

The House of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The House of God is Christ, where God is found and communicates with humanity, and baptism represents the death of the old self and the acceptance of God's position.

Scripture: Ezekiel 40:2

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "The House of God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the House of God is embodied in Christ, who serves as the ultimate meeting place between heaven and earth. Through the visions given to Ezekiel, the detailed representation of the spiritual temple is revealed, highlighting the importance of Christ as the fulfillment of God's thoughts and the only means of access to Him. The sermon draws parallels between the Old Testament and the New Testament, illustrating how Christ is the true Bethel, the House of God, where God communicates with humanity. Sparks also discusses the significance of baptism as a declaration of our death in Christ and our acceptance of His authority in our lives. Ultimately, he calls believers to recognize their identity in Christ and to live under His Headship, affirming that the Lord is present in their lives as they embody the House of God.

Transcript

Reading: Ezekiel 40:2-4; 43:10-11.

You remember it was at the time when everything which had formerly been God's means of setting forth in type His thoughts in the midst of His people, had been broken down and lost, and the people were far out of touch both spiritually and literally with those things (the temple and Jerusalem, etc.), that the Lord took up His servant Ezekiel, and in the visions of God brought him back to the land, setting him upon a high mountain, and showed him in vision the city, and that great, new, spiritual heavenly house. Very full and very comprehensive and very detailed was the vision and the unveiling that was given, and the prophet was taken to every point, every angle, and through the whole of that spiritual temple step by step; in and out, up and through, and around, the angel with the measuring rod all the time giving the dimensions, the measurements of everything; a most exhaustive definition of this whole spiritual house. And then, further, after being shown all the form and the ordinances, the priesthood, the sacrifices and everything else, the prophet was commanded to show the house to the house of Israel and to give them all the detail of the Divine thought. In our previous meditation we pointed out, in that connection, that whenever there is a departure from Divine thoughts, whenever there is a loss of the original revelation of God, whenever the

heavenliness, the spirituality, the Divine power of that which is of God ceases to operate in the midst of His people, and whenever the glory departs, the Lord's reaction to such a state of things is to bring His Son anew into view; and we followed through to see how that, in just such a time in the history of the Church in the first days, when things changed from the primal glory, John was used by the Holy Spirit through his Gospel, his Letters, and the Apocalypse, to bring the Lord Jesus in a full, heavenly, spiritual way anew into view; reminding ourselves, in so doing, that John's Gospel is practically the last New Testament book that was written, so that in spiritual value and significance, it stands really after everything else written in the New Testament. That is to say, it represents God's breaking in again with a fresh presentation of His Son in terms of heavenliness and spirituality, at a time when things have gone astray.

I just want for a few minutes, as I feel constrained, to stay with that: and we have the Gospel of John opened before us, at the first chapter. And note that this is God coming back in relation to the fullness of His thought for His people, and the meaning is just this: Christ is the fullness of God's thought for us, and the Holy Spirit (represented by the angel in Ezekiel), has come with the express object and purpose of giving and leading us into the detail of Christ, so that we get a comprehensive and detailed expression of the Divine thought in Christ and are brought thereinto.

Now you notice with John 1 you get the fresh, great, eternal presentation:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

That is the eternal background of Divine thought. Move on a little:

"And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us."

That is the Divine thought coming out of eternity and being planted right in the midst in a full and comprehensive way; all God's thoughts summed up in His Son, the great Eternal Thought, and centred in the midst of men in the Person of Christ. And then you move (and I am not touching all that lies between these points) to the end of that first chapter and you have by implication something that is very beautiful, if you recognize its significance. It is the word to Nathanael. It is always interesting to notice that it was to Nathanael. Had it been to Peter, James or John, we might well have concluded that it was for a sort of inner circle. But, being Nathanael, he is in the widest circle of association with Christ, and therefore what was said to him is said to every one.

"Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

BETHEL--THE HOUSE OF GOD

Now for the implication: we are instinctively carried by those words right back to the Old Testament, to the book of Genesis, and Jacob immediately comes into view, and we remember Jacob on his way between two points, as it were in an in-between place, between heaven and earth; neither wholly of the earth nor wholly of the heaven, but an in-between place. That night, in that in-between place, somewhere in the open he lay down and slept; and, behold, a ladder set up on the earth, the top of which reached unto heaven, and upon it the angels ascending and descending, and above the ladder the Lord; and the Lord spoke to him. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not; this is none other but the house of God! And he called the name of that place "Bethel", or the House of God.

The Lord Jesus appropriated that and made it to apply to Himself in His words to Nathanael, and, in effect or by implication, said, I am Bethel, the House of God; I am that which is not wholly of the earth, although resting on it; not wholly of heaven in My present capacity, though related to it; I am here between heaven and earth, the meeting place of God and man, the House of God, in Whom God speaks, in Whom God is revealed--He speaks in His House, He is revealed in His House--I am the House of God: the communications of God with this world are in Me, and in Me alone: "no one cometh to the Father but by me". He might well have said, although it is not recorded that He ever did so: the Father comes to no one but by Me.

Now, it is just that House of God, as represented by Christ, that is our thought as leading up to the practical testimony in baptism: Jesus--God's House. We know, of course, that every other house in the Bible is only an illustration of Him. Whether it be the tabernacle in the wilderness or the temple of Solomon, or any subsequent temple which was intended to fulfil the same function, or anything that in more spiritual terms in the New Testament is called the Church, it is not something other than Christ, but it is Christ. In the thought of God it is just Christ and there is nothing other than Christ and nothing extra to Christ which is the Church or the House of God.

The point that we feel the Lord is seeking to emphasize in these meditations is how He has bound up everything in a final way, conclusively and exclusively, with His Son, and that there is nothing to be had of God except in Christ, and by revelation of the Holy Spirit at that, as Christ is revealed by Him in our hearts. So that the Lord Jesus, being God's House, fulfils every function which is in type set forth in these other houses on this earth.

You begin with the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies. In Him is the Holy of Holies, where God verily and personally and actually dwells, has His habitation. God is in Christ, and in no other does He dwell in the same sense. It is going to become true that the Father will take up His abode in us. But, beloved, there is a difference. By the Father coming to dwell in us, we are not constituted so many more Christs. We are not in the same sense indwelt by very God as was the Son. The difference we will see in a minute. The indwelling of God in Christ is unique, and the Most Holy Place is in Him alone.

In Him is the oracle; that is, the voice, the voice that speaks with authority, and final authority. The final authority of God's voice is in Christ, and in Christ alone. The three disciples were in a very exalted position, both in their souls and in their bodies, on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience, a tremendous spiritual happening. But even so, when you are in a very exalted and elevated spiritual state, full of spiritual aspirations and spiritual expressions, you may make most grievous mistakes. So Peter, with the purest of motives, the highest intentions, said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." And while he yet spake--as though God stepped in and did not give him a chance to finish, but said, Enough of that--while he yet spake, the cloud overshadowed, and there came a voice out of heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." 'Don't you begin to give expression to your thoughts and ideas here in this position: the final word of authority is in Him; you be silent to Him. Your spiritual ecstasies must have no place here; you must not be influenced by even your most exalted feelings.' God's authoritative voice in Christ is the final word of authority. It is the oracle that is in Him, as in the sanctuary of old. So we may go through all of that tabernacle or temple and take it all point by point, and we see Him as the fulfillment of it all, as the House of God where God is found, and where God communicates.

THE CORPORATE HOUSE OF GOD

Now, what is the House of God in its fullest sense, in its corporate or collective sense? It is, to take up that wonderful phrase with its almost two hundred occurrences in the New Testament, all that is meant by "in Christ". If we are in the House of God, we are only in the House of God because we are in Christ. To be in Christ is to be in the House of God, and not to be in Christ Jesus is to be outside of the House of God. He is the House of God. We are brought into Him.

