THE TRUE TABERNACLE, AND ITS GLORY OF GRACE AND PEACE

NO. 1862

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 27, 1885
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,
(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father)
full of grace and truth."
John 1:14

"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."
John 1:17

THERE was a time when God freely communed with men. The voice of the Lord God was heard walking in the garden in the cool of the day. With unfallen Adam, the great God dwelt in sweet and intimate fellowship, but sin came and not only destroyed the garden, but destroyed the communion of God with His creature, man. A great gulf opened between man as evil, and God as infinitely pure. And had it not been for the amazing goodness of the Most High, we must all of us forever have been banished from His presence, and from the glory of His power.

The Lord God in infinite love resolved that He Himself would bridge the distance, and would again dwell with man. And in token of this He made Himself manifest to His chosen nation Israel when they were in the wilderness. He was pleased to dwell in type and symbol among His people, in the very center and heart of their camp.

Do you see yonder tent with its curtains of goats' hair in the center of the canvas city? You cannot see within it, but it was all glorious within with precious wood, and pure gold, and tapestry of many colors. Within its most sacred shrine shone forth a bright light between the wings of cherubim, which light was the symbol of the presence of the Lord.

But if you cannot see within, yet you can see above the sacred tent a cloud, which arises from the top of the Holy of Holies, and then expands like a vast tree so as to cover all the host, and protect the chosen of God from the intense heat of the sun, so apt to make the traveler faint when passing over the burning sand.

If you will wait till the sun is down, that same cloud will become luminous, and light up the whole camp. Thus it was both shade and light, and by its means was enjoyed that safety which was afterwards set forth in the promise, "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night." Over all the glory was a defense and a comfort. The Lord dealt not so with any nation, save only His people Israel, of whom He said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

The day of the type is over. We see no more a nation secluded from all others, and made to be as "the church in the wilderness." God does not now confine His abode to one people, for "The God of the whole earth shall he be called." There is now no spot on earth where God dwells in preference to another.

Did not our Lord say, at the well of Sychar, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But…the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth"? Wherever true hearts seek the Lord, He is found of them. He is

as much present on the lone mountain's side as in the aisles of yonder abbey, or in the galleries of this tabernacle. "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will you build me? saith the LORD: or what is the place of my rest?"

Yet there is a true house of God, a real temple of the Infinite, a living abode of the Godhead. The epistle to the Hebrews speaks of "the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." There is still a trysting-place where God does still meet with man, and hold fellowship with Him. That place is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

The manhood of Christ is become to us the anti-type of that tent in the center of the camp. God is in Christ Jesus, Christ Jesus is God, and in His blessed person God dwells in the midst of us as in a tent—for such is the force of the original in our text. "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled, or tented, among us." That is to say, in Christ Jesus the Lord dwelt among men, as God of old dwelt in His sanctuary in the midst of the tribes of Israel. This is very delightful and hopeful for us—the Lord God does dwell among us through the incarnation of His Son.

But the substance far excels the shadow, for in the wilderness the Lord only dwelt in the abode of man, but now His approach to us is closer, for He dwells in the flesh of man. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

Note that word "flesh." It does not say, "The Word was made *man*," it means that, but the use of the word "flesh" brings the Lord Jesus still closer to us, and shows that He took on Him the very nature and substance of manhood. He did not merely assume the name and notion, and appearance of manhood, but the reality—the weakness, the suffering, the mortality of our manhood He actually took into union with Himself.

He was no phantom, or apparition, but He had a human body and a human soul. "The Word was made flesh." When the Lord became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, His incarnation in a human body brought Him far nearer to man than when He only abode within curtains, and occupied a tent in the midst of Israel.

Moreover, it is to be noted that God does in the person of Jesus not merely dwell among men, but He has joined Himself unto men—the Word not only dwelt in flesh, but "was made flesh." It is impossible to use words which are exactly accurate to describe the wonderful incarnation of the Son of God in human flesh, but these words are used to show that our Lord is as truly and as really man as He is God.

Not only does God dwell in the body of man, but our Lord Jesus is God and man in one person. He is not ashamed to speak of men as His brethren. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." So that the Lord Jesus is one with us.

