

THE TABERNACLE OF THE MOST HIGH

NO 267

A SERMON
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AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS.

*“In whom you also are builded together for an habitation
of God through the Spirit.”
Ephesians 2:22.*

UNDER the old Mosaic dispensation, God had a visible dwelling place among men. The bright shekinah was seen between the wings of the cherubim which overshadowed the mercy seat, and in the tabernacle, while Israel journeyed in the wilderness, and in the temple afterwards, when they were established in their own land, there was a visible manifestation of the presence of JEHOVAH in the place which was dedicated to His service.

Now, everything under the Mosaic dispensation was but a type, a picture, a symbol of something higher and nobler. That form of worship was, as it were, a series of shadow pictures, of which the Gospel is the substance. It is a sad fact, however, that there is so much Judaism in all our hearts, that we frequently go back to the old beggarly elements of the law, instead of going forward and seeing in them a type of something spiritual and heavenly, to which we ought to aspire.

It is disgraceful to the present century to hear some men talk as they do. They had better at once espouse the Jewish creed. I mean it is disgraceful to hear some men speak as they do with regard to religious edifices. I remember to have heard a sermon once upon this text, “If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy.” And the first part of the sermon was occupied with a childish anathema against all who should dare to perform any unhallowed act in the churchyard, or who should lean the pole of a tent during the fair of the coming week against any part of that edifice, which, it seemed to me, was the god of the man who occupied the pulpit.

Is there such a thing as a holy place anywhere? Is there any spot wherein God now particularly dwells? I know not. Listen to the words of Jesus, “Believe me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship Him.” Remember, again, the saying of the apostle at Athens, “God who made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands.”

When men talk of holy places they seem to be ignorant of the use of language. Can holiness dwell in bricks and mortar? Can there be such a thing as a sanctified steeple? Can it possibly happen that there can be such a thing in the world as a moral window or a godly doorpost? I am lost in amazement, utterly lost, when I think how addled men’s brains must be when they impute moral virtues to bricks and mortar, and stones and stained glass.

Pray tell how deep does this consecration go and how high? Is every crow that flies over the edifice at that time in solemn air? Certainly it is as rational to believe that, as to conceive that every worm that is eating the body of an Episcopalian is a consecrated worm, and therefore there must necessarily be a brick wall, or a wide gravel path to protect the bodies of the sanctified from any unhallowed worms that might creep across from the Dissenters’ side of the cemetery.

I say again, such child’s play, such Popery, such Judaism, is a disgrace to the century. And yet, notwithstanding, we all find ourselves at divers times and seasons indulging in it. That at which you have just now smiled is but pushing the matter a little further, an error into which we may very readily descend. It is but an extravaganza of an error into which we, all of us, are likely to fall. We have a

reverence for our plain chapels. We feel a kind of comfort when we are sitting down in the place which somehow or other we have got to think must be holy.

Now let, us if we can, and perhaps it takes a great sturdiness and independence of mind to do it—let us drive away once and forever all idea of holiness being connected with anything but with a conscious active agent. Let us get rid once and forever of all superstitions with regard to place. Depend upon it, one place is as much consecrated as another and wherever we meet with true hearts reverently to worship God, that place becomes, for the time being, God's house.

Though it is regarded with the most religious awe, that place which has no devout heart within it, is no house of God. It may be a house of superstition, but a house of God it cannot be. "But still," says one, "God has an habitation. Does not your text say so?" Yes, and of that house of God, I am about to speak this morning.

There is such a thing as a house of God. But that is not an inanimate structure, it is a living and a spiritual temple. "In whom," that is, Christ, "you also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." The house of God is built with the living stones of converted men and women, and the church of God, which Christ has purchased with His blood—this is the divine edifice and the structure wherein God dwells even to this day.

I would, however, make one remark with regard to places in which we worship. I do think, albeit that there can be no sanctity of superstition connected with them, there is at the same time, a kind of sacredness of association. In any place where God has blessed my soul, I feel that it is none other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven. It is not because the stones are hallowed, but because there I have met with God, and the recollections that I have of the place consecrate it to me

That place where Jacob laid him down to sleep, what was it but his sleeping chamber for the time being, but his sleeping chamber was none other than the house of God. You have rooms in your houses, I hope, and closets there more sacred in truth than any gorgeous cathedral that ever lifted its spire to heaven. Where we meet with God, there is a sacredness, not in the place, but in the associations connected with it.

