

Let the House Be Builded - Part 2of3

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the ongoing conflict over God's habitation among His people and emphasizes the necessity of unity through the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's purpose.

Duration: 48:38

Scripture: Ezra 4:24, Matthew 27:40, Ephesians 3:16

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of growing in our understanding of God's values and principles from the moment of our new birth. This growth is necessary to counter the works of the evil kingdom and for the church to become a powerful force. The speaker also highlights the controversy surrounding the temple in both the Old and New Testaments, with Jesus' statement about its destruction leading to his death. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the ongoing battle between God's intention and the counter-intention of the enemy, and the need for believers to be aware of their position in this fight.

Transcript

We continue our consideration of the implications of those few words from the book of Ezra from which we have read this evening in chapter six and verse three. The answer which came back from Darius to that letter, let the house be built. We last night occupied our time with a consideration of the eternal conception and decision of God regarding a house.

We sought to show that although the Bible deals with many particular and clearly defined matters there is one object which is inclusive of them all and that is the divine purpose and intention to have a habitation on this earth. That habitation has many symbolic titles or names in the Bible. We do not stay now to call them all to mind.

But perhaps the most common of those symbolic titles of this habitation is the house of God. It is but a symbolic title. To our mentality the very word conjures up certain ideas.

But our time last night was occupied in seeking to arrive at the divine idea. Now there is a progressiveness of revelation of this matter in the Bible and as we proceed with that, with the development of that revelation we are led to see that this is not a thing at all. It is not a building as we understand it.

It is not a place but it is a people. And a people in vital organic union with God's Son, Jesus Christ. That is where we arrive as we pursue this matter of God's habitation.

Now at this time we are going to consider the continuous controversy and conflict in relation to this habitation of God. It is a matter of very simple evidence that we are not through the first three chapters of the Bible before we meet all the elements of conflict and controversy. And from then onward, right the way through the Bible, those elements of conflict and controversy are rarely absent.

The book is just full of them until we reach the last two chapters and the conflict ceases. The controversy is settled. And that forever.

But as we pointed out last night, the center of the consummation and the final issue is the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them. And be their God. And they shall be his people.

The end which has been the occasion of this tremendous conflict from the beginning. But if we look closer into this matter, we shall find that it is invariably related to just one thing. It is most impressive.

It is always focused upon this one thing. That is God's place in this world. And that in a people for his habitation.

That's as we say the bone of contention. The focal point of all the trouble. That is the issue there at the beginning in the garden with the first pair.

It's far too beautiful and happy a scene to behold God walking with men and talking with men and having very blessed fellowship with men in a scene of peace and rest and order. It is far too beautiful a thing to go unassailed. Somehow, a situation must be set up which would drive God out and break in upon that fellowship and if possible, end it.

At least suspend it. That was the issue there. Many things may circle round that.

But it is just this God here in conditions of fellowship with men. It's the point of the trouble in the first family. A family in a holy and sacred fellowship with God is something that will not go unassailed.

And so we find the family thrown into this state of conflict and one brother murders the other. It's the whole point in the history of a chosen nation. In all it's varied phases and stages of life and history.

It's the point when that chosen nation was in Egypt. What was it that God intended? Well, it's found in his challenge to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, let my people go that they may serve me. And we know from the later history what that meant.

God in the midst of a people. And the great controversy and conflict in Egypt was born of this sinister realization that if that happens, God will have what he has ever set his heart on. And that must be frustrated.

That's the point. They get into the wilderness. That is, God gets them out to be his people for his dwelling.

But as they are in the wilderness, congregated at the foot of the mountain, and Moses goes up into the mountain, note, he is going to receive the pattern of the tabernacle in which God will take up residence in the midst of his people. For that tabernacle, there will be the need at least of some gold in the great symbolism of the divine nature. That has been brought out of Egypt.

And while Moses tarries in the mountain, what happens? Again, there enters in this challenge to the divine purpose. And the gold is stolen from God and made into a calf to be worshipped in the place of God. All apart of the one long story.

And it goes on in their history. When they are through the wilderness and in the land, Solomon builds the temple. God takes up his residence.

But before, just before that temple was going to be brought in and built, another terrible thing happened. It is said, then Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number the people. Many of you know the story.