This approach to us is exceedingly close. God was never one with the tabernacle, but in Christ Jesus He is one with us. This union has in it a sweetness of sympathy, a tenderness of relationship, and a condescension of fellowship greatly to be admired. Now we listen to the music of that blessed name Emanuel, "God with us."

In the person of the only begotten, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we see God reconciling the world unto Himself. Let us rejoice and be glad that we have in Jesus more than Israel had in the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. The ancient believer gazed upon the sacred tent, he thought of the holy place of sacrifice, and the Holy of Holies, the inner shrine of the Lord's indwelling. But we have infinitely more, we have God in our nature, and in Him "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

In and around the tent wherein the Lord dwelt in the center of the camp, there was a manifestation of the presence of God. This was the glory of that house, but how scanty was the revelation! A bright light which I have already mentioned, the Shekinah, is said to have shone over the mercy seat, but the High Priest only could see it, and he only saw it once in the year when he entered with blood within the veil.

Outside, above the holy place, there was the manifest glory of the pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night. This sufficed to bear witness that God was there—but still, cloud and fire are but physical

appearances, and cannot convey a true appearance of God, who is a spirit. God cannot be perceived by the senses, and yet the fiery, cloudy pillar could appeal to the eyes only.

The excellence of the indwelling of God in Christ is this—that there is in Him a glory as of the only begotten of the Father, the moral and spiritual glory of Godhead. This is to be seen, but not with the eyes. This is to be perceived, but not by the carnal senses. This is seen, and heard, and known, by spiritual men, whose mental perceptions are keener than those of sight and hearing.

In the person of the Lord there is a glory which is seen by our faith, which is discerned of our renewed spirits, and is made to operate upon our hearts. The glory of God in the sanctuary was seen only by the priest of the house of Aaron. The glory of God in the face of Christ is seen by all believers, who are all priests unto God.

That glory the priest beheld but once in the year—but we steadily behold that glory at all times, and are transformed by the sight. The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is not a thing of outward appearance, to be beheld with the eyes, like the pillar of cloud and fire. But there is an abiding, steady luster of holy, gracious, truthful character about our Lord Jesus Christ, which is best seen by those who by reason of sanctification are made fit to discern it.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Yea, they do see Him in Christ Jesus. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him."

Many of us besides the apostles can say, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." We have not seen Jesus raise the dead. We have not seen Him cast out devils. We have not seen Him hush the winds and calm the waves, but we do see, with our mind's eye, His spotless holiness, His boundless love, His superlative truth, His wondrous heavenliness.

In a word, we have seen, and do see, His fullness of grace and truth. And we rejoice in the fact that the tabernacling of God among men in Christ Jesus is attended with a more real glory than the mere brilliance of light and the glow of flame. The condescension of Christ's love is to us more glorious than the pillar of cloud, and the zeal of our Lord's self-sacrifice is more excellent than the pillar of fire.

As we think of the divine mysteries which meet in the person of our Lord, we do not envy Israel the gracious manifestations vouchsafed her when "a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD covered the tabernacle," for we have all this and more in our incarnate God, who is with us always, even to the end of the world.

As the Holy Spirit shall help me, I shall at this time say, first of all, *Let us behold this tabernacling of God.* And secondly, *Let us avail ourselves of this tabernacling of God in all the ways for which it was intended.*

I. First, then, LET US BEHOLD THIS TABERNACLING OF GOD WITH US.

"We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In Jesus Christ all the attributes of God are to be seen—veiled, but yet truly there. You have only to read the Gospels, and to look with willing eyes, and you shall behold in Christ all that can possibly be seen of God. It is veiled in human flesh, as it must be, for the glory of God is not to be seen by us absolutely. It is toned down to these dim eyes of ours. But the Godhead is there, the perfect Godhead in union with the perfect manhood of Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Two divine things are more clearly seen in Jesus than aught else. Upon these I would speak at this time, considering the two together, and then each one separately—"Full of grace and truth."

Observe the two glorious qualities, joined inseparably—grace and truth—and observe that they are spoken of *in the concrete*. The apostle says that the only begotten is "full of grace and truth." He did not come to tell us about grace, but actually to bring us grace. He is not full of the news of grace and truth, but of grace and truth themselves.

Others had been messengers of gracious tidings, but He came to bring grace. Others teach us truth, but Jesus is the truth. He is that grace and truth whereof others spake. Jesus is not merely a teacher, an exhorter, a worker of grace and truth, but these heavenly things are in Him. He is full of them.