Where we hold fellowship with God and where God makes bare His arm, though it is in a barn or a hedgerow, or on a moor, or on a mountain side, there is God's house to us, and the place is consecrated at once. But yet not so consecrated as that we may regard it with superstitious awe, but only consecrated by our own recollections of blessed hours which we have spent there in hallowed fellowship with God. Leaving that out of the question, I come to introduce you to the house which God has builded for His habitation.

We shall regard the church this morning thus—first, as *a building*. Secondly, as *a habitation*. And thirdly, as what she is soon to become, namely—*a glorious temple*.

I. First, then, we shall regard the church as A BUILDING.

And here, let us pause to ask the question, first of all, what is a church—what is the church of God? One sect claims the title for itself of the church, while other denominations hotly contend for it. It belongs to none of us. The church of God consists not of any one particular denomination of men. The church of God consists of those whose names are written in the book of God's eternal choice. The men who were purchased by Christ upon the tree, the men who are called of God by His Holy Spirit, and who, being quickened by that same Spirit, partake of the life of Christ and become members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.

These are to be found in every denomination among all sorts of Christians. Some stray ones where we little dreamed of them, here and there a member of the church of God hidden in the midst of the darkness of accursed Rome. Now and then, as if by chance, a member of the church of Christ connected with no sect whatever, far away from all connection with his brethren, having scarcely heard of their existence, yet still knowing Christ, because the life of Christ is in him. Now this church of Christ, the people of God throughout the world, by whatever name they may be known, are in my text compared to a *building* in which God dwells.

I must now indulge in a little allegory with regard to this building. The church is not a heap of stones shot together, she is a building. Of old her architect devised her. I think I see Him, as I look back into old eternity, making the first outline of His church. "Here," said He in His eternal wisdom, "shall be the cornerstone and there shall be the pinnacle." I see Him ordaining her length, and her breadth, appointing her gates, and her doors with matchless skill, devising every part of her, and leaving no single portion of the structure unmapped.

I see Him, that mighty architect, also choosing to Himself every stone of the building, ordaining its size and its shape, settling upon His mighty plan the position each stone shall occupy, whether it shall glitter in front, or be hidden in the back, or buried in the very center of the wall. I see Him marking not merely the bare outline, but all the fillings up. All being ordained, decreed, and settled in the eternal covenant, which was the divine plan of the mighty architect upon which the church is to be built.

Looking on, I see the architect choosing a cornerstone. He looks to heaven and there are the angels, those glittering stones. He looks at each one of them from Gabriel down, but said He, "None of you will suffice. I must have a cornerstone that will support all the weight of the building, for on that stone every other one must lean. Gabriel, you will not suffice! Raphael, you must lay by. I cannot build with you."

Yet it was necessary that a stone should be found and one too that should be taken out of the same quarry as the rest. Where was He to be discovered? Was there a man who would suffice to be the cornerstone of this mighty building? Ah no! Neither apostles, prophets, nor teachers would. Put them altogether and they would be as a foundation of quicksand, and the house would totter to its fall.

Mark how the divine mind solved the difficulty, "God shall become man, very man, and so He shall be of the same substance as the other stones of the temple, yet shall He be God and therefore strong enough to bear all the weight of this mighty structure, the top whereof shall reach to heaven." I see that foundation stone laid. Is there singing at the laying of it? No. There is weeping. The angels gathered round at the laying of this first stone.

Sad look you men and wonder, the angels weep. The harps of heaven are clothed in sackcloth and no song is heard. They sang together and shouted for joy when the world was made, why don't they shout now? Look here and see the reason. That stone is imbedded in blood, that cornerstone must lie nowhere else but in His own gore. The vermilion cement drawn from His own sacred veins must imbed it. And there He lies, the first stone of the divine edifice.

