

The Law of the House (Ezekiel 43:1-12)

T. Austin-Sparks:

Reading: Ezekiel 43:1-12

At a time when the temple in Jerusalem was in ruins, Ezekiel the prophet was shown a spiritual temple, measured out by a man with a golden measuring rod. The measurements were all exact; the prophet was led in, led through, led round, led up, set down, so that he could see it from every side. From every angle and every aspect this spiritual house, which was God's mind accurately expressed, was shown to him. For Ezekiel it was a spiritual temple, and it remains so until now. Then the command was given to him to show it to the house of Israel, so that they should be thoroughly ashamed - presumably at their own short-comings.

It was not only a prophecy: it was also a figure. It spoke of God's people who were meant to form His dwelling place. In a sense it pointed right back to Adam, the man who was originally intended to be indwelt by God and filled with His glory. If, as we look backwards to Adam, we have any doubts about this intention, these doubts are dispelled immediately we take the forward look to Christ, for we see Him as the Man on the mount of transfiguration crowned with glory and honour. We are given to understand that He is the first of the new humanity, and that He is bringing many sons to glory. We are to be joined with Him, as members of His body, and so to share His glory. God's true temple is not an earthly edifice, but a people. Israel's temple was but a type of the intention for Adam to be indwelt by God and filled with His glory. The first man, Adam, failed. Israel, with its typical temple failed, and the key to their failure is found in the matter of heart fellowship with God by faith.

This is really the key to so much, this matter of heart fellowship by faith. For lack of this Adam never became a temple of God, and because of failure in this respect the Jewish temple became a ruin. When it lay in ruins, the word of the Lord came by Haggai: "Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? ...The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:3 and 9). Now the fact is that there has never yet been a literal temple on this earth with greater glory than that of Solomon. Whether there is still to be such a temple on this earth does not concern us very much, for we look higher, and see the veil drawn away for a new temple to come down from heaven with the proclamation: "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them". Only a spiritual temple can come down out of heaven, so Haggai's words are prophetic, pointing on to Christ. He alone can transcend all that has gone before, so that the last Adam is greater than the first, just as the last temple is greater than the former. Christ is God's eternal reality, not a type or a pattern, but the fulfilment of them all. Adam was a type of Him that was to come, and the temple was a type of Him who said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again". The types have broken down. Christ is the reality. He is the temple in whom God truly dwells, the Amen, the final conclusive realisation of God's desire to live with men.

Ezekiel spoke of "the law of the house". In His life on earth, Christ was governed by spiritual laws, and we can discover one of these by considering the cause of the breakdown of the types. Where did the ruin begin? It began before it affected this creation and overtook Adam. We understand that the original cause of the ruin was pride of heart: "For thou saidst in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God... I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). Adam fell by succumbing to this same temptation, and his pride revealed itself in a threefold way - independence, possessiveness and self-centredness. The same features were thus found in Adam's pride of heart as had been expressed by Satan's fall to ruin. Adam's fall meant that from then onwards he had to take responsibility for making his own way. He had to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. Up to that point, God had taken responsibility and provided everything for him; life was a very simple matter, with no cause for anxious thoughts about anything. From the moment of yielding to heart pride, however, he had to accept responsibility for his own affairs and maintain his existence on earth.

We see the great contrast in the case of the last Adam. If pride of heart caused ruin, then humility of heart was basic to recovery. If pride of heart found expression in independence, then humility delighted in dependence. From His birth onwards, everything about the Lord Jesus spoke of lowliness and humility. With Him there was no self-importance; even as the king He came: "...meek, and riding upon an ass". It was by virtue of His life of utter dependence that He provided a home in which the Father could live. It was to this that Stephen was leading up when he was so brutally interrupted. His full quotation would have been: "...what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what place shall be my rest? ...but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2).

If ruin came by pride, and pride showed itself in possessiveness, then humility will be revealed by

self-emptying. Certainly Christ emptied Himself, and so became a fit home for God. There is a power about this divine humility which is capable of bringing the pride of Satan to the dust, destroying all the devil's works. It might be thought that when we speak of humility we are simply emphasising one of the common virtues of the Christian life, but in fact we are dealing with a much bigger issue, even the desire of God to dwell in man. The whole intention of the incarnation is "God with us", and for that purpose Christ was God manifest in the flesh so that He could recover a home for God in the hearts of men. He was "crucified through weakness", but what a complete transformation has been made possible in the whole universe on the basis of that crucifixion! The pride which made it impossible for God to dwell in Adam, and which made it necessary to withdraw His presence from the earthly temple, has now been challenged and defeated by the humility of the Lamb.