The numbering, of course, was just a bit of vanity. Vanity. The vanity of the human heart.

Counting heads. Being able to say, what a great people I have got. And what a great king I am.

And even a man of the world who had very little, if any, spiritual perception. Joab saw through it and urged the king not to do it. But he insisted.

And then he had to meet God. Result, the devastation of the nation. Till, as the plague swept over the people, mowing them down, David at last met the angel of the Lord, and the angel of the Lord met him in the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite.

And that became the site of the temple. But, what a contesting, what a controversy over this habitation of God, all the time. Well, the temple is built, and when the nation has come to the very peak of its development, along this line of God's habitation, the very builder of the temple itself defaulted.

And made an alliance with that which was another God, outside of Israel. So it is not long before the nation is split in two, and the swift movement downward takes place, and the Lord leaves the temple. The end of that movement is a way into Babylon.

Temple, Jerusalem, forsaken of God, people in captivity. After 70 years, a remnant returned and restarted to build a temple. And the story is told in these twin books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and what books of conflict they are.

Here it is again, it is as though something said, no, never, if we can stop it. If you look at the last verses of the fourth chapter of the book of Ezra, you will see, so the work ceased. Well, that is how the Old Testament closes.

The New Testament opens. As we saw last night, God comes to his consummate realization along two lines. Firstly, becoming incarnate in his Son, Emmanuel, God with us.

But, his very presence raises the bitterish controversy. On this very point of the temple, it all centers in and circles around this temple. And you know, the charge which brought him to his death was, he spoke about the destruction of the temple.

He said, destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again. In their blindness to his true spiritual meaning, they interpreted it as meaning that this great temple was to be destroyed. Of course it was.

But that brought him to his death. Stephen took up that matter a little later on and quoted these words about the temple. God dwelleth not in temples made with hands.

And from that point the rage and storm broke upon him. See the focal point of it all? Most significant. And when the personal Christ, sown like corn of wheat in the ground, died has risen in the corporate form of the nucleus of his church.

This is the habitation of God in reality. But what a storm breaks upon it. Oh, it's the signal for new outbreaks of this terrible antagonism.

Dear friends, that is the root of all the sad tragic history through the centuries of divisions and controversies and conflicts and schisms and contentions amongst Christians. One, one object and focal point is, God is not going to have this dwelling if it can be prevented by any means whatsoever. This must be stopped.

There is no greater menace to the kingdom of darkness than a people after this kind to which God commits himself because they provide him with the ground for being there, just being there in blessed fellowship. We believe that we are living in the end time. And as the end draws near, in spite of all the talk and the efforts for unions and affiliations and so on, the spirit of suspicion, fear and misunderstanding intensifies.

It intensifies. The atmosphere of Christianity is impregnated with this kind of thing. That the last little thing will suffer division if possible.

The differences are multiplying all the time. As we get near the end, the end, what is it? Well, we have mentioned it this evening. Why are there so many differences and controversies in the realm of interpretations of Christian relationships? Well, it is just this one thing.

You may say it's because of this or that or some other thing. You may put it down to one of the many hundreds of things that make for division. But let us get right to the root of the thing and the heart of the thing.

Every one of these things which may be the pretext is related to this one all-inclusive and all-governing thing. It is related to a spiritual relatedness of the people of God to provide him with that which has been in his heart from all eternity. A habitation, a presencing of himself with men.

That is the heart of it. All this sad and terrible history and story is related to the corporate. The beginning, a man and his wife.

Corporate. Two brothers. The race.

Twelve brothers. Twelve sons of Jacob. Twelve tribes.

The pattern of the tabernacle. And so on. It's always centered in this corporate idea to either prevent it or to wreck it if it has any semblance of being present.

Ever and always the point of attack has been the people of God in heavenly fellowship with God in their midst. Well, we have to look at the significance of this. What does it signify in the first place? Well, surely it signifies so clearly the existence in this universe of a force and system that is hostile to this idea.

That is antagonistic to the realization of this divine purpose. This is not a natural thing. You may, if you like, say well it was because of this or that or something else.