But to be in Christ means a total exclusion of all that is not Christ, and in a previous meditation we strove to make one thing so clear, and that is, the altogether and absolute 'other-ness' of Christ from ourselves, even at our best. How utterly different He is from man, even at man's religious best; different in mind, in heart, in will; different altogether in constitution, so that it takes us a whole lifetime, under the tuition of the Holy Spirit, to discover how different we are from Christ and how different He is from us. But God has ranged that difference absolutely from the beginning. It does not take God a lifetime to discover the difference. He knows it, and therefore He has put the absolute position from His own standpoint right at the beginning. He has, in effect, said, The difference between you and Christ is so utter and final that it is the width and the depth of a grave! It is nothing less than the fullness of death. There is no passing over. Death and the grave are the end. On the one side, therefore, is the utter end of what you are, and if there is to be anything afterward at all, that death must stand between, and anything subsequent can only be by resurrection: a passing out of yourself and into Him as through a death and a resurrection. So that, in that death, you are regarded as having passed out of the realm of what you are, even at your best, and as having passed into the realm of what He is. The depth of a grave lies between you and Him, and there is no passing over. It is an end. To get into the House of God means that.

THE ALTAR

Thus you notice, coming back to John 1, the truth is here set forth in a representative way. It is more fully and clearly developed later in the New Testament when the Holy Spirit has come for that purpose--He has come to take up what Christ has said and lead it out into its full meaning--but in John 1, long before you reach the House of God, you have this word reiterated, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Before you can get to the House, you have always to come to the altar. That is how it is in the tabernacle and temple. You can never get into the sanctuary, into the House actually until you have come to the altar. The lamb, God's lamb, and the altar, stand and bar your way to the sanctuary, and that lamb speaks of this dying in our stead, this passing out as us. We are identified firstly with Christ in His death, His death as our death. Then in virtue of His precious Blood which is sprinkled all the way from the altar right through to the Most Holy Place, in virtue of that precious Blood there is a way of life. It is His Blood, not ours; not our remedied life, not our improved life, not our life at all, but His. It is Christ and only Christ in the virtue of whose life we come into the presence of God. No High Priest dare come into the presence of God, save in the virtue of precious blood, the blood of the lamb, blood from the altar. Behold the Lamb of God! That stands right across the path to the House, the death in judgment, what we are. Well, these are hints from which you are seeing a great deal more, I expect, than I am able to say.

But what is particularly in view at this moment is this matter of being in Christ, and therefore being in God's House. The House of God is Christ, and if we speak of the House of God as being a corporate or collective thing in which we are, it is only because we are in Christ. Those who are in Christ are in the House of God, and are the House of God by their union with Him. They have come into the place where God is, and where God speaks; where God is known, and where the authority of God is in Christ

absolutely, and we are carried in thought at once into Colossians, to Paul's word--"He is the head of the church". We see the Body and its Head. Christ's Headship means the authority of God vested in Him for government.

BAPTISM

Now you see two things. There is the first step toward the House, namely, the altar, the death, and that is what baptism is intended to set forth. It is that we take our place in Christ representing us, as the end of all that we are in ourselves. It is not only our sins that are taken away; it is ourselves, as so utterly different from Christ. From God's standpoint, it is an end of us. Let us understand that. That is God's standpoint. In the death of Christ, God has brought an end to us in our natural life. In Christ's resurrection and our union with Him, from God's standpoint it is no longer we who exist. It is only Christ who exists, and the Holy Spirit's work in the child of God is to make that which has been established in its finality real in us. We have not to die; we are dead. What we have to do is to accept our death. Failing to see that, we shall all the time be struggling to bring ourselves to death. It is a position taken which is God's settled, fixed and final position so far as we are concerned. That is the meaning of reckoning yourself dead. It is taking the place that God has appointed for us, stepping into it, and saying, I accept the position which God has fixed with regard to myself : the Holy Spirit's business is to deal with the rest, but I accept the end. If ever you and I should come to a place where we turn away from the Holy Spirit's dealings with us, what we are doing is something more than just refusing to go on. It is refusing to accept the original position, and that is very much more serious. It really is a reversing of a position which we once took with Him.

