

The House of God: The Greatness of Christ and His Church

T. Austin-Sparks:

We return this morning to that which was revealed to the Prophet Ezekiel; and I am sure that as you have read these six chapters (Eze. 40-46), you have found very great difficulty in getting a clear picture of the whole. I have tried many times to draw a plan of this house with all its details and its correct measurements. Up to the present time, I have not succeeded. That is not because it is impossible. I expect that there are some architects here this morning who might succeed, but I have come up against the Lord in this matter, or the Lord has come up against me. I have gotten my paper on my board, and I have gotten all my instruments, then again and again I have started on this plan, and I have not found that I could get very far. It was as though I was trying to do something that the Lord did not want me to do. I wonder if you have had that experience, if you have tried to do something, but you have just had no life in it at all. The thing becomes dead; and if you are spiritually sensitive, you just have to say, "Well, the Lord is not in this." And that has been my consciousness every time I have tried to reduce this thing to a plan on paper. This is the point at which I begin this morning, because I believe that that contains a very important principle.

As we read these chapters, we find ourselves in the presence of a great mass of detail. It is very difficult to cope with all the details. If we were to try to deal with that in these sessions, we should find that we had undertaken an impossible task. For one thing, we would have to be here for quite a long time; and for another thing, we might begin to lose our sense of life in it. My point is this: it would be very easy for us to fall into the very mistake that we must most carefully avoid, and that is to resolve spiritual things into a technical system, to be taken up with the technique of the House of God. That is a very great peril! And I do want to emphasize that this morning.

Here this great mass of material and detail is altogether beyond our power to handle. If we were to resolve this into merely a technical system, we could easily destroy the life! I therefore urge you brethren to be very careful on this matter, be very careful not to reduce the House of God to a technique. Immediately if it is resolved into a system, then it is in danger of losing its life. That is the very thing that has happened again and again in the history of the Church. Before you get to the end of the Book of the Acts, you find that that thing is happening! The whole present system of Christianity was beginning; and, as you know, Paul wrote his last letters to Timothy to restore the spiritual nature of things. He sought to show that the offices of the church are not just offices; that is, elders are not officials, they are spiritual men.

The House of God is not a system - it is a spiritual House. In Timothy's day, men had already begun to make spiritual things into an earthly system, and that has happened many times during the past centuries. God has done something of a spiritual character. He has given a fresh revelation of the spiritual nature of things, and for a time things went on in that spiritual life, and then men took hold of it and reduced it to a fixed system. They brought it out of the heavenlies onto the earth; and, in doing that, they killed its spiritual life. That is the history of so many things in Christianity on the earth today. Many of them did begin in real spiritual life - they were in spiritual power - and out from them went a river of life. But then man took hold of them and organized them into a system and introduced a technical element into things; and, in doing that, they killed the life. I do urge upon you to be alive to that peril, and to guard very carefully against it, especially those of you who have responsibility in leadership.

Now we come back to the House of God as presented in Ezekiel. Of course, this whole presentation does show how exact and how careful God is. It shows how particular the Lord is about the smallest details. We recognize that is a law of the House. God is most particular about the smallest things. Every little thing has its own measurement - it is a measurement which is given to it by God. We are not allowed to make that smaller or larger, it must exactly express the Mind of the Lord. As we have said, there is a tremendous mass of detail here, but every part of it represents God's particular concern to have things according to His Mind. We recognize that, but we must at the same time recognize that it is not a system that is presented. In this vision of the House, God was not presenting a system. He was not presenting an organization. He was presenting a Person. This is the Person of His Son. This is a spiritual House, not a system of truth, and the supreme characteristic of this House has to do with Life.

Let us look at that from both sides. LIFE will demand exactness in behaviour, LIFE will demand exactness in order; but we can have the order without the Life. It is possible for the system, or the technique, to destroy the Life. It does not necessarily follow that because you have things according to the Bible in technique that you have them according to the Bible in Life. It is possible to resolve Christianity into a legal system, just as much as Judaea. The law of this House is Holiness of Life. We therefore have to come to view this temple in Ezekiel in an objective way. That is how Ezekiel first saw it. You will see that there were two views of this temple given to

Ezekiel. First of all, he saw it as a whole, as from a distance; he was given to view it from the very "high mountain." He saw it comprehensively in that way. He saw its broad outline, he saw its boundaries and its inclusiveness. And then the Spirit took him in, and he saw it from the inside. He was shown all the details from the inside. It is important that we see it in that way.