And often there seem to be and do seem to be good human and natural reasons for it. But get behind all that. You find that it is all issuing from this sinister realm hierarchy which is antagonistic to one thing.

And it is this one thing. We speak about the church militant. What do we mean by the church militant? Well, our ideas are usually objective when we speak like that.

We think of the church making assault upon heathenism, upon paganism, upon worldliness, upon vice, upon bad social conditions, upon suffering and its causes. That is perhaps what we mean by the church militant. But however true that may be and right, the fact is that the church militant finds its campaign sabotaged from the inside.

Defeated before it starts to fight. Indeed it cannot fight as a corporate whole because it is already crippled on the inside. Crippled by its divisions.

Crippled by the absence of this one related corporate life. Inexpression. Yes.

The enemy has subtly got on the inside of things and weakened and paralyzed the church militant. Some of you are perhaps familiar with a story in the life of Spurgeon. The students of his college were preaching their trial sermons before him.

One young man chose Ephesians 6 for his subject. And in a great attempt at eloquence and impressiveness he pictured the warrior and the armor. And himself was taking it up.

At last fully clad in great boldness he stepped forward and said, Now where is the enemy? Mr. Spurgeon cupped his hands and said, Inside the armor! Well, that's an old story. But it's very much to the point. Very much to the point.

The church is not moving like a mighty army. It is not true that like a mighty army moves the church of God. It is not true that it is terrible as an army with banners.

Satan has seen to that and given the denial to that. The lie. What is the point? We've got to take account of something more than the human factors and the natural elements.

I'm not wanting to open the door for an inrush of demonism or demonology. But perhaps we've swung too much the other way in our fears. We have either got to accept the Bible or reject it.

We've got to settle that. And if we accept the Bible, if we take it as it stands, we have got to accept this act of a great evil spiritual hierarchy surrounding this world, unrelenting, ceaseless invigilance and activity, watching for any opportunity and any ground that it can use against this one thing, the absolute oneness of God's people to provide him with a habitation suitable to himself. We've got to recognize that great system and take account of it and really take it into account.

There it is. There seems to be some strange dullness, numbness over the church in this matter which itself may be significant. Who does not amongst Christians know, for instance, Ephesians chapter 6? Probably most of us could quote it.

Our wrestling is not with flesh but with principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness and hosts of wicked spirits in the heavens. Who does not know that in words, in language? But dear friends, who has really been stung into the realization of what that means for the church? Into the recognition of the fact that that word is the summing up of the greatest revelation of the church that has ever been given

to mankind. Up to that the apostle moves with his great unveiling of the church in its past eternal election, in its heavenly vocation, in its walk here with God and in its coming eternity purpose.

Through all that he moves up to this. Yes, yes, but, but while that is true, while that is God's masterpiece, the greatest thing ever conceived, it is the one object of countless hosts of evil spirits in their inimical, their antagonistic interest and attention. You see, fanatics and powers, world rulers of this darkness, hosts of wicked spirits have one thing that thereafter, and it's the destruction of that church, the dividing of that church.

We, I say, are strangely numb in the presence of such a revelation. We are not stung alive to the recognition of what that means. If all this is true, you're going to have very great difficulty in arguing your way out of this if you're so disposed.

I say the Bible from the first chapters to the last is full of this very thing, this continuous controversy and conflict centered in this one thing, God having a habitation for himself in a people. If this is true, dear friends, we've got to adjust ourselves, take a new attitude over this matter and face the fact that these evil forces are not just concerned with the whole sum total of the church to split it into so many sections. They, these evil forces, are not just concerned with the whole sum total of the church to split it into so many sections.

They will not stop at the last two. They began with the first two and they will pursue their evil purpose to the last two believers to get in between. And if that is true, I say we have got to adjust ourselves to this that any division, any breaking up of fellowship is not to be put down finally to some human or natural factors.

They may only be the pretext or the occasion but behind there's something very much more. We're involved in a terrible warfare over this matter of relatedness far, far beyond our power of overcoming or coping with it. There you see is where the words in this great letter come to our rescue as the apostle prays that he would grant him to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inward man.

Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all ages forever and ever. I say we've got to take account of these forces and adjust ourselves to the matter in a new way in the realization of what it is that is happening and not put everything down to second causes but to get behind them the primary cause in that other evil realm.

