

Exodus 33 - 40.

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Article 16 of 47 **Short Meditations**

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A strange, and wondrous secret shows itself as we pass at once from the opening chapters of Genesis to the closing chapters of Exodus. I mean from these facts — in the one, we see *the Lord God preparing a dwelling-place for man*; in the other, we see *man preparing a dwelling-place for the Lord*.

At the opening of Genesis, the Lord God builds the heavens and the earth, and furnishes them. He then plants a garden in Eden, the chosen spot on the earth for that purpose, and there He sets the man whom He had created, and blesses him with all manner of blessings, crowns and enriches him, and gives him a helpmeet, so that he has to utter the fulness of a heart that was satisfied to overflowing.

We know how man soiled and lost this his goodly estate, and was sent forth, in righteous judgment, from the garden to till the ground for a common livelihood. But the Lord God became a stranger in His own creation also. An unjudged scene of pollution and corruption could not be His place. He could not rest in it, and be refreshed by it, as once He had been in the sight of creation as it came forth under His hand, clean and pure and perfect. He visited His elect that were in it; but when He had done talking with such, as we read, "He went His way." Sin had defiled it, and separated Him from it. This is continued: -

In process of time, He separates a people to Himself out of the nations of this defiled earth. He redeems them to Himself by blood, and they are made a peculiar people, separated, I may say, as He Himself already was. And this people in due time, and after the fitted manner, and in the right character, prepare Him a dwelling, a tabernacle for the entrance and occupation of the Glory, as we see at the close of the Book of Exodus.

As of old the heavens and the earth had been created, the garden of Eden planted, and man set therein as his dwelling-place, crowned and espoused, and satisfied in full measure of blessedness, and all this of God for him, so now, the tabernacle is made and furnished and raised up of man for God, and the Glory enters it and the Cloud rests on it, and the Lord God delights in His new dwelling-place, as Adam had in his.

This is wonderful. There is something mysteriously excellent and precious in this contrast between the opening of Genesis and the close of Exodus. But we have more to notice in it than this.

It was, of course, in *sovereignty*, in the exercise of His own high, prerogative, good pleasure, that the Lord God had, at the beginning, built and furnished a place for man — it is now, in *obedience*, that man prepares a place for God. The Lord God Himself had directed this Tabernacle to be made. He had shown every part of it, in patterns, to Moses; and in full, exact conformity with such patterns, had all things now been made. Just as had been prescribed by the Lord, so was everything done by Israel — and just as the Lord Himself had looked on all that He had created and made, according to His own Divine good pleasure, and pronounced it good, and rested in it and blessed it, so Moses now looks on all that Israel had made, and being according to God's commandment and prescription, Moses pronounced it, in like manner, to be good, as I may say, and blessed the people. And then, keeping all still in His sovereign hand, the Lord commands Moses to put it all together, and to raise it up in its sanctuary form; and Moses doing so, still in the spirit of obedience, the Lord, in the symbols of the

Cloud and the Glory, takes possession of it as His habitation.

Here is, again I say, something wonderful, something mysteriously excellent; that, though the Lord builds for man, and then man builds for the Lord, yet is there infinite distance between them; the Lord doing this according to the will of His sovereign rights and pleasure, man doing this simply as obedient.

There is, however, much more to be seen in this.

This raising of a dwelling-place for God was, as we see, an act of obedience, and the obedience of faith, obedience to a revelation. Disobedience to a command, breach of law, had at the beginning, deprived Him of a place in His own creation; but now, obedience, the obedience of faith to a revelation, had built Him a place for His glory. But we have still to see who they were that were thus obedient, in what character the people of Israel had erected this Tabernacle for the Glory. And here we are introduced to very blessed and needed truth.

We must go back from Exodus 40 to Exodus 33, to get satisfaction upon this — but there, we are abundantly satisfied, and very graciously and happily instructed.

Israel had destroyed themselves under the law, under their own, or the old, covenant. Having made the golden calf, they broke the first article of the law, and were to be cut off from the land. But the Mediator stays the execution of righteousness; and under his words (brought to them from the Lord) they take a new place, they assume a new character; they strip themselves of their ornaments, and seek the Lord in the place to which He had retired outside their camp.

This was, by conviction, taking the place of sinners in the sight of God. And this was a new thing. But this was the only thing that the Lord could possibly accredit. It was the only true thing, the only real place; for they were sinners, and they must be as sinners before Him. But being convicted, they let the Mediator know, that he was all their confidence. They look after him as he enters the place to which God had come down, they leave their tents, they stand, every man at his door, and from thence, as convicted and humbled, while bowing and worshipping, they look towards the Mediator.