The first thing that we see from this heavenly standpoint is the great size of this House of God. The whole area of the House was revealed to Ezekiel, and it is, as we saw yesterday, a very great thing. We must be very careful not to make Christ, or His Church, smaller than it really is. We must not make Christ smaller than God has made Him. We may not make Him just our Christ, our little Christ, the Christ that belongs to us, the Christ of our particular locality. We must be very careful that we do not make Christ smaller than what God has made Him, and we may not make the Church smaller than God has made it. This is not our little Church, it is not anybody's little Church. This is much bigger than our thoughts: it goes much beyond our imaginations. This is a very Great Christ and a very great Church.

Here again we must guard against a peril; that is, the ever-present peril of reducing the size of Christ and the Church, reducing the Church to the measure in which we have seen it. The measure of the Church is not our measure of understanding it; the measure of the Church is not our measure of comprehending it. The prayer of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians concerning the Church was that they should have an enlargement of comprehension. He prayed that the Church might know "what is the breadth, and the length, and the height, and the depth." This is a knowledge which surpasses all human knowledge. If there was one thing about the Apostle Paul more than another, it was just this thing: he was always overwhelmed with the Greatness of Christ, and the greatness of the Church.

So, we must see it like that and always guard against the peril of reducing Christ and the Church to our own size; that is, the size of our knowledge of it. You and I have yet to learn far more about the Lord and His Church than ever yet we have seen, and the realization of that fact should always save us from littleness. Here, then, is the compass of Great Fullness - this fills all things, and all things are to be filled into it. This House is to effect all things to the uttermost. That is what we come to when we come to the river. The river is the influence, or effect, of this House. It is what goes out from this House to the world, and it is to effect the whole world, so that stored up in this House there are all the potentialities to affect the uttermost bounds of the earth.

Now you will notice that this House, the whole dimension of the House, is square. It has four sides, and all the sides are equal. I am speaking now about the whole area of the temple; the whole temple area is one great square, four sides which are equal. You remember what we said about the number "four" when we were beginning. We pointed out that the number four is the number of creation. Four embraces the whole creation, and this House represents the new creation in Christ. Paul tells us that Christ is to fill all things and ALL things are to be filled into Him, or to use another phrase of Paul's, in Ephesians 3:9, "to make ALL men see what is the stewardship of the mystery."

Do take note of that, "To make ALL men see what is the stewardship of the mystery." That does not necessarily mean that all men will accept it, or understand it. We must be very careful that we do not confine Church truth, as we call it, to just a few. We must not be those who say: "Now we are the people who have seen the Church, we stand on the ground of the Church, we hold the truth of the Church, we have seen the meaning of the Body of Christ. Many other Christians have not seen it, they do not stand on that ground; therefore, what conclusion do we draw? We must be the Church, and they are not!" You see, that is a very artificial conclusion. We have got to be very careful of that danger. There may be a difference in apprehending the truth, there may be a difference of position as to the Church, but the Will of God is "to make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery." You cannot get outside of ALL MEN because that is the range of God's Will, and we must enlarge our heart and our mind to God's measure. You cannot make Christ too big. You cannot make the Church too big, provided it is God's Church and not man's church. So, here we have the comprehensiveness of Christ.

I said that Paul was overwhelmed with that consciousness. He was constantly crying out over that tremendous overwhelmingness of the greatness of things. He spoke of all "the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His... ways!" - he spoke of "the exceeding riches." Paul was overwhelmed with this greatness of Christ and His Church. What it amounts to is this: that the real apprehension of the Church of Christ will make us big in spirit, and not small. There is nothing that will save us from littleness more than a true apprehension of Christ. If we become little, or if the work becomes little in its mind, it has not really apprehended Christ. So that is the first thing that we see represented here in Ezekiel's vision of the House. How great this House is. It represents the whole of a new creation. In the ages to come, it will fill all things; and all things will be affected by it. That is a glorious vision. We must, therefore, be very big people, big in spirit and big in heart.