I want you to note this. It raises such a difference between Christ and others. You go to others to hear of grace and truth, but you must go to Christ to see them. There may be, there is, grace in other men, but not as it is in Christ. They have it as water flowing through a pipe, but He has it as water in its fountain and source.

He has grace to communicate to the sons of men, grace without measure, grace essential and abiding. There is truth in others where God has wrought it, by His Spirit, but it is not in them as it is in Christ. In Him dwells the depth, the substance, the essence of the fact. Grace and truth come to us by Him, and yet they evermore abide in Him.

I say again, our Lord did not merely come to teach grace and truth, or to impress them upon us, but He came to exhibit in His own person, life, and work, all the grace and truth which we need. He has brought us grace in rivers and truth in streams—of these He has an infinite fullness, of that fullness all His saints receive.

This grace and truth are *blended*. The "and" between the two words I would treat as more than a common conjunction. The two rivers unite in one fullness—"Full of grace and truth," that is to say, the grace is truthful grace, grace not in fiction nor in fancy, grace not to be hoped for and to be dreamed of, but grace every atom of which is fact—redemption which does redeem, pardon which does blot out sin, renewal which actually regenerates, salvation which completely saves. We have not here blessings which charm the ear and cheat the soul, but real, substantial favors from God that cannot lie.

Then blend these things the other way. "Grace and truth"—the Lord has come to bring us truth, but it is not the kind of truth which censures, condemns, and punishes. It is gracious truth, truth steeped in love, truth saturated with mercy. The truth which Jesus brings to His people comes not from the judgment seat, but from the mercy seat. It has a gracious drift and aim about it, and ever tends unto salvation. His light is the life of men.

If you are overshadowed with a dark truth which seems to deepen your despair, look you to it again and you will perceive within it a hidden light which is sown for the righteous. The darkness of convincing and humbling truth makes for light—by engendering despair of self, heart-searching truth is meant to drive you to the true hope.

There is grace to God's people in everything that falls from the lips of Jesus Christ. His lips are like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh. Myrrh in itself is bitter, but such is the grace of our Lord Jesus that His lips impart sweetness to it. See how grace and truth thus blend, and qualify each other! The grace is all true, and the truth is all gracious. This is a wondrous compound made according to the art of the divine Apothecary. Where else is grace so true, or truth so gracious?

Furthermore, it is grace and truth *balanced*. I wish I were able to communicate my thoughts this morning as they came to me when I was meditating upon this passage, but this thought almost speaks for itself. The Lord Jesus Christ is full of grace, but then He has not neglected the other quality which is somewhat sterner, namely, that of truth.

I have known many in this world very loving and affectionate, but they have not been faithful. On the other hand, I have known men to be sternly honest and truthful, but they have not been gentle and kind. But in the Lord Jesus Christ there is no defect either way. He is full of grace which does invite the publican and the sinner to Himself, but He is full of truth which does repels the hypocrite and Pharisee.

He does not hide from man a truth however terrible it may be, but He plainly declares the wrath of God against all unrighteousness. But when He has spoken terrible truth, He has uttered it in such a gracious and tender manner, with so many tears of compassion for the ignorant and those that are out of the way, that you are as much won by His grace as convinced by His truth.

Our Lord's ministry is not truth alone, nor grace alone, but it is a balanced, well-ordered system of grace and truth. The Lord Himself is in His character "just and having salvation." He is both King of righteousness and King of peace. He does not even save unjustly, nor does He proclaim truth unlovingly. Grace and truth are equally conspicuous in Him.

Beloved, notice here that both these qualities in our Lord are *at the full*. He is "full of grace." Who could be more so? In the person of Jesus Christ the immeasurable grace of God is treasured up. God has done for us by Christ Jesus exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or even think. It is not possible even for imagination to conceive of any person more gracious than God in Christ Jesus.

You cannot desire, certainly you cannot require, anything that should exceed what is found of grace in the person, offices, work, and death of the only begotten. Come, you that have large minds, and intellects that are creative, and see if you can devise anything that should be mentioned in the same day with what God, in the infinite glory of His grace, has given us in the person of His Son.

