

Let the House Be Builided - Part 3of3

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of God's presence in the house of God, where justice is the ultimate criterion, and new birth is necessary for God's presence.

Duration: 48:25

Scripture: John 2:24, John 3:3

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the story of Jesus' presence on earth and his subsequent withdrawal. The speaker suggests that God cannot involve himself in man's disorder and therefore must have conditions that are suitable to himself. This may explain why God seems reserved and slow to answer the cries and prayers for a visitation. The speaker emphasizes the importance of having an increase of Christ within oneself and suggests that God may take away busy servants in order to increase their measure of Christ. The sermon also highlights the concept of new birth and the need for God, the Holy Spirit, to come and take up residence within individuals.

Transcript

So we come to the concluding hour of this time together, in which we have been seeking to see that the one all-inclusive regulation in the Bible is that of God's intention and determination to have a habitation on this earth. There are, as we have said, many figures, many types, many names, used in a symbolic way of that habitation. Perhaps the most outstanding is that of God's house.

But no matter how many symbolic titles and representations, they all embody one thought and one purpose. And that is this, God's desire to dwell with men. When things were, at the beginning of the Bible, in such a condition as to make it possible for God to pass the verdict, it is very good then God was found present in communion and fellowship with man.

We are not told very much about how he was present. We are told that he walked in the garden at the cool of the day, that he talked with man and made known to him his thoughts. We know little more than that about it so far as the story there tells us.

It may very well have been much like the forty days after the resurrection when he came, showed himself, spoke and went and came again and went and came again, coming and going and speaking and showing. Very probably it was like that at the beginning, all making so clear that that was his thought and according

to his heart, to be present and to be able in personal presence to commune and communicate. But so soon he had to withdraw.

In a sense morally he was driven out, shall we say expelled. Conditions changed. They no longer corresponded to his mind.

They no longer found it possible for him to say it is very good. The change made it necessary for him to withdraw. But again and again through history we are told of God's effort to recover a condition suitable to and well pleasing unto himself that he might return.

He gave to Moses a pattern of a heavenly habitation and when all things were made according to the pattern it was again as though God said it is very good and he returned and filled the tabernacle. And again it cannot be abided. It's in figure and in type and in a measure.

But things are not fully and finally according to his mind in the people themselves. Later he gave another pattern to David of a temple, a representation again of a heavenly habitation. When all things were made according to that revealed pattern God came and filled the temple again showing this is what he is ever seeking.

And again things change. We have the sad story of the glory departing and removing and going away and that thing remaining just an empty shell. A cold unreal formality.

The Old Testament closes on the note of failure in this great purpose of God. Failure yet promise. We have it read tonight.

The last phase the Old Testament who is there among you that saw this house in its former glory is it not as nothing but the last state of this house shall be greater than the former and then that great statement yet once I will shake reality. The desire of all nations shall come. He is the desire of all nations.

Do you remember that it is in the letter to the Hebrews that those words are taken up by the writer and applied to the shaking of everything here on this earth which is but a representation that is a type, a figure, a symbol in order that the spiritual reality might take its place. Well if we turn our page from the Old Testament to the New and we find the next consummate movements of God in relation to this purpose. There are three major expressions of this divine work.

Other minor but three major. One, Israel. We have not understood Israel until we have recognized Israel was chosen among the peoples of this earth a nation for this one sole and only object that God should find in a people a habitation for himself suitable to himself.

He strove, he labored, he longed, he suffered. He showed his infinite patience and mercy and long suffering with that people because his heart was bound up with his object that he might realize his eternal thought and have a habitation here in a people. I repeat we do not understand the dismissal of Israel from the divine program until we have recognized their utter and final failure to fulfill that vocation.

And their failure to fulfill it came to its culmination in the expulsion of God incarnate when they said we will not have this man. So for the dispensation at least God has left that house and it remains desolate to this day. But God has not abandoned his purpose.

The second great expression and perhaps we may call it the inclusive expression of his thought is in the incarnation itself. Emmanuel, God with us. In the person of his son he has found his sanctuary, his temple, his tabernacle.

The word became flesh and tabernacle among us and we beheld his glory. The third major expression is in the advent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. Again we have not understood the incarnation until we have related it to this eternal thought.

God finding in man a habitation. Making man the place of his dwelling. And further we have not understood the deepest significance of the advent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church in which the Holy Spirit takes up residence until we have related that to this one thing.

God is here. The church is that place of his dwelling and he has come to his temple. When we have said that and everybody in reading can see how gloriously fulfilled that was on the day of Pentecost for verily the messenger of the covenant has come to his temple.

Verily God was present on that day and did not depart. He has come to stay. It is God incarnate who says I am with you all the days unto the consummation of the age.

He has come to stay in the person of his spirit. It is quite clear that in the church general that is the divine thought. But then we find that what was true of the church universal was God's intention for the churches local.