The House: The Place Of God's Glory

Then we notice the threefold purpose of this House. First of all, it is the place of God's glory. Ezekiel forty-three, at verse seven: "And He said unto me, Son of man, this is the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever; and the House of Israel shall no more defile My Holy Name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, and by the dead bodies of their kings in their high places." You notice that it is the word "glory" that leads up to verse seven, for verse two says: "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east." Then, verse four and seven, "And the glory of the Lord came into the House by the way of the gate... east... and He said... this is the place of My throne." This House is the place of the Throne of Glory.

Now "the glory" had left Jerusalem nineteen years before this House was shown to Ezekiel, and it is not returning to the literal earthly Jerusalem, but the glory is returning to the spiritual House. Likewise, the glory left the earthly Jerusalem when God's Son was rejected; and it has never come back to the earthly Jerusalem, but the glory did come back to the spiritual House on the day of Pentecost. This House is the House of God's glory, and you notice from the whole of that seventh verse that "the glory is the glory of Holiness." It is not just some bright shining: it is a spiritual condition. No defilement has a place here, no dead bodies have a place here, there is no death or corruption here. The glory is the glory of holiness, where corruption and death have been removed. Do remember that the glory depends upon the spiritual condition. It depends upon the holiness. This then, in the first place, is the place of His glory.

The House: The Place Of God's Government

Next, the House is the place of His government. "This is the place of My throne": it is in the seat of His government. Remember that this is a heavenly House. The seat of His government is not in a church on the earth, whether that be in Rome or anywhere else. The seat of His throne is in heaven, and we only come under that government of God when we come into a heavenly position. Now that is a very strong statement. It carries very much with it, but we really only come under this government of God when we are in a heavenly position. And I am sure that you would agree that it is a very important matter to be under the government of God. What hope is there for any of us, or for a church, that is not under the government of God?!

So what we have in the Book of the Acts sets this very clearly before us. There the Church is under the government of heaven, and it is a very effectual Church. But when the Church got under the government of man, it lost its effectiveness. The government of the Church requires a heavenly position, that is, a Church, or a House, that is wholly according to Christ. That is necessary for heavenly government. The government of the Lord will come by way of things being just according to Christ. "This is the place of My throne!" What place? - The place that is according to Christ. Everything here in this vision is Christ. Christ stands over everything. Everything takes its measure and its character from Christ, and this is the place of the throne.

And then this is a House that is entirely ordered by the Spirit. You notice the place of the Spirit in this House? - "The Spirit lifted me up, the Spirit brought me in, the Spirit took me out, the Spirit took me around." - All this is in and by the Spirit. This is the revelation of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and this is the consummation of the Church government. The government of this House is the government of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit may use men, He may choose those who are called elders, but there is a great deal of difference between the official and the spiritual. You can be what is called an elder officially, and not be an elder spiritually. If you are an elder spiritually, you are bound to become that officially. Your spiritual measure will be recognized; and whether you are made an elder or not, you will be one if you are spiritually one. The government, I am saying, is spiritual. The men of the New Testament were described as men "filled with the Holy Spirit." They were the apostles, they were the elders, they were the deacons. That was the thing that made them what they were, men "filled with the Spirit!"

The House: The Vessel Of God's Life

Then on to the third thing. This House is the channel, or vessel, of God's Life. Out of a house, like this House, Life flows. It is from this House that the Life flows. You do not have to start the Life flowing, you do not have to make this Life. This Life spontaneously comes from a stream. You do not have to go and collect buckets of water and then try to pour them out of this House. There is nothing official about this. There is nothing second-hand about this. There is nothing of men's doing about this. The Life just springs up! and it flows out, it flows out of a House like this - a House where the Lord's throne is, a House where the government of heaven is, a House where The Lord is. Out from that House the Life flows. The testimony itself is in that Life.

The House of God: The Greatness of Christ and His Church

John said, "This is the testimony." Do you want to know what the testimony is? The testimony is not a system of doctrine and teaching. The testimony is not a technique. "This is the testimony, that God has given unto us Eternal life, and this Life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11). The testimony is in The Life; and when the testimony is in us, when The Life is in us, the testimony is in us. So the testimony of everything is Life. That is a searching statement!

Life is that which determines the presence of the Lord. Life is that which tells whether things are according to Christ. Life tests whether this service is the service of God. LIFE TESTS EVERYTHING. The question is, "Is it ministering Life? Is this thing a living thing, and is it pouring out Life, pouring out Life to the ends of the earth?!" If that is not true, then there is something wrong with it. It may be a very wonderful technique and system, but there is something wrong with it. Everything is tested by "The Life."