And there is an equal fullness of truth about our Lord. He Himself, as He comes to us as the revelation and manifestation of God, declares to us, not some truth, but all truth. All of God is in Christ, and all of God means all that is true, and all that is right, and all that is faithful, and all that is just, all that is according to righteousness and holiness.

Christ Jesus has brought to us the justice, truth, and righteousness of God to the full. He is the Lord our righteousness. There are no reserves of disagreeable fact in Christ. There is nothing hidden from us of truth that might alarm us, nor anything that might have shaken our confidence.

Nor, on the other hand, is any truth kept back which might have increased our steadfastness. He says, "If it were not so I would have told you." Admire the full-orbed splendor of the Sun of Righteousness. Ask not with Pilate, "What is truth?" but behold it in God's dear Son.

Oh, I know not how to speak to you upon themes so full and deep! How shall I, that am but as a twinkling dewdrop on a blade of grass, reflect the full glory of this Sun of Righteousness? But all truth and all grace dwell in Christ in all their fullness beyond conception, and the two lie in each other's bosoms forever, to bless us with boundless, endless joy and glory.

Thus I have taken the two together. Now I want to dwell briefly on each one by itself.

Grace is put first. "We beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace." Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is His only begotten Son. Others are begotten of God, but no other was ever begotten of God as Christ was. Consequently, when He came into this world the glory that was about Him was a glory as of the only begotten. A very singular, and very special, and incommunicable glory abides in the person of our Lord. Part of this was the glory of His grace.

Now, in the Old Testament, in that thirty-fourth chapter of Exodus, which we read in part this morning, you notice that the glory of God lay in His being "the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." The glory of the only begotten of the Father must lie in the same things as the glory of the Father, namely, in long-suffering, goodness, and truth. In Christ there is a wonderful display of the gentleness, patience, pity, mercy, and love of God. Not merely did He teach the grace of God, and invite us to the grace of God, but in Himself He displayed the grace of God.

This is to be seen, first, in His incarnation. It is a wonderful instance of divine grace that the Word should be made flesh and dwell among us, and reveal His glory to us. Apart from anything that springs out of the incarnation of Christ, that incarnation itself is a wondrous act of grace. There must be hope for men now that man is next akin to God through Jesus Christ.

The angels were not mistaken when they not only sang, "Glory to God in the highest," but also, "on earth peace, goodwill towards men," because in Bethlehem the Son of God was born of a virgin. God in our nature must mean God with gracious thoughts towards us. If the Lord had meant to destroy the race, He never would have espoused it and taken it into union with Himself. There is fullness of grace in the fact of the Word made flesh tabernacling among us.

More than this, there is fullness of grace in the life of Christ when we consider that He lived here in order to perfect Himself as our High Priest. Was He not made perfect through His sufferings, that He might sympathize with us in all our woes? He was compassed with infirmities, and bare our sorrows, and endured those crosses of the human life which press so heavily on our own shoulders—and all this to make Himself able to deal graciously with us in a tender and brotherly way.

Apart from that which comes out of this wonderful brotherhood, there is a bottomless depth of grace about the fellowship itself. The Lord Jesus cannot curse me, for He has borne my curse. He cannot be unkind to me, for He has shared my sorrows. If every pang that rends my heart has also rent His heart, and if into all my woes He has descended even deeper than I have gone, it must mean love to me. It cannot mean anything else—and it must mean truth, for Jesus did not play at fellowship. His griefs were real. I say then that this manifestation of God in the person of Christ Jesus is seen in His sorrowing life to be full of grace and truth.

Then think for a minute of what He did. He was so full of grace that when He spoke, His words dropped a fatness of grace, the dew of His own love was upon all His discourses. And when He moved about, and touched men here and there, virtue went out of Him, because He was so full of it.

At one time He spake and pardoned a sinner, saying, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." At another moment He battled with the consequences of sin, raising men from sickness and from death. Again He turned Himself and fought with the prince of darkness himself, and cast him out from those whom he tormented.

He went about like a cloud which is big with rain, and therefore plentifully waters waste places. His life was boundless compassion. There was a power of grace about His garments, His voice, His look, and in all He was so true that none ever thought Him capable of subterfuge. Everywhere He went He scattered grace among the children of men, and He is just the same now—fullness of grace abides in Him still.