Oh, begin your songs afresh, you angels, it is over now. The foundation stone is laid. The terrible ceremony is complete and now, whence shall we gather the stones to build this temple? The first is laid, where are the rest? Shall we go and dig into the sides of Lebanon? Shall we find these precious stones in the marble quarries of kings? No. Where are you flying, you laborers of God? Where are you going? Where are the quarries? And they reply, "We go to dig in the quarries of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the depths of sinful Jerusalem, and in the midst of erring Samaria."

I see them clear away the rubbish. I mark them as they dig deep into the earth and at last they come to these stones. But how rough, how hard, how unhewn. Yes, but these are the stones ordained of old in the decree and these must be the stones, and none other. There must be a change effected. These must be brought in and shaped and cut and polished, and put into their places.

I see the workmen at their labor. The great saw of the law cuts through the stone and then comes the polishing chisel of the Gospel. I see the stones lying in their places and the church is rising. The ministers, like wise master-builders, are there running along the wall, putting each spiritual stone in its place. Each stone is leaning on that massive cornerstone and every stone depending on the blood, and finding its security and its strength in Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, elect and precious.

Do you see the building rise as each one of God's chosen is brought in, called by grace and quickened? Do you mark the living stones as in sacred love and holy brotherhood they are knit together? Have you ever entered the building and seen how these stones lean one upon another, bearing each others' burden and so fulfilling the law of Christ?

Do you mark how the church loves Christ and how the members love each other? How first the church is joined to the cornerstone and then each stone bound to the next, and the next to the next, till the whole building becomes one? Lo! the structure rises and it is complete and at last it is built. And now, open your eyes wide and see what a glorious building this is—the church of God.

Men talk of the splendor of their architecture—this is architecture indeed, neither after Grecian nor Gothic models, but after the model of the sanctuary which Moses saw in the holy mountain. Do you see it? Was there ever a structure so comely as this instinct with life in every part? Upon one stone shall be seven eyes and each stone full of eyes and full of hearts. Was ever a thought so massive as this—a building built of souls—a structure made of hearts?

There is no house like a heart for one to repose in. There a man may find peace in his fellow-man. But here is the house where God delights to dwell—built of living hearts, all beating with holy love—built of redeemed souls, chosen of the Father, bought with the blood of Christ. The top of it is in heaven. Part of them are above the clouds. Many of the living stones are now in the pinnacle of paradise. We are here below, the building rises, the sacred masonry is heaving, and as the cornerstone rises, so all of us must rise until at last the entire structure from its foundation to its pinnacle shall be heaved up to heaven and there shall it stand forever—the New Jerusalem—the temple of the majesty of God.

With regard to this building I have just a remark or two to make before I come to the next point. Whenever architects devise a building, they make mistakes in forming the plan. The most careful will omit something. The most clever find in some things he has been mistaken. But mark the church of God. It is builded according to rule, and compass, and square, and it shall be found at last that there has not been one mistake.

You, perhaps, my dear brother, are a little stone in the temple and you are apt to think you ought to have been a great one. There is no mistake about that. You have but one talent. That is enough for you, if you had two, you would spoil the building. You are placed perhaps in a position of obscurity and you are saying, “Oh that I were prominent in the church!” If you were prominent you might be in a wrong place, and but one stone out of its place in architecture so delicate as that of God would mar the whole. You are where you ought to be, stay there. Depend on it, there is no mistake.

When at last we shall go round about her, mark her walls and tell her bulwarks, we shall each of us be compelled to say, “How glorious is this Zion!” When our eyes shall have been enlightened and our hearts instructed, each part of the building will command our admiration. The topstone is not the foundation, nor does the foundation stand at the top. Every stone is of the right shape, the whole material is as it should be, and the structure is adapted for the great end, the glory of God, the temple of the Most High. Infinite wisdom then may be remarked in this building of God.

Another thing may be noticed, namely, her impregnable strength. This habitation of God, this house which is not made with hands, but is of God’s building, has often been attacked, but it has never been taken. What multitudes of enemies have battered against her old ramparts! But they have battered in vain. “The kings of the earth stood up and the rulers took counsel together,” but what happened? They came against her, every one of them with mighty men, each man with his sword drawn, but what became of them? The Almighty scattered kings in Hermon like snow in Salmon. As the snow is driven from the mountainside before the stormy blast, even so did You drive them away, O God, and they melted before the breath of Your nostrils.

