

# God Entering His Temples

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from **Miscellaneous Papers**

(R. L. Allan)

A solemn, holy, subject, which the heart would reverence, while the pen traces it for a little through Scripture.

Scripture abounds with evidences of the intimacy which God has sought with the works of His hands. He has always been making a habitation for Himself, in some form or another, among His creatures.

At the beginning, as Creator, He formed His works, so that He Himself might rest in them. He saw everything which He had made, that it was very good; and all furnished Him with a desired habitation.\* The Sabbath at the end of creation-work tells us this. Whatever measure of happiness was provided for man in the arrangements of creation (and that measure was indeed complete), still the Lord God was to have a place in the garden. He walked there in the cool of the day, seeking the presence of Adam.

\*NOTE. — The Editor thinks it due to truth here to explain, that Scripture intimates no dwelling or resting of God on earth till after redemption, whether in type or in reality. Hence Exodus, not Genesis, first speaks of a dwelling of God with man.

Thus was it at the first, when the earth was in her virgin purity. She is quickly changed, but this purpose of God does not change.

The creation denies the Lord God a rest or a habitation, by reason of sin that defiled. He must arise and depart. It could not be His rest, for it was polluted. We therefore at once see Him as a stranger in the world His hands have made. This was not His place of abiding. He visits His elect that are in it, but He does not make it a home in patriarchal days, as of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He communicates with them in marked, personal intimacy, but He seeks no place on the earth. Still, however, He has a dwelling place here, in *counsel and in prospect*.

The seed of Abraham are redeemed from Egypt, and brought into the wilderness. Egypt was as the world, the polluted creation; the wilderness was as a spot outside of it, and there, in the midst of His people again, He finds for Himself a "holy habitation." (Exodus 15: 13.) The tabernacle is reared to be His dwelling, and He enters it.

But how, I ask, did He enter it? He had of old with evident delight taken His creation, as we saw; but now, the earth being defiled, and a wilderness around Him, and before Him, and under Him, after what manner does He take His place and enter His dwelling, in the midst of His people? Just with equal delight as at the beginning He enters the tabernacle reared in the wilderness of Sinai, as with His whole heart and His whole soul. The cloud abides on the outside or top of it, and the glory goes within — but goes there with an expression of earnest, delighted satisfaction. Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (Exodus 40: 35) God, as it were, would have the whole of it for Himself — at least for a season — as at creation. He enjoyed the work of His hands, hallowed the seventh day and rested, ere He shared His rest and His enjoyment with Adam.

This is full of blessing. It is an expression of the early desire of God to find a place among His creatures. If pollution separates Him from the earth in its common, general condition, it cannot separate Him from this purpose of His heart. He will purify a people that He may still dwell among His creatures. He will give them His Sabbaths, sanctify them as He did the seventh day, and dwell in the midst of them, as in a garden of Eden.

There can be no more happy thought than this, that the Lord God purposes to be thus near to His creatures and intimate with them. And it is a thought, as we shall find from this meditation, that the heart is never for one moment called to part with. As we travel through the book of God, we take it up at the beginning, we take it along with us on our journey, and find it full and fresh at the end. It accompanies us all the way, and is to be realized for ever.

Israel has to change their condition. They cease to be a travelling, and become a settled people. They leave the tents of the desert for the cities and villages of the land. The glory, according to this, has to go from the tabernacle to the temple. There may be all these changes in circumstances, but there is no change in affection, no abatement in the fervency and desire of the Lord of Israel towards His people.

A great interval also took place, and fresh provocations were given. As soon as the ark, the witness of the divine presence, had entered the land, the sword of Joshua began the work of conquest to prepare a "mountain," a kingdom, for the Lord. But Israel was untrue to Jehovah, and all through the times of the Judges and of Saul, there is confusion and defilement, and the restlessness of iniquity. The sword of David has, therefore, after so long a time, to finish what the sword of Joshua had begun, till at length there is rest — no evil or enemy occurring — and the peaceful throne of Solomon, the throne of the Lord, is set in the land and over the people. And then the temple is built, and the ark leaves the tabernacle of the wilderness (or the tent which David had prepared for it, in principle I may say the same thing) for the house of the kingdom.