When it came to His death, which was the pouring out of His soul, then His fullness of grace was seen. He was full of grace indeed, forasmuch as He emptied Himself to save men. He was Himself not only man's Savior, but his salvation. He gave Himself for us. He was indeed full of grace when He bare our sins in His own body on the tree. His was love at its height, since He died on the cross, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God."

Pronounce the word "substitution," and you cannot help feeling that the Substitute for guilty man was full of grace. Or use that other word, "representative," and remember that whatever Jesus did, He did as the covenant head of His people. If He died, they died in Him, if He rose again, they rose in Him, if He ascended up on high, they ascended in Him, and if He sits at the right hand of God, they also sit in the heavenly places in Him.

When He shall come a second time, it shall be to claim the kingdom for His chosen as well as for Himself, and all the glory of the future ages is for them, and not for Himself alone. He says, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Oh, the richness of the grace and truth that dwell in our Lord as the representative of His people! He will enjoy nothing unless His people enjoy it with Him. "Where I am, there also shall my servant be." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

There is yet another word higher than "substitution," higher than "representation," and that is "union." We are one with Christ, joined to Him by a union that never can be broken. Not only does He do what He does, representing us, but we are joined unto Him in one spirit, members of His body, and partakers of His glory. Is not this grace, grace unspeakable? Is it not a miracle of love that worms of earth should ever be one with incarnate deity, and so one that they never can be separated throughout the ages?

Thus I have shown you that there is in our Lord a fullness of grace. Your own thoughts will dig deeper than mine.

But then it is said there is in Him a fullness of *truth*, by which I understand that in Christ Himself, not merely in what He said, and did, and promised, there is a fullness of truth. And this is true, first, in the fact that He is the fulfillment of all the promises that went before concerning Him. God had promised great things by His prophets concerning the coming Messiah, but all those predictions are absolutely matters of fact in the person of the Well-beloved.

"All the promises of God are yea and Amen in Christ Jesus." Verily He has bruised the serpent's head. Verily He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Verily He has proclaimed liberty to the captives. Verily He has proved Himself a prophet like unto Moses.

According to my second text, in verse seventeen, I understand our Lord Jesus to be "truth" in the sense of being the substance of all the types. The law that was given by Moses was but symbolical and emblematical, but Jesus is the truth. He is really that blood of sprinkling which speaks better things than that of Abel. He is in very deed the paschal lamb of God's Passover. He is the burnt-offering, the sin-offering, and the peace-offering—all in one! He is the true scapegoat, the true morning and evening lamb. In fact, He is in truth what all the types and figures were in pattern.

Blessed be God, brethren, whenever you see great things in the Old Testament in the type, you see the real truth of those things in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jew had nothing that we have not. He had nothing even in outline and shadow which we have not obtained in substance. The covenant in its fullness is in Christ—the prophecy is in Moses, the fulfillment is in Jesus—the foreshadowing is in the law, the truth is in the Word made flesh.

Further than that, our Lord Jesus Christ is said to be grace and truth in this sense that He truthfully deals with matters of fact in the case of our salvation. I know the notion of the world is that the salvation of Christ is a pretty dream, a handsome piece of sentiment. But there is nothing dreamy about it. It is no fiction, it is fact upon fact. The Lord Jesus Christ does not gloss over or conceal the condition of man in his salvation. He finds man condemned, and takes him as condemned in the very worst sense, condemned of a capital offense, and as man's substitute He endures the capital penalty, and dies in the sinner's stead.

The Lord Jesus views the sinner as depraved, yea, as dead in trespasses and sins, and He quickens him by His resurrection life. He does not wink at the result of the fall and of actual sin, but He comes to the dead sinner and quickens him. He comes to the diseased heart and heals it.

To me the Gospel is a wonderful embodiment of omnipotent wisdom and truth. If the Gospel had said to men, "The law of God is certainly righteous, but it is too stern, too exacting, and therefore God will wink at many sins, and make provision for salvation by omitting to punish much of human guilt." Why, my brethren, we should always have been in jeopardy. If God could be unjust to save us, He could also be changeable, and cast us away. If there was anything rotten in the state of our salvation, we should fear that it would fail us at last.