*“Then should our souls in Zion dwell,
Nor fear the rage of Rome or hell.”*

The church is not in danger and she never can be. Let her enemies come on, she can resist. Her passive majesty, her silent rocky strength, bids them defiance now. Let them come on and break themselves in pieces, let them dash themselves against her, and learn the ready road to their own destruction. She is

safe and she must be safe even unto the end. Thus much then we can say of the structure. It is built by infinite wisdom and it is impregably secure.

And we may add, it is glorious for beauty. There was never a structure like this. One might feast his eyes upon it from dawn to eve, and then begin again. Jesus Himself takes delight in it. So pleased is God in the architecture of His church, that He has rejoiced with His church as He never did with the world. When God made the world, He heaved the mountains and digged the seas, and covered its valleys with grass. He made all the fowls of the air and all the beasts of the field. Yea, and He made man in His own image and when the angels saw it, they sang together and they shouted for joy.

God did not sing. There was no sufficient theme of song for Him that was, "Holy, holy, holy." He might say it was very good. There was a goodness of fitness about it, but not moral goodness of holiness. But when God built His church, He did sing, and that is the most extraordinary passage, I sometimes think, in the whole Word of God, where He is represented as singing, "Your redeemer in the midst of you is mighty, he will save, he will rest in His love, he will rejoice over you with singing" (Zep 3:17).

Think, my brethren, of God Himself looking at His church and so fair and beautiful is the structure that He sings over His work, and as each stone is put in its place, divinity itself sings. Was ever song like that? Oh, come, let us sing. Let us exalt the name of God together, praise Him who praises His church—who has made her to be His peculiar dwelling place.

Thus, then, have we in the first place regarded the church as a building.

II. But the true glory of the church of God consists in the fact that she is not only a building, but that she is A HABITATION.

There may be great beauty in an uninhabited structure, but there is always a melancholy thought connected with it. In riding through our country, we often come upon a dismantled tower or castle. It is beautiful, but it is not a thing of joy. There is a sorrowful reflection connected with it. Who loves to see desolate palaces? Who desires that the land should cast out her sons and that her houses should fail of tenants? But there is joy in a house lit up and furnished, where there is the sound of men.

Beloved, the church of God has this for her peculiar glory, that she is a tenanted house, that she is an habitation of God through the Spirit. How many churches there are that are houses, yet not habitations!

I might picture to you a professed church of God. It is built according to square and compass, but its model has been formed in some ancient creed and not in the Word of God. It is precise in its discipline according to its own standard and accurate in its observances according to its own model. You enter that church, the ceremony is imposing, the whole service perhaps attracts you for a while. But you go out of that place conscious that you have not met with the life of God there—that it is a house, but a house without a tenant. It may be professedly a church, but it is not a church possessing the indwelling of the Holy One. It is an empty house that must soon be dilapidated and fall. I fear that this is true of many of our churches Established and Dissenting, as well as Romanist.

There are too many churches that are nothing but a mass of dull, dead formality. There is no life of God there. You might go to worship with such a people, day after day, and your heart would never beat more quickly, your blood would never leap in its veins, your soul would never be refreshed, for it is an empty house. Fair may be the architecture of the structure, but empty is its storehouse, there is no table spread, there is no rejoicing, no killing of the fatted calf, no dancing, no singing for joy.

Beloved, let us take heed, lest our churches become the same, lest we be combinations of men without spiritual life and consequently houses uninhabited, because God is not there. But a true church, that is visited by the Spirit of God, where conversion, instruction, devotion, and the like, are carried on by the Spirit's own living influences—such a church has God for its inhabitant.

And now, we will just turn over this sweet thought. A church built of living souls is God's own house. What is meant by this? I reply, a house is a place where a man solaces and comforts himself. Abroad we do battle with the world, there we strain every nerve and sinew that we may stem a sea of troubles, and may not be carried away by the stream. Abroad, among men, we meet those of strange

language to us, who often cut us to the heart and wound us to the quick. We feel that there we must be upon our guard. We could often say, "My soul is among lions. I lie even among those who are set on fire by hell."