Now the outcome of the cross is the Church as the house of God, and we notice that this spiritual house must be governed by the same laws as ruled the life of the Lord Jesus. The perfect humility which made Him a fit dwelling place for the Father must also be found in the redeemed who represent Christ's recovery of a home for God. It is notable that Paul, who was especially called to reveal that house, is a man who speaks a great deal about himself. No apostle used the first personal pronoun so much as he. We believe that it was the Holy Spirit's intention that this should be so, for a man who spoke so much about the house of God needed himself to be an object lesson of the true nature of that house. Paul was taken hold of in relation to his revelation, and made an expression of his message as well as being the appointed messenger. So we are entitled to look for the outworking of the principles of the house in the man Paul.

Now Paul - or Saul of Tarsus - was in himself the very opposite of a humble man. Before he met Christ he had been assertive and aggressive, a man of great independence and forcefulness of will. From time to time, even after his conversion, little glimpses of his natural self-strength emerged. But the outstanding impression we get is of one whose pride had been broken, and who displayed a beautiful humility. He was always deeply dependent on his Lord for guidance and strength. Moreover he was careful to lay down the principle of dependence - mutual dependence - as the basis of the house of God, insisting that the body consists of many different but interdependent members, who will spoil God's purposes if they abandon the humility of the need for one another and begin, in pride, to act out of harmony with the rest.

As we have said, pride is shown in possessiveness, and so often the ruin which can be seen in the churches has been caused by this tendency of their members. It is a mark of the home of God that it offers no rights of possession, no place for personal power or mastery. The Lord Jesus wanted nothing for Himself, being content to leave it to the Father to decide what should come to Him. He refused to strive, to strain, to manipulate or scheme for His own interests, but committed everything to the Father. That was how the living Foundation of the Church was laid, and that is how the whole structure must be built. We must be very careful that natural possessiveness does not arise in the things of God. It can do so unconsciously, even in our desire for spiritual blessing. Even a desire for holiness may have a subtle snare about it, if it means that we want to be noticed or praised for our holy living.

The first great law of the house of God must be the humility of Christ in all its aspects of dependence, emptiness and God-centredness. There is a tremendous significance about the victory of the humility of Christ. Satan had robbed God of His desire to dwell with Adam and then with Israel, by inducing them to adopt an attitude of pride. Then Christ came, and challenged this whole satanic principle, overcoming it by being the Lamb. He repudiated independence, possessiveness and self-centredness and by so doing brought God into His own. In His case men thought that they were dealing with a poor weak Man, but they found that in fact they had come up against the mighty God. This is to be repeated in the experience of the Church. It may look like a poor remnant of humanity, weak, persecuted, helpless, but as God makes His dwelling there, the opposing forces of evil will find that they have to reckon with the Almighty and so meet with utter defeat. Humility is one of the greatest forces in God's universe. In the case of the Lord Jesus humility did not begin when He took man-form. Of Him we are told: "...who, subsisting in the form of God, counted it not as something to be grasped at to be on equality with God..." (Philippians 2:6). We may consider this in contrast to Satan, who did grasp at equality with God and who infected Adam with the same proud ambition. There was no personal self-glorifying in the attitude of the incarnate Son of God; but on the contrary He was willing to empty Himself to become Man. This makes it clear that humility is not just something required of the human race, but it is a divine feature, an attribute of the Godhead. Humiliation and humility are two different things. The humiliation of the Lord Jesus was one thing; His humility is another. This humility is eternal; it is an expression of our glorious God, who is no vaunting, proud, Self-glorifying Being.

So, from His place in glory, Jesus emptied Himself and "being found in fashion as a man He humbled himself...". As God He emptied Himself and as Man He humbled Himself. What a marvellous Lord we have! Satan and Adam sought to exalt themselves to be equal with God, but here was One, eternally equal with the

The Law of the House (Ezekiel 43:1-12)

Father, who did not grasp at this equality but was willing to relinquish all His rights in order to ensure that the will of God was done on earth as it is done in heaven. And He is the One to whom all glory is given. We are told that Christ has been exalted as a direct result of His perfect humility. In the Word of God various reasons are given for the exaltation of Christ. He has been exalted because of His sufferings in death. He has been glorified because He glorified the Father here on earth. Now in Philippians 2 it is specifically stated that God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name because He carried a life of humility through to its full and final self-emptying. So His humility is the explanation of His power. And humility is the basis upon which the Church can know the presence and power of almighty God. In the humility wrought by the cross we are brought into oneness with our exalted Lord, and we enjoy a practical experience of the spiritual reality of the house of God. God dwells and God makes known His power when the law of the house is observed and the true humility of Christ is allowed to govern in all things.