But our foundation is sure, for the Lord has excavated down to the rock. He has taken away every bit of mere sentiment and sham, and His salvation is real throughout. It is a glorious salvation of grace and truth, in which God takes the sinner as He is, and deals with Him as He is. Yea, and deals with the sinner as God is, on the principles of true righteousness, and yet saves him.

But it means more than that. The Lord deals with us in the way of grace, and that grace encourages a great many hopes, but those hopes are all realized, for He deals with us in truth. Our necessities demand great things, and grace actually supplies those great things. The old law could never make the comers thereunto perfect as pertaining to the conscience, but the grace of God makes believers perfect as pertaining to the conscience.

If I were to sit down and try to imagine a flaw in the ground of my salvation by Christ, I could not do it. Believing as I do in Him who bore my sins in His own body on the tree, I feel that by no possibility can His atonement fail me. I have not imagination strong enough to feign a reason for distrust. I do not see hole or corner in which any charge could lurk against the man that believes in Jesus Christ. My conscience is satisfied, and more than satisfied.

Sometimes it even seems to me that my sins could not have deserved that the Son of God should die. The atonement is greater than the sin. Speak of the vindication of the law!—is not the vindication even greater than the dishonor? Does not the law of God shine out more lustrous in its indescribable glory through the sacrifice of Christ as the penalty for sin, than it would have done had it never been broken, or had all the race of law-breakers been swept into endless destruction?

O brothers, in the salvation of Jesus there is grace unrivalled! There is a deep verity, a substantiality, an inward soul-satisfaction in the sacrifice of Christ, which makes us feel that it is a full atonement—a fountain of "grace and truth."

Nor have I yet quite brought out all the meaning, even if I have succeeded so far. Christ has brought to us "grace and truth," that is to say, He works in believers both grace and truth. We want grace to rescue us from sin, He has brought it. We need truth in the inward parts, He has wrought it. The system of salvation by atonement is calculated to produce truthful men. The habit of looking for salvation through the great sacrifice fosters the spirit of justice, begets in us a deep abhorrence of evil, and a love for that which is right and true.

By nature we are all liars, and either love or make a lie. For this cause we are content with refuges of lies, and we compass ourselves with deceit. In our carnal state we are as full of guile as an egg is full of meat, but when the Lord comes to us in Christ, no longer imputing our trespasses to us, then He takes out of our heart that deceit and desperate wickedness, which had else remained there.

I say it, and dare avow it, that the system of salvation by the indwelling of God in Christ, and the atonement offered by Him for men, has a tendency in it to infuse grace into the soul and to produce truth in the life. The Holy Ghost employs it to that end. I pray that you and I may prove it so by the grace which causes us to love both God and man, and the truthfulness with which we deal in all the affairs of life.

Thus our Lord has displayed the glory of God in the grace and truth with which He is filled. I am sorry I have spoken so feebly on a theme so grand. May the Spirit bless you even through the infirmities of my speech!

II. Now I want a few minutes to say to you, Come brothers and sisters, LET US AVAIL OURSELVES OF THIS TABERNACLING OF GOD AMONG US.

First, then, if God has come to dwell among men by the Word made flesh *let us pitch our tents around this central tabernacle*. Do not let us live as if God were a long way off. To the Israelites God was equally near from every quarter of the camp. The tabernacle was in the center, and the center is equally near to every point of the circumference. No true Israelite could say, "I must go across the sea, or soar up into the air, or dive into the depths to find my God."

Every Israelite could say, "He dwells between the cherubim: I have but to go to His tabernacle to be in His presence and speak with Him." Our God is not far from any one of His people this day. We are made nigh by the blood of Christ. God is everywhere present, but there is a higher presence of effectual grace in the person of the only begotten. Do not let us live as if we worshipped a far-off God. Let us not repine as if we were deserted. Let us not feel alone, for the Father is with us.

"God is near thee; therefore cheer thee, sad soul."

Open your window towards Jerusalem, as Daniel did. Pray with your eye upon Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily in the greatest nearness to us. God is never far away since Christ has come to dwell among men.

Next, *let us resort to this central tabernacle to obtain grace to help in time of need*. Let us come to Christ without fear, for He has grace to give, and He will give it to us abundantly, whenever we need it. I like to think of the wording of my text. Leave out the parenthesis, and it runs, "He dwelt among us full of grace."