This was beautiful — the second step in the path of a convicted sinner. As stripped of their ornaments, they go outside the camp, as though they were unclean, and let the Mediator know that he is all their confidence. And he does not, he could not disappoint them. I will not go particularly through the scene of his intercourse with the Lord, as they are together face to face, and speak as a man with his friend. But this we may see, and this we may say — that Moses uses his place and his intimacy, altogether in the cause of Israel. The earnestness with which he pleads with the Lord that He would own Israel as His people, and give them the benefit of the grace in which he himself was standing, it is beautiful to see — and we know in all this he represents One greater than himself, that he is but the shadow or reflection of the true and only Mediator. But he succeeds. He could not, as he proposed, make an atonement for them — that lies in the hand of Him who, in the volume of the Book has it written of Him, that He said, "Lo, I come," for whom "a body" was prepared — but he gets the Lord and the camp together again, under promise that Canaan shall be reached. The Mediator did not disappoint the hopes of the people. He was withdrawn from them all this time. They saw him not, but he was serving them in God's presence with this earnest, devoted, self-surrendering love.

At length he comes back to them, and he brings with him, as I may say, two things; *glory on his countenance*, and *patterns of what he had seen on the mount*. The glory that he carried on his countenance was the expression of the law, and they found it intolerable — the patterns were the shadows of good things to come, witnesses of grace, or of God's provisions for sinners, and they are

called upon to adopt them as their only way of blessing. They do so. This was the obedience of faith, the obedience rendered by convicted sinners to the revelation of God's provisions in grace for their condition. And with full earnestness of heart they render this service of faith. They bring their offerings to this work with *willing hearts*, and work at this work with *skilful, divinely instructed hands*.

All this, it is very happy, indeed, very needful, to see. Convicted sinners, who have by faith accepted God's provision for their ruined condition, are the artificers of this tabernacle which the Lord was about to occupy. And they make it, as with ready hearts that had been kindled by His grace, and with skilful hands that had been gifted by His Spirit.

All this is chiefly to be considered. When we speak of man preparing a dwelling for the Lord, it is only in such a character as this, and in such a way as this, that such a work could be done. God could take nothing from man, save as man took the place of a convicted sinner. But let him humble himself, God can exalt him. Let him by faith receive God's provisions for his self-incurred state of guilt and judgment, and then the Lord will receive from him tribute and service and worship, and, as shown in these great chapters, a dwelling-place for His glory. For Solomon, speaking by inspiration of God, says, as indeed Moses and the obedient camp of the wilderness might have said, at the close of the book of Exodus, "The Lord hath said that He would dwell in the thick darkness. But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever." (2 Chr. 6)

What can be grander and more excellent in the ways of God and His grace! The Gospel in much of its brightness shines out here — for the Lord is there accepting the services of convicted sinners who by faith use His provision for their state of ruin and condemnation. Yea, He is still dwelling in sanctuaries which faith, through the operation of His Spirit, prepares for Him — as, speaking of the Father and of Himself, the Lord Jesus says, concerning each of His loving saints, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him" — and the Apostle speaks of the assembly of the saints, as "a habitation of God through the Spirit." (John 14, Eph. 2)

And in connection with this, let me say, in what marvellous ways the Lord Jesus, the Christ of God, is more than a Repairer of all breaches, or than a Restorer of paths to dwell in. He is that surely — but He is more than that.

We know how all that has been from time to time entrusted to man has in man's hand failed, and disappointed (I speak as a man) Divine expectations. Adam in Eden or in the fair untainted creation. Noah in the new world. Israel in Canaan. The house of David on the throne. The house of Levi in the sanctuary. The Gentile with the sword and the power, as an earthly god. The Candlestick. All have proved untrue. But all purposes in these, all Divine expectations in each and all of these, will be answered and realised by Christ. The earth will bloom again. Israel, and David, and Levi, people, king, and priest, will be all in their several place and service in the days of Messiah. Government in the world will be in righteousness, and the Church be presented in full beauty, a glorious, spotless Church.

All this will be so, as in the hand of the great Repairer of all breaches. But more than this. At the beginning, the Lord God prepared a Sabbath. Adam profaned it. In due time Jehovah prepared another Sabbath in Canaan and in Solomon. Israel and the house of David profaned it. But now, blessed to tell it, Christ has prepared a Sabbath for God. "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do," said He, addressing the Father. And God has entered this Sabbath. He rests in the finished work of the Lord Jesus; and He will rest in it for ever.

Wondrous and precious mystery! Man, the first man, Adam, profaned the Sabbath which God had hallowed — man, the second man, Christ, has perfected and prepared a Sabbath for the Lord God, and He will enjoy it for ever.

We may well say, Christ is a Repairer of breaches, yea, and much more, to His praise, in admiration of the ways of God.