Going abroad in the world we find but little rest, but the day's work done, we go home, and there we solace ourselves. Our weary bodies are refreshed. We throw away the armor that we have been wearing and we fight no more. We see no longer the strange face, but loving eyes beam upon us. We hear no language now which is discordant in our ears. Love speaks and we reply. Our home is the place of our solace, our comfort, and our rest.

Now, God calls the church His habitation—His home. See Him abroad. He is hurling the thunderbolt and lifting up His voice upon the waters. Listen to Him. His voice breaks the cedars of Lebanon and makes the hinds to calve. See Him when He makes war, riding the chariot of His might, He drives the rebellious angels over the battlements of heaven down to the depth of hell. Behold Him as He lifts Himself in the majesty of His strength! Who is this that is glorious? It is God, most high and terrible.

But see, He lays aside His glittering sword. His spear He bears no longer. He comes back to His home. His children are about Him. He takes His solace and His rest. Yes, think not I venture too far—He shall rest in His lover and He does do it. He rests in His church. He is no longer a consuming fire, a terror, and a flame. Now, is He love and kindness and sweetness, ready to hear the prattle of His children's prayers and the disjointed notes of His children's songs. Oh how beautiful is the picture of the church as God's house, the place in which He takes His solace! "For the LORD has chosen Zion, He has desired it for his habitation. This is My rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."

Furthermore, a man's home is the place where he shows his inner self. You meet a man at the market, he deals sharply with you, he knows with whom he has to deal and he acts with you as a man of the world. You see him again at home, talking with his children and you say, "What a different man! I could not have believed it was the same being."

Mark, again, the professor in his chair. He is instructing students in science. Mark his sternness as he speaks upon profound themes. Would you believe that that same man will in the evening have his little one upon his knee and will tell it childish tales and repeat the ballads of the nursery? And yet, it is even so.

See the king as he rides through the street in his pomp. Thousands gather round him, acclamation rends the sky. With what majestic port he bears himself! He is all king, every inch a monarch, as he towers in the midst of the multitude. Have you seen the king at home? He is then just like other men. His little ones are about him. He is on the floor with them in their games. Is this the king? Yes, it is even he. But why did he not do this in his palace? in the streets? Oh, no, that was not his home. It is in his home that a man unbends himself.

Even so with regard to our glorious God. It is in His church that He manifests Himself as He does not unto the world. The mere worldling turns his telescope to the sky and he sees the pomp of God in the stars and he says, "O God, how infinite are You." Devoutly he looks across the sea and beholds it lashed with tempest and he says, "Behold the might and majesty of the Deity!" The anatomist dissects an insect and discovers in every part of it divine wisdom and he says, "How wise is God!"

Yes. But it is only the believer who as he kneels in his chamber can say, "My Father made all these," and then can say, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." There are sweet revelations which God makes in His church, which He never makes anywhere else. It is there He takes the children to His bosom. It is there He opens His heart and lets His people know the fountains of His great soul and the might of His infinite affection. And is it not a sweet thing to think of God at home with His family, happy in the house of His church?

But yet, furthermore, another thought strikes me now. A man's home is the center of all he does. Yonder is a large farm. Well, there are outhouses and hay ricks and barns and the like, but just in the middle of these there is the house, the center of all husbandry. No matter how much wheat there may be, it is to the house the produce goes. It is for the maintenance of the household that the husband carries on

his husbandry. You may hear the cattle lowing yonder, you may mark the sheep upon the hills, but the fleece comes home, and the full udders must yield the milk for the children of the house, for the house is the center of all. Every river of industry comes down towards the sweet soft inland lake of home.

Now, God's church is God's center. He is abroad in the world, He is busy here and there and everywhere, but to what does all His business tend? To His church. Why does God clothe the hills with plenty? For the feeding of His people. Why is providence revolving? Why those wars and tempests, and then again this stillness and calm? It is for His church.