He could not have dwelt among such provoking ones if He had not been full of grace. But if He dwells among us full of grace, we need not fear that He will cast us away because of our sins and failings. I invite you, therefore, to come boldly to Him who is full of forgiving love. I beg you to come and receive of His fullness, for grace is truly grace when it is communicated. Grace which is not distributed is grace in name only.

"Alas!" you say, "I want so much grace." Brother, it is treasured up in Christ for you without measure. It is placed in Him that you may have it. Do we not try to persuade the sinner that there is life in a look? Shall I need to persuade saints that grace is equally free to them? Do we not tell the sinner that God is not to be sought for as far away, but that He is waiting to be gracious? Must I tell the believer the same?

You may at this moment obtain all the grace you need. The door is open—enter and take what you will. Do not stop till you reach home, and go through a set of religious exercises—but here, and now, believe in Jesus to the full.

In the center of the camp is the incarnate God. Israel had but to go to the central tent to find present help in time of trouble. In the person of Christ, who has said, "I am with you alway, even to the end of the world," there is, in truth, all the grace you can possibly need. Come to this well and drink. Receive of His fullness, and go on your way rejoicing.

What next shall we do? Brethren, since God in Christ is in the midst of us, *let us abide in joyful, peaceful confidence in Him who is grace and truth to us*. Do not let us wander to other sources. To whom should we go? Shall we leave our God? Shall we leave His grace, His truth? Do not let us dream that He is changed, for He is God. Do not imagine that He has removed, for He has said, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it."

Do not let us conceive that His grace and truth are exhausted, for His fullness is eternal. Let us receive strong consolation, and remain steadfast, unmovable. Let us quietly rest in the firm belief that all we can want between here and heaven, all that we need this moment and in all moments yet to come, is treasured up in Christ Jesus, who is abidingly the center of His church and the manifestation of God.

Once more—if this be so, and God does really in Christ dwell in the midst of His people "full of grace and truth," *let us tell everybody of it*. I am sure if I had been an Israelite in the wilderness, and had met an Amalekite or an Edomite, I should have gloried in my God, and in the privileges which His presence secured me.

We know that Amalekites and Edomites could not have come into the house of the Lord, but nowadays, if we meet with one who is a stranger, we can tell him of our privilege, with sweet persuasion that the stranger can be brought nigh through the blood of the Lamb. Therefore let us abundantly speak of the dwelling of God with men. Let us tell to all that the Lord has come to man, not in wrath, not in judgement, but "full of grace and truth."

O my unconverted hearer come to Jesus! He is able to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him. Draw nigh to the meek and lowly Jesus, and you draw nigh to God. He says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Publish the invitation of grace to the four winds. Ring out your silver trumpets, or if you have them not, sound your rams' horns, but somehow let all people know that the tabernacle of God is with men, and He does dwell among them.

Tell out this news in the far country, that the wandering prodigal son may hear it, and cry, "I will arise, and go to my Father." God has come to men—will not men come to God? In Christ Jesus God invites men to come to Him—will you not come to receive grace and truth?

One more lesson remains, and that is—*what manner of people ought we to be among whom JEHOVAH dwells*? It must have been a very solemn thing to be a member of that great camp of two millions in the wilderness of Sinai. God's presence in the midst of the camp must have made every tent sacred. As we walked through the streets of that canvas city, if we had been Israelites, and in our right minds, we should have said, "These tents are none other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven. For see, JEHOVAH is in the midst of us. Mark you not the bright light that shines above His sanctuary?"

We should have felt that in such a camp all should be holy. The pollution of sin should be unknown there. In such a camp constant prayer and praise should be presented to Him whose presence was its glory and defense. Today let our congregation be a holy convocation, and as for ourselves, let us be

holiness unto the Lord. We are consecrated men and women, seeing the Lord has come so very near to us.

I spoke of solemnity. I meant not dread and sorrow, but a solemnity full of joy. It is a solemn thing to have God so near, but the joy is equal to the solemnity. Glory be unto God Most High, for He is here! Let us spend our days and nights in gladness and delight. God is reconciled to us in the person of His dear Son, and we have fellowship with God in Christ Jesus, wherefore let us rejoice forevermore. Amen and amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
EXODUS 34:1-8 AND 40:34-38 AND JOHN 1:1-18

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—249, 256, 250

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.