

Bethel - God's House

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes that the house of God is the church of Jesus Christ, a holy and heavenly Temple where God reveals Himself, and that the way to Bethel starts at Gilgal, where the earthly is put off and all flesh is judged.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:21

Topics: "Unity in the Church", "The Nature of God's House"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the journey to Bethel, the house of God, begins at Gilgal, symbolizing the necessity of the Cross in our spiritual journey. He clarifies that the house of God is not a physical location but rather the church, a holy assembly of believers united in Christ, where true fellowship, love, and life are experienced. Sparks highlights that holiness is not comparative and that the church represents a heavenly reality, reflecting God's presence through unity among its members. He warns against divisions that hinder the church's expression of love and life, urging believers to recognize their collective identity as the body of Christ. Ultimately, the path to experiencing the fullness of God requires a commitment to unity and the rejection of earthly distractions.

Transcript

The way from Gilgal leads to Bethel. From Gilgal alone! Because Bethel is the house of God. We only get to the house of God through the Cross.

What do we mean by the house of God?

The expression 'houses of God' has created much confusion. It has given rise to the idea of holy ground, that is, places that are holier than others. Have you noticed that there is no comparative for the word 'holy'? We can say that someone is prettier in comparison to somebody else. We cannot say, however, that someone is holier in comparison to someone else. There are no degrees of holiness. That which belongs to God is holy. That which does not fully belong to God is not holy. Whether we are in reality, as the Word says, "holy and beloved," depends on whether we belong to God in reality or not. That is why the church of Jesus Christ is a holy Temple in the Lord, because He Himself lives in His Own people, because they are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:21,22). And there is no other habitation of God. "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48). God lives in the hearts of those that have accepted Christ, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

When we speak of the house of God, we speak of the church of Jesus Christ, of His holy Temple, nothing earthly, but something heavenly. The house of God is connected to heavenly fulness. Those that have become living stones have come to know this experientially. They know it on the basis of the love that binds them together on the basis of the life that fills them all. In Hebrews 12:22 and 23 we read: "Ye are come to the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven." That is the church. It is a heavenly assembly. It is an assembly of those who have been born again. And as long as she is on this earth, she is in reality a representative of heavenly things, through whom the Lord wants to reveal Himself to the world. If there is to be a practical expression of the heavenly reality that fills the church, then it is necessary that all believers come to a living realization of the unity of all members of the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only together do we arrive at the fulness of God. The fulness is given to us in as far as we, the many, are one body. That is why every division means loss to us and for the time being also loss to the Lord.

In the Old Testament no one was allowed to come to the temple with empty hands. What do we have, we who are His temple? Nothing else but Himself. Only that which is of Christ is worthy to be presented, because our unity is only based on that which is of Christ.

Let us look at the house of God from different angles. Firstly from the point of view of fellowship. We have already spoken about it. Fellowship in Jesus Christ is what makes the church so wonderful. It is only through fellowship that the church is formed. Who could have brought together into one new man those who are so different according to nationality, social standing and gender? That which came into being through the Cross is so wonderful, so unfathomably great, that all human efforts to create fellowship have remained poor, bungled attempts. For exactly this reason the devil tries to destroy this fellowship. The devil does not want that which Christ has brought about to become visible. The devil creates divisions, denominations and even uses the truth, divided into truths, just so that the unity does not become visible, and that the power that is in unity does not become effective.

Instead of fellowship we could also say love, because this is the true essence of fellowship. Love is the practical value of fellowship.

Beside that there is life. The house of God is the expression of the life of God. Wherever there is fellowship in Christ, fellowship of love, there we have a wonderful fellowship of life, life as an indivisible life, from which we cannot withdraw ourselves, from which we cannot separate ourselves without immediately sensing the powers of death. There is such oneness in this life that James says: "Is any among you sick? Let Him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil... and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick" (James 5:13-15). Here we see the church. We do not only see her in the representation of the elders. We see her in her totality, because if "one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). The purpose for the members is to have life. The fulness of life that is in the Head is available for the members. The Holy Spirit will transmit it to them. They may come and as members of a body intervene for one another, acting together, so that the whole body in wonderful growth becomes an expression of the fulness, given to our Head for us all.

The third angle from which we want to look at the House of God is light. Bethel was the place where Jacob's ladder stood. It stood under an open heaven. This is an indication of revelation, of light from above. Light that illumines us inwardly, to see the things of God in the light of God. Therefore we can say that the house of God is there where God reveals Himself. Where has God revealed Himself more gloriously than in the Lord Jesus Christ! While He was on earth, He was the temple of God. As we are now sent by Him, we may be His temple, a living temple, full of the knowledge of God and full of His love.

Let us state one more time that the way to Bethel starts at Gilgal. One cannot come to the House of God and that which is heavenly cannot come into being as long as the earthly is not put off and all flesh is judged. However, where this has taken place, the road leads on to Bethel. It leads us to the House of God. It leads us to where we have fellowship in life, in love and in light.

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