One thing to characterize local companies of God's people, companies of God's people was that God should be found there. That is as you see our third message. The ultimate criteria.

I do not imply ignorance on your part when I remind you that criterion just means the principle which determines the standard of judgment. That is that which decides the matter or is the ground upon which you decide any matter. The standard, the measure, the principle by which everything is determined.

That is a criterion. The one criterion ultimately of the house of God, universal or local, is justice. That God is there and you find him there.

And that is the dominant thing about it. It is not the methods and the manner and the performance and the rites and the formalities and the ceremonies and all the things. It is either in them or through them or apart from them, without them.

God is there. You meet God. You cannot go in there without meeting God.

That is the ultimate criterion as to whether it is a house of God. Not a place but a people in the midst of whom God in the person of his son Jesus Christ by his spirit is present and known to be present. Because is it possible for such a one as he to be present without your knowing it? Well, it may be if there is something wrong with you.

But it ought not to be so. It ought to be that where God is, we know it. We meet him.

Criterion is not any one or any number of many things that men think are necessary to compose a house of God. Our very vocabulary and phraseology is all thought in this matter when we speak of the house of God. We refer to building, to place and so on.

But the criterion is not those things at all. It is justice. You meet God there.

And if not, then it cannot bear that name because it does not fulfill that function. We may as well dismiss the thing. Cease.

Try and hold it together if it is not like that. Now this brings us then to the question of the ground on which God is present. May I just say here in parenthesis that God may be present in varying degrees.

In greater or lesser degrees. The churches in the New Testament make it perfectly clear that that is true. It is not at all difficult to discern that God the Lord was more in one place than in another.

That there was a greater measure of the Lord and his glory in this place than in that. For instance, Philippi over against Corinth. But surely the thing that ought to govern us is not that the Lord should be there anyhow.

But that he should be able to be there without reserve or restraint. Wholly giving himself. Surely that is the matter.

That is the thing that ought to concern us individually. The Lord should be able to be with us individually without reserve. Just free to commit himself.

And surely that ought to be the concern of every company of the Lord's people in every place. Not this or that or some other thing for existing. But the maximum of the presence of the Lord.

Now I venture to say dear friends that if that really was the governing and dominating concern. It would be the key to many problems. The solution of many problems.

The clearing up of all the difficulties. If we were all set on this. Now the thing that matters more than anything is that the Lord should have an absolutely clear and free way to fill this place with his glory.

Whatever gets in the way of that has got to get out of the way. This is to be a mighty motive in our lives. We have got to become wedded to this eternal thought of God.

To see it and it has got to become our passion. So much so that whatever may threaten it, obstruct it, limit it, cannot be tolerated. That is the challenge of this message.

But in order that it should be like this, God must have conditions. Which on the one side will not involve him in man's disorder. For God will not allow himself to be involved in man's disorder.

He will not commit himself to that. And on the other side be completely suitable to himself. May this not explain much of the resolve of the Lord.

That we and Christian people everywhere are finding so difficult. To either understand or endure the cries and the appeals and the pleadings and the praying day and night for a visitation of God. And God seems so reserved and so slow.

May it be that God cannot commit himself to man's order of things without becoming involved in something that will dishonor him. I put it in the form of a question. But it is shown in the Bible that that is so.

Cry of the prophets the people was to put things into such an order and state that God could come. Something to be taken account of. In all our praying there must be something for us, there might be

something for us to do.

To prepare a way of the Lord. To cast up a highway for our God. To gather out the stones which would injure his feet should he come.

Maybe something. Now Satan from the beginning as we were seeing last night. In this continuous controversy and conflict over this one thing to prevent God from having an abiding place.

Satan from the beginning has sought to put man in the way of God. Man was created for this purpose to be God's habitation. He should dwell with man.

Therefore Satan's great stroke and effort has ever been to turn the very man of God's creating against the purpose of God. And put man in the way of God to frustrate God. That's the long and terrible story isn't it? Of God being hindered by man.

And by the conditions created by man. Jesus saw that. Jesus saw quite clearly that Satan's interference with man.

Was in order so to change man that God could not come and dwell in him. The end of the second chapter of the gospel by John. Which ought never to be divided from the third chapter.

Finds the Lord Jesus. Finds this comment about the Lord Jesus. That he would not commit himself to man.

For he knew what was in man. He would not commit himself because he knew all men. And knew what was in man.

Terrible thing that man who was intended to be God's very temple. Should be in such a state that God cannot and will not commit himself. And I said chapter 2 of John ought never to be separated from chapter 3. Because immediately you move on into what is in the arrangement chapter 3. You come on this.

You must be born again. What is the point? This throws a new flash of light upon new birth. Says that God must have a new kind of man to empower.