Well, now, baptism is that altar where God regards us as having died in Christ, and we simply step in there and say, That position which God has settled with reference to me is the one which I now accept, and I testify here in this way to the fact that I have accepted God's position for me, namely, that in the Cross I have been brought to an end. The Lord Jesus took this way and set baptism right at the beginning of His public life, and, under the anointing of the Spirit, from that moment He absolutely refused to listen to His own mind apart from God, to be in any way influenced by anything arising from the dictates of His own humanity, sinless as it was, apart from God. All the way along He was being governed by the Anointing; in what He said, what He did, what He refused to do; where He went, and when He went; and was putting back every other influence, whether coming from the disciples, or from the Devil, or from any other direction. His attitude was, Father, what do You think about this: what do You want: is this Your time? He was saying, in effect, all the time, Not My will, but Yours; not My judgments, but Yours; not My feelings, but what You feel about it! He had died, in effect, you see; He had been buried, in effect. His baptism had meant that for Him, and that is where we stand.

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

But then there is the other thing. When that position has been accepted in death, there is the rising. But, as I have said, it is the rising in Christ, and from God's standpoint it is the rising, not only in Christ, but as under the Headship of Christ, or, in other words, under that full and final authority of God vested in Christ, so that Christ is our mind, Christ is our government, His Headship! And when believers in New Testament times had taken the first step in baptism, declaring their death in Christ, and had come up out of the waters, representative members of the Body, not always the apostles, laid their hands upon their heads and prayed over them, and the Holy Spirit signified that they were in the House. The Anointing which was upon Christ as Head now came upon them in Christ; not a separate anointing, but anointed in Christ (2 Cor 1:21; 1 Cor 12:13).

But what is the Anointing? What was the Anointing in the case of Christ, when He accepted a representative life and for the time being declined to live and act on the basis of Deity and Godhead, in order to work out man's redemption as Man? What did the Anointing mean? Well, in His case it is so clear. The Anointing meant that He was under the direct government of God in everything and had to refuse to refer or defer to His own judgments and feelings about anything. The Father, by the Anointing, was governing Him in everything, and He, apart from that, was altogether set aside. And when He said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"; or again, "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 9:23; 14:27), He was only saying in other words, 'You can never learn Me unless the Cross is operating continually to put you out and make way for Me, so that you can accept My mind, and the Cross means that you have to be crucified to your own mind about things: your mind has to come under the Cross; your will has to come under the Cross; your feelings and your ways have to come under the Cross daily, and that is how you make a way for learning Me, My mind, My government, My judgment, My everything. That is the school of discipleship, the school of Christ.'

I was saying that, on the resurrection side, the Headship of Christ under the Anointing becomes, or should become the dominating factor in a believer's life, and the laying on of hands on the head is simply again a declaration that this one is under the Headship, this head comes under another Head, this head is subject to a greater Head. Thus far, this head has governed its life, but no longer shall this head govern its life; it is to be subject to another Headship. This one is brought under Christ as Head in the Anointing. And the Spirit attested that in the first days; the Spirit came upon them, declaring that this one is in the House where the Anointing is, to be under the government of the Head of the House.

The spirit of it all finds expression in that word in the Letter to the Hebrews, "But Christ as a son, over God's house; whose house are we" (3:6). I think it is unnecessary to say any more. We are just going on the way of the heavenly revelation of Christ; and, in baptism, we take the position of accepting God's position so far as we are concerned, namely, that this is an end of us! If in the future, what we are in ourselves seeks to assert itself, we should revert to this and say, 'We said once for all--an end of us!' Preserve your attitude toward God's position.

Then afterward the gathering around and the laying on of the hands of representative members of the Body is a simple testimony to the fact that in Christ such as bear the testimony are in the House of God, under the government of Christ through the Anointing, and that His Headship constitutes us one in Him.

May the Lord make all this true in the case of all of us, a living reality, so that we really have come to Bethel and can say in our rejoicing in Christ, Surely the Lord is in this place! It is a great thing when we come to a spiritual position where we can say, The Lord is in this place. I am where the Lord is: this is the House of God! And that simply means a living knowledge of what it means to be in Christ, under His Headship and Anointing.

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