This long delay — this delay of many centuries, during which the Lord of Israel was kept out of His rest, and that, too, through the faithlessness of His people — works no change. The glory enters the temple exactly as it had afore entered the tabernacle. The priests cannot stand in the temple, just as Moses had been unable to, stand in the tabernacle — the glory had again so filled the house of God. (2 Chr. 5) And this was the Lord again seating Himself in the midst of His people, or entering His habitation there as with His whole heart and His whole soul.

In Eden He found His rest, because all there was "very good" — now He finds His rest in the temple, because "he is good and his mercy endureth for ever." This difference we see (Gen. 1: 31; 2 Chr. 5: 13); but still He takes His place, and enters His dwelling with the like earnest affection and delight.

After this He still goes on, and we still trace the same mind in Him. The fulness of time arrives, and God is to be manifest in the flesh. This great mystery bespeaks itself in Luke 1: 2. But what fervour is there seen and felt to wait upon it! What joy in heaven among the angels, what joy on earth in the vessels filled by the Spirit! The fields of Bethlehem witness this. Elizabeth, and Mary, and Zechariah, and the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, witness this. God assuming the manhood, manifesting Himself in flesh, entering the temple of the human body, shall be, in its generation, like the glory entering the tabernacle or the temple. It shall be a moment of rapture. The Holy Ghost Himself, the angels that are in God's presence on high, and the elect that are visited and quickened by Him here below, shall all be made to tell of the divine joy of that moment. It was no *exile* from the higher regions that we see in the glorious, eternal Son of the Father, "made of a woman," and taking flesh and blood. Unspeakable riches

of grace indeed it was; but Luke 1, 2 forbids us to say that it was an *exile* that was then entering a foreign land, or the place of banishment. There is no finer glow of joy expressed in the whole of Scripture than, in these chapters, which thus usher in and reveal and celebrate the Incarnation. If ever the Lord God entered His temple with desire and joy, it was then; but this, as we have seen, He has always done.

Wondrous and precious beyond all thought, had we hearts to enjoy, it! But is there still more of this? Is this same story, full of blessedness as it is, able and prepared to tell itself out in still further numbers?

See the house of God, again and after this, in Acts 2. That may give us our answer.

The house is then finished, as the heavens and earth of old were, on the sixth day. The vacant, forfeited apostleship is filled, and the day of Pentecost has fully come. The glory again enters. The Holy Ghost comes into His temple now, as the Son, in the day of Luke 2, had come into His. The temples are different, but the joy in which God enters them is the same.

The living house of God, then raised and completed in Jerusalem, is filled with the Spirit; and like cloven tongues of fire, He sits upon each of the assembled saints. This was a new form, but it was as when the cloud covered the house, and the glory entered it, in the times of Ex. 40 and 2 Chr. 5.

But how was this entrance made? Like "a rushing mighty wind" the Holy Ghost came; and this style of covering, this expression of it, bespeaks the delight and fulness with which it was done. The full glory was there. The Spirit Himself, in His proper personality, in fulness and power, entered. And the fruit of this is shown all around, as we saw in the day of the Incarnation. The wonderful works of God were rehearsed at once, by the baptized body. They were glad, and praised God. They were delivered from themselves, both dwelling together, and sharing with one another all they had. Moreover, they gave witness, and that too with great power, to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

Surely, we may again say, if the Son entered His tabernacle of flesh, the temple of His body, in divine fulness and glory, so did the Spirit now enter and fill His house in like affection. Intense personality is here again witnessed. God is again near an intimate. He finds is a habitation ere in the midst of us, as with His whole heart and His whole soul — as the prophet speaks. (Jer. 32: 41) The dispensation may change, the tabernacle may have to give place to the temple, or one temple to yield to another — the temple of a human body may be prepared for the Son, the temple of living stones for the Spirit; but the fervour and intimacy with which God or the glory enters each of those in its day is alike throughout.

Further, however, still — for it is thus to the end and at the end — there is one other form which this same mystery is to take; but it takes it in the same manner, as from the beginning hitherto.