Not an angel divides the ether who has not a mission for the church. It may be indirectly, but nevertheless truly so there is not an archangel that fulfils the behests of the Most High but really carries the church upon his broad wings and bears up her children lest they dash their feet against a stone. The storehouses of God are for His church. The depths beneath of hidden treasure, of God's unutterable riches—all these are for His people.

There is nothing which He has from His blazing crown to the darkness that is beneath His throne, that is not for His redeemed. All things must minister and work together for good for the chosen church of God which is His house—His daily habitation. I think, if you will turn that over and over again, when you are away, you will see there is much in the beautiful fact that as the house is the center, so is the church the center of everything with God.

One other thought and I will have done. We have heard much talk of late about the French invasion. I shall begin to be alarmed about it when I see it, but certainly not till then. However, there is one thing we may say pretty safely. We are, many of us, peaceable men and would not like to wield the sword. The first sight of blood would sicken us, we are peaceful beings, we are not for fighting and war. But let the most peaceful man imagine that the invader has landed on our shore, that our houses are in danger, and our homes about to be sacked by the foe, our conscientiousness I fear would give way.

Notwithstanding all we might say about the wrongness of war, I question whether there be a man among us who would not take such weapon as he could find next to hand to repel the enemy. With this for our war cry, "Our hearths and our homes," we would rush upon the invader, be he who he may or what he may. There is no might so tremendous that it could paralyze our arm, until we were frozen in death we would fight for our home. There would be no command so stern that it could quiet us. We should break through every band and bond, and the weakest of us would be a giant, and our women would become heroines in the day of difficulty. Every hand would find its weapon to hurl at the invader. We love our homes and we must and will defend them.

Ay, and now lift up your thoughts—the church is God's home, will He not defend it? Will He suffer His own house to be sacked and stormed? Shall the hearth of divinity be stained with the blood of His children? Shall it be that the church is overthrown and her battlements stormed, her peaceful habitations given up to fire and sword? No, never not while God has a heart of love and while He calls His people His own house and His habitation.

Come, let us rejoice in this our security. Let earth be all in arms abroad, we dwell in perfect peace, for our Father is in the house and He is God Almighty. Let them come on against us, we need not fear. His arm shall fell them, the breath of His nostrils shall blast them, a word shall destroy them, they shall melt away like the fat of rams, as fat of lambs shall they be consumed, into smoke shall they consume away. All these thoughts seem to me naturally to arise from the fact that the church is God's habitation.

III. I was about to show you in the third place, that the church is, by-and-by, to be GOD'S GLORIOUS TEMPLE.

It does not yet appear what she shall be. I have, however, already mentioned this precious fact. The church is rising today and she shall continue to rise until the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established upon the top of the mountains. And then, when all nations shall call her blessed and Him blessed, too—when they shall all say, "Come and let us go up to the house of our God that we may worship him," then shall the church's glory begin. When this earth shall pass away, when all the monuments of empires shall be dissolved and run down in the common lava of the last burning, then

shall the church be caught up in the clouds and afterwards be exalted to heaven itself, to become a temple such as eye has not seen.

And now, brethren and sisters, in conclusion I make these remarks. If the church of God is God's house, what should you and I do? Why we should earnestly seek to be a part of that temple, always to retain the great inhabitant. Let us not grieve His Spirit lest He leave His church for a while, above all, let us not be hypocrites lest He never comes into our hearts at all. And if the church is God's temple and God's house, let us not defile it. If you defile yourself, you defile the church, for your sin, if you be a church member, is the church's sin. The defilement of one stone in the building virtually mars its perfection. Take care that you are holy even as He is holy. Let not your heart become a house for Belial. Think not that God and the devil can dwell in the same habitation.

Give yourself wholly to God. Seek for more of His Spirit, that as a living stone you may be wholly consecrated. And never be content unless you feel in yourself the perpetual presence of the divine inhabitant who dwells in His church.

May God now bless every living stone of the temple. And as for you that as yet are not hewn out of the quarries of sin, I pray that divine grace may meet with you, that you may be renewed and converted, and at last be partakers of the inheritance of the saints of light.

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