God is holy the place of his dwelling must be holy if this is the work of Satan it's unholy it's the touch of evil therefore God cannot commit himself the work of the enemy must be cast out God is one God is one he will not commit himself to that which divides him cried the apostle to the Corinthians is Christ divided? and I think there was a tone of shock in his interrogation unthinkable unthinkable Christ is not divided therefore he cannot commit himself as one God to division we divide God the Holy Spirit is one spirit there is says the apostle one spirit there are not so as many Christs and as many Holy Spirits as there are believers we do not have a personal and private Jesus or Holy Spirit we only have him and them in common and there is no other way of having the Lord now we've got

to find the key we've got to find the key to this oneness this unity and in this very letter to the Ephesians the apostle speaks about it as the unity of the spirit the unity of the spirit you see our oneness our unity is not first an intellectual thing that is that we have threshed out truth and matters of procedure and after a great deal of discussion and argument we have arrived at some measure of agreement and now we are

one does not begin there that is not the basis of our oneness at all even in evangelical truth we don't arrive at oneness intellectually by argument we do not arrive at it by an enterprise a common undertaking or piece of work this needs to be done and we resolve to unite to do it the history of the work of God surely is the history of how that kind of thing can break

down and does not go through when it meets the forces of evil no we are not one in that way we are not one by sentiment by, may I use the word smarmyness nice talk closing our eyes to wrong that is wrong being sentimental that is not the basis of oneness it is not a oneness by ideals and certainly not a oneness of pretense what is it? it is as the word here says the unity of the spirit that is of the Holy Spirit I have just said that there are not as many Holy Spirits as there are believers we were all baptized in one spirit into one body says the apostle now then this oneness is twofold first of all it is basic and then it is progressive it is basic by our sharing of a common life oh that we made more of that fundamental reality we know it is true we have only got to be scattered over

the world where you meet one Christian in a hundred thousand and the thing becomes very real very real oh what a thing it is to meet a Christian you don't raise ecclesiastical questions forthwith doctrinal questions and so on you just find that you've got something in common if you'd only keep on that ground what a long way you can go it is something in common you know it without being told we know a believer a true believer anywhere in the world without introduction the introduction is inside it's fundamental we share one life we have one holy spirit dwelling in all that is the basic reality of oneness if only we would make more of it but then it is progressive it is progressive that is it grows, it develops, it proceeds and progresses by living in the spirit by a life in the spirit a

life governed by the holy spirit within us dear friends though this has been said many times it's a point for very great emphasis if only you and I personally really lived the life under the government of the holy spirit inside what a big difference it would make you see he is the spirit of truth and if he is governing our spirit and our inner consciousness as born again children of God indwelt by the holy spirit if you and I got a false notion about another one it would not be long before we knew it in our own hearts that the holy spirit does not agree with that notion we take on a false report a false rumor we hear something about somebody and take it on and it may be though apparently true and might seem to come from the most authentic and trustworthy source it might still be false we

can know it in our hearts by the holy spirit and that spirit governing will be a safeguard against some division, some strain, some broken fellowship which ought never to be because it is founded upon a lie a beautiful lie it might be you see what I mean you ought to spend much time with that but oneness, fellowship is progressive on the basis of a life in the spirit and you and I as God's people are called to live in the spirit and to walk by the spirit to know the inner instruction and teaching of the spirit to know the voice of the spirit takes a long time to learn in fullness or any great measure but it's a great reality which ought to begin with our new birth that we have a new consciousness of values of things that differ of right and of wrong of what we ought to do and ought not to

do how we ought to speak and how we ought not to speak all this ought to be born with us at our new birth and it ought to grow and grow and grow only so will this other evil kingdom be destroyed only so will its works be countered only so will the church be terrible as an army with banners only so will God find the place that he is seeking where he can commit himself and abide and make himself known time is gone for this evening though the ground is not by any means fully covered but it's enough it's enough there's a great battle on and that battle is not just the battle of different conceptions and interpretations

presentations of Christianity behind all is a battle between a great intention of God and a counter-intention of a great faith may God help us to have our eyes open to this and to be very clear cut as to where we stand in this fight

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