In Rev. 21, the millennial city, or, if you please, the eternal city, descends in full form and solemnity. It is a finished thing, perfect in all its beauty, ere it appears in sight. It has been built in heaven. The marriage of the Lamb was celebrated there, and there the bride had made herself ready. She is now seen in all her costliness and perfection, the habitation of the glory, as once the tabernacle of the wilderness, and then the temple of the kingdom, had been; the habitation of God through the glory, as I may express it, as once the Church on earth had been the habitation of God through the Spirit. (Eph. 2: 22.)

This city is now seen as "a bride adorned for her husband" — a figure which needs no comment to tell its deep meaning.

A great voice accompanies it, in its descent; and the voice cries, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God."

This introduces or waits upon the vision which is given John of the holy city.

As the cloud of old filled the courts when the glory entered the tabernacle and the temple as the angels rehearsed the joy of heaven when the Son entered the flesh and blood of humanity, making it His temple — as the Holy Ghost entered His living temple with like witness of His presence in its fulness; so now, the millennial, eternal dwelling-place of God in the midst of men is shown as with kindred witness of the divine delight, and of the rapture of heaven. At the beginning the Lord God had rested in His creation, and walked with man; and now at the end, He rests in His own accomplished redemption, and pitches His tabernacle in the midst of men again.\*

\*See previous Note.

Surely all this tells us of the delight which He takes in the works of His hands, in His presence with His creatures, and in His nearness to them.

We may draw some happy moral from this holy and very blessed fact — the way in which God has ever entered His temples in this world of ours. If it has been thus with Him, how may we entirely trust Him for the forgiveness of our sins, and for our blessings in grace! He would not thus delight in His communion with us, and in His nearness to us, did He not also delight in the mercy He has shown us, and in our believing and ready and assured acceptance of peace at His hand in Jesus. The reasoning of Manoah's wife with her husband applies to this — and sweet comfort there is in that artless, but unanswerable argument of faith. (Judges 13: 23)

Can I, I may ask myself, see the delight of the Lord God in His creation, and then in coming near to man and talking with him — the fervency and freedom in which the glory first entered its tent and then its house of hewn stone — the joyous solemnity that accompanied the Son from the eternal bosom, as He came and entered the body prepared for Him — the earnestness and fulness of the Spirit filling His living temple — and then the decided and happy witness that was borne to the day on which the Lord God removed His tabernacle from heaven to dwell among men again — can I, I ask, survey these wondrous things, as they pass in succession before me, and doubt His delight in mercy? Can I question my welcome to that mercy, and the provisions it, has made for me a sinner, in Jesus? Among a thousand answers to this, let this meditation give one: — there is hindrance and dimness and cloud, I know; but they are in *our eyes*.

The difficulties the soul knows in living the life of faith may well introduce that life to us afresh, as being from God. Revolted, tainted nature ought to calculate on finding that which comes from such an One altogether contrary to itself. It is hard for a selfish nature to believe in self-sacrificing love. God takes such an attitude in the Gospel as man never put himself in. It is more than strange or wonderful; it is absurd; it is not to be credited. A man would be beside himself to act as God in the gospel acts. But what is all this but God's glory? The Son of God has loved me, and given Himself for me. For whom? A creature that had rebelled against Him, insulted Him, believed the lie that had deeply, deeply slandered Him, done all he could to dishonour Him. Is it to be believed? How can a selfish nature accept such a fact?

But all this turns to a testimony. It receives a seal from the very fact that man rejects it. It is *from* God, one may say, just because it does not suit itself *to* man. What a witness for it!

The Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth, *has to give it place in us*. But He does so. In some, the love of

God is "shed abroad," as the apostle speaks, so blessedly, that the soul is always breathing a free and gladdening element. In some, there is such a deep "rooting and grounding" in love, as he always says, that the sense of it constitutes the sure foundation on which the soul rests. (Rom. 5; Eph. 3) But what a privilege is it, that we are thus taught and encouraged to *rest in the ground of love*, and to *breathe the atmosphere* of love — and that love, God's! The poor, cold heart of some of us knows all this after its own poor measure. But it is in ourselves, and not in the love, we are straitened. And each of us conscious of being quickened of God, is taught to know that our condition, as thus quickened, comes from the great love wherewith we are loved. (Eph. 2: 4, 5)