah's dwelling in the midst of Israel. It is also "the place where Thine honour [or, Thy glory] dwelleth." Glory is the outshining of excellence. When the saints are glorified it will be the outshining of an excellence which has been conferred upon them. With God it is the outshining of intrinsic excellence. All creation declares His glory, save such parts of it as have been invaded by sin; yet there is a spot where His glory is concentrated. That spot is His house.

How significant a fact is this. With most of us our glory — such as it is — does not dwell where we dwell. Our glory lies far afield in places where we only visit, and where consequently the things that would tarnish our glory are hardly noticed. At home our blemishes become painfully manifest. With God the very opposite is the case. The nearer one is to Him the more His glory is perceived, for it dwells where He dwells. David had a spiritual understanding of this, and hence the house became an object of his affections. He loved it. And surely so do we.

In David's case this was the more remarkable inasmuch as there was no proper house of God in Jerusalem in his days. The altar of burnt offering was in the high place that was at Gibeon, whilst the ark was at Jerusalem in a tent which he had specially pitched for it after bringing it up from Kirjath-Jearim. Had he been swayed by considerations of a materialistic or ceremonial or ritualistic order, he would never even have discerned the house of God in the lowly tent that covered the ark of the covenant. He was swayed by faith: and faith discerned the presence of God. He was swayed by love: and love delighted itself in the One whose presence he discerned. He proved that he loved the Divine habitation by the immense provision he made for the building of the house by his son though he himself was not to have the glory of erecting it, nor even to see it.

No material house of God have we today; not even a simple tent such as David had. There is the Father's house on high in which our place is prepared, and into which we shall enter when the Lord Jesus comes. The only house which God has on earth today is composed of the saints, who are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2: 22); and so we read of "the house of God, which is the church of the living God" (1 Tim. 2: 15).

Today, then, the true church of God is the house of God. There His Name is set: there His Spirit

is: there His glory dwells, in so far as it is found at present upon earth. Do we love it, as David loved the habitation of His house in his day? Do we love the church of God? Are we able in any degree to see it as God sees it? We may love certain individual saints who happen to accord with our own thoughts. We may be loyal to those who are attached to the community where our own attachment lies. But that love and loyalty may count for very little before God. Do we love saints *as saints*, just because they are members of Christ, because they have been "built up a spiritual house." That is the thing that counts. The Apostle Paul is a pattern to us in this, for he said "I endure all things for the elects' sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2: 10).

David's affection for the house of God is revealed yet further in Psalm 27. It was the one object of his present desire. He had full confidence that he would dwell in the house of the Lord *for ever*, as Psalm 23 shows. Now we find that in keeping with this his present desire was to dwell in God's house *all the days of his life*, inasmuch as His beauty is beheld there, and in His temple enquiry can be made of Him.

"Beauty" in this verse apparently has the sense of *pleasantness* or *graciousness*. If 1 Chronicles 17 be read, we may see how the graciousness of the Lord was made known to David, and how he "came and sat before the Lord." The verse in Psalm 27 seems to be reminiscent of that. On several occasions too we read of David inquiring of the Lord, and he knew that His temple was the special place for that. To withdraw from the noise and distraction of the world into the quiet of the Divine presence is the way in which the mind of God may be known and His graciousness be realized.

A somewhat similar thought marks the allusion to the house of God that we find in Psalm 28; where David speaks of, "the voice of my supplications . . . when I lift up my hands toward Thy holy oracle." An "oracle" is of course a speaking-place, and it is a term applied both in Kings and in Chronicles to the innermost sanctuary of the temple. Owing to the failure that supervened so soon after the temple was built, it may be that God hardly ever, if at all, spoke from His holy oracle in Jerusalem; yet that was the Divine intention. The intention was only realized in full when the Lord Jesus appeared; for He could speak of the temple of His body, and in Him was found not only the speaking place, but the Spokesman. All that God has to say to us is in and through Him. This particular thought in connection with the house is realized not in the church, but rather in Him who is the church's Head. In the New Testament, as has so often been pointed out, the church does not teach but is taught.

It is "Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ ... unto the church," whether at Corinth or elsewhere. Paul was the human teacher, but all his authority was derived from Jesus Christ, who is the Spokesman of the Godhead; and the church was taught.

Psalm 29 is the last of this series speaking of the house, and again it is the temple that comes before us: the place where God sits, abidingly enthroned in His glory. The whole Psalm celebrates His majesty and calls for the ascription of glory to Him. In the poetic imagery of the Psalm, Jehovah is seen sweeping through the land in might which is irresistible. His advent is like a mighty thunderstorm and an earthquake combined. Trees and mountains — symbolic of all the great powers established in the earth — are broken or moved before Him. The centre is His temple, for there "doth everyone speak of His glory" — "in His temple doth everyone say Glory!" (N. Tr.). In His temple there is no discordant note; the praise is universal and forever.

That of course is the climax. It will come to pass when Jesus is revealed in His majesty and glory at His second advent. Then all who would not say, Glory! will have been removed in judgment.

How happy for us that we anticipate this blessed service before that day dawns. Indeed we are the temple of God, for it is written, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God

dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3: 16). As in and of that temple we say, Glory! And so it comes to pass that we often sing,

"Glory, glory everlasting,
Be to Him that bore the cross!"