And you notice that that was addressed to an outstanding representative of the Jewish nation. To Nicodemus. Full length portrait of Israel.

Who had claimed to be God's house. Who had appropriated God. Who had sought to lock God up to themselves and make him their exclusive God.

And it is here in Jerusalem to such that Jesus knowing what was in man would not commit himself unto them. And then to a representative of such a nation. As speaking to the nation.

You must be born from above. Why? In order that God the Holy Spirit should come right in. And take up residence.

And that's chapter 4. It's all a wonderful sequence. It all centers in this one eternal thought. This thought unlocks the whole Bible.

Everywhere. Thought of God to be in. Dwelling.

In dwelling. In man. In the midst.

That is why new birth came in at that point. Where he would not commit himself. Because he knew all men.

Knew what was in man. So the question immediately arises. To what will God commit himself? I'm going to try to show this.

By taking up the prophecies of Ezekiel for a few minutes. You know the last words in the prophecies of Ezekiel? The last sentence? The name given to the place Jehovah Shammah. The Lord is there.

And the book closes. The end is reached. The thought and purpose of God is attained.

The Lord is there. Now leaving aside the controversy. Over Ezekiel's temple and house.

As to whether there is to be a literal rebuilding of the temple. On this earth in Jerusalem. When all this Arab world has been swept aside.

And the mosque of Omar has been obliterated from Jerusalem. A lot to be done yet. Not impossible with God.

Whether it is to be like that. Or whether all that is realized in the church. Spiritually.

We leave that controversial matter aside for the moment. It doesn't come in. Whether this be true or not.

The book of Ezekiel stands for today. With much positive application and teaching. Its divine principles.

Which are eternal and belonging to no particular age or place. Are very clear. And in relation to this whole end.

Where it is to be. What it is to be. When it is to be.

Well. The end is this. In any case.

The Lord is there. And the whole of these prophecies are a progressive movement toward that end. They begin with the prophet saying that he saw visions of God.

Visions of God. And then what follows in the prophecies. Are those visions of God.

The visions of God as you will note are progressive toward that consummate end. Stages and the phases of that progress. Show the principles or the ground on which that end will be reached.

The Lord is there. The first vision. Which in a sense is inclusive of all the rest.

Is the vision of the throne. The throne above the firmament. And upon the throne above the likeness as of a man.

That of course could occupy a whole evening and more. But what does it signify. That the first, the fundamental, the all inclusive vision or reality.

By which this end of God shall be reached. Is the absolute exaltation, enthronement and authority of that man. With a capital M. The son of man.

On the throne above the firmament. Where Stephen saw him. From where he stooped to encounter Saul of Tarsus.

The man on the throne. Christ glorified. Christ exalted.

Christ in possession of all authority in heaven and in earth. That has got to become a practical reality. In all matters and details if God is going to reach the end.

The Lord is there. It is the fundamental governing thing. The Lord will be there.

According to the measure in which this is true. That Jesus Christ is exalted. That Jesus Christ has his place as the exalted one.

That he is on the throne. And that the authority is recognized as being in his hand. Many ways in which that can be put.

In the church at the beginning and in the churches it meant this. That they never had meetings, committees and councils for deliberating on what they were going to do. They had prayer meetings and submitted everything to the Holy Spirit.

And took all their instructions from heaven. It proved to be a very effective thing, didn't it? Yes. God was there.

That's the effect. That is reality. The Lord was there.

The place where they were gathered was shaken by his presence. The Lord was with them. All on the ground are their testimony that this Jesus had been set at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens.

But that was not just an objective fact or even teaching or truth. But that was not just an objective fact or even teaching or truth. It was a practical reality in all the details of everyday life.

Jesus was referred to. And Jesus was deferred to in all things. His authority was applied authority.

Not theoretical. Stands first. The first inclusive vision.

We move on and we find a man whose appearance is as the appearance of brass with a measuring line and rod in his hand. And what do we come to? Find the great temple area. This great square of the temple.

And from the outermost corners of that great square of the temple area we draw diagonal lines. Corner to corner. Corner to corner.

And at the point where those lines meet and cross right at the center of that area is a great brazen altar. Central and universal. Governing all things within and without.

A man of brass. An altar of brass. Do you know that brass symbolizes righteous judgment? Righteousness unto judgment.

Judgment unto righteousness. Right there at the very heart and center and core of everything. Where everything meets and from where everything radiates is the cross.

The cross. Where everything is brought to judgment and judged according to God's standard of righteousness. Of holiness.

That is the ground on which he will be present. We are so familiar with teaching of the cross. But here again we can only rightly apprise and understand the meaning of the cross of the Lord Jesus when we see that it relates essentially to this one matter, God's presence.

God's presence. Everything has got to come to judgment according to God's standard. And what cannot pass must be consumed on that altar.

And what is of God can be established in heaven. Great discriminating work of the cross. On that God will be present.

Yes, Jehovah Sharma comes right back to this. How far has everything been brought to that great judgment of Calvary and determined as to its acceptance by God? Oh dear brothers and sisters, how searching this is. For all things in us, in you, in me.

In our fellowships, in our assemblies, in our churches, everywhere. Can this pass the judgment of the cross? What does the cross say to this and to that? How does this stand in the light of Calvary? The answer will determine just how much God is going to commit himself. That's important.

That's important. We can't get away from that. This man of brass will see to it.

He will measure the altar. And he will measure everything according to the altar. We must leave it.

God's thoughts of righteousness. And then we move with that man to the house. The house.

And you who know the vision of the house and all that is said about it here will be familiar with the dominant feature of this whole matter of the house. The dominant feature of this vision of the house is measurement. This man with his rod, his measuring rod is moving everywhere measuring, measuring, measuring.

Giving the measurement of everything within and without and around and about. It's measurement. Measure.

So meticulous. The man of brass is doing it. What is he doing with this house? He is defining it according to Christ.

He is measuring according to Christ. That is going to be the measure of everything, you see. God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath appointed.

The man of brass. Bring everything in the world to judgment according to himself. If that is true of the world and judgment must begin, is coming to the world, it must begin at the house of God.

Now, to resolve this into one statement just means this. If it is to be Jehovah Shammah, if it is to be the Lord is there, it will be according to the measure of Christ. Just how much there is of Christ there.

No more, no less will God commit himself. It is not this or that or many things that men think constitute a place for God. It is only one thing.

How much of Christ is there there? Let that go right into our hearts. How much of Christ is there in you and in me? Does not this explain the infinite pains that God takes and his preparedness to sacrifice so much in order to increase our measure of Christ? The explanation of so much. Why he will take a useful or very busy servant of his away from his work and shut him up.

Why? We say loss, we say tragedy, we say the church suffers. God knows. It matters more to him that there should be an increase of Christ there for eternal purposes than perhaps the doing of a lot of busy things for him.

There must be an explanation. Must be an explanation. The strange providences of God.

May this be it? May this be it? I put it again in form of question. The Lord is prepared to make any sacrifice. The Lord is prepared to take any pains to increase the measure of his son.

Not just for its own sake, but in relation to things to which he has given his heart to find a state suitable for his own presence. You and I are all prepared to say immediately that where there is most of Christ, there you meet the Lord indeed. The two things go together.

The Lord is there. The Lord is there. It often means the ruination of ourselves to make place for him.

The house is measured. Not just as a whole, but at every point, at every corner, at every movement. And we know from the letter to the Ephesians that it is the measure of Christ.

The measure of Christ. Finally, in the visions, we come to the river. The river.

When he is on the throne and has his place. And when the altar is in its place and judging and governing everything according to God's righteousness. And when the house is measured according to Christ.

Well, what do you expect? Out from that house will emerge and break a river. And life will issue and proceed in ever increasing fullness to make everything live whithersoever the river cometh. That's the day of Pentecost.

He's got his house. Christ is on the throne. The cross has done its work.

And the river proceeds spontaneously. I just raise the question again. It's no criticism.

No judgment of mine. It's really an exercise. But you know, Christians have been praying and pleading for years for revival.

Revival. Revival. That's the word.

Well, it happens when God has his conditions. May its delay be explained by the fact that he hasn't got his conditions. However, it's a question.

It may be very objective. It's a subject of interest. But, dear friends, it has a very immediate application.

What you and I desire, I'm sure I speak for you as I do for myself, is that out of us should flow rivers of living water. Oh, that there might issue from us this stream that makes everything live. When we pray with people, life comes into them.

They feel refreshed and renewed. When we speak to them, that is the effect. As we move about the world, the result of our movement is that people are helped to live anew.

Life comes. That is true also of our churches, our assemblies, our companies. Oh, it's life.

Life flowing out. Reaching, reaching far out. No limit to the possibilities of a little company ordered according to God.

No limit to the rain. The influence of that little company in some little corner may go to the ends of the earth. You may be ministering Christ far, far beyond your own borders if God has his condition.

It just happens. You don't have to organize great campaigns to do it. It happens.

If it's like this, the river. Note, it comes out of a measured sanctuary. It comes down by way of the altar.

It is from the house according to Christ, which house has been judged by Calvary as to how it stands before God. It comes. The Spirit comes.

The Spirit of life. Well, that's some of the deciding factors then as to the presence of God. More or less, God grant that it may be more and ever more, the deciding factors are the absolute authority of Christ in everything.

The centrality and the universality of the cross. The measure of Christ in believers individually and collectively. The Spirit of life emanating.

From that which answers to God's own heart and satisfies him that he can be there without restraint of fear. Jehovah, Shalom. The